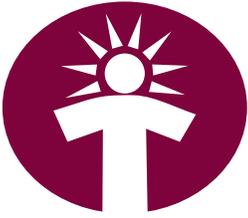


# Welcome!

First Congregational Church  
of Webster Groves United Church of Christ



*Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.*

**JULY 4, 2021**

**SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
INDEPENDENCE DAY**

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*We respond to God's call by welcoming everyone  
regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, race,  
gender identity, sexual orientation or  
socio-economic background.*

*To proclaim in word and deed the love of Christ,  
we affirm that all may share in the full life, ministry, fellowship,  
responsibilities and blessing of our congregation.*

*No matter who you are  
or where you are on life's journey,  
you are welcome here.*

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## Order of Worship

**PRELUDE**

*Contemplation*

Colin McAlpin

(from *Original Pieces for American Organ*)

**TOLLING THE BELL**

**LIGHTING THE CANDLES**

**WELCOME**

Roger Barnes

**CALL TO WORSHIP (Responsive—Leader; People)**

from Psalm 48

Let us dwell upon God's faithful love, in God's temple.

**God's praise, like God's reputation extends to the far corners of the earth.**

Let the people be glad; let the whole country rejoice over God's justice.

**For here is God, our God, forever and always—the one who will lead us even to the very end.**

**\*RAISING THE COVENANT (Unison)**

*Covenant of 1977*

**We who are called of God into this Christian community covenant together: to seek to know the will of God, to experience the joy and struggle of discipleship, to proclaim in word and deed the love of Christ, and to work for peace and justice among all people. We trust God's promise of grace and forgiveness and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our trials and rejoicing.**

**\*GATHERING HYMN**

*This Is My Song*

Lloyd Stone

This is my song, O God of all the nations,  
a song of peace for lands afar and mine;  
this is my home, the country where my heart is;  
here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine:  
but other hearts in other lands are beating  
with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,  
and sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine;  
but other lands have sunlight too, and clover,  
and skies are everywhere as blue as mine:  
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,  
a song of peace for their land and for mine.

**RITUAL OF APPROACH**

Rev. David Denoon, *Pastor*

*Invitation to Confession*

*Corporate Confession (Unison)*

**God of every generation, hear our prayers this day and bless us. If we**

**have acted as though our government had greater authority or power than you in our lives, forgive us. If we have deferred to any other majesty, we are heartily sorry and regret our sin. Let us never lose our comprehension of your glory and your grace to us as we have known them through our true Sovereign Jesus Christ. Now and at our end, receive us into your midst with the love and care of a parent for wayward children who have come home. So may we ever rejoice in your Spirit's nurture and kindness and care. Amen.**

*Silence for Personal Confessions*

*Assurance of Pardon*

from 2 Corinthians 12

God has said to us, "My grace is enough for you, because power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, accept your weaknesses, for the sake of Christ.

**For when we are weak, then are we strong. Thanks be to God.  
Amen.**

**NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY**

Halley Kim, *Pastoral Assistant*

**MESSAGE OF THE DAY**

*"An American Cantata"*

Rev. Denoon

What we are about to do is to sing from the American songbook with an order for communion in the midst.

I'll admit that for a great part the communion stands where it does in spite of the music rather than with it. For although all of the songs will mention God in some way or another, what is meant by the word "God" is not necessarily what we as Christians mean by "God."

Let me explain. What we are singing today are significant songs of an American civil religion. The concept of civil religion was invented by Jean-Jacques Rousseau during the 17th Century, as he imagined the rise of democracy in government. Democracies, Rousseau asserted, would need a common, civil religion praising the source of their laws and justice. In the 17th Century, Europe's governments presumed the divine right of kings (something pretty clearly stated throughout the Bible, but especially in Romans 13). An elected government's power to legislate, in fact its very existence, Rousseau insisted, would have to be justified in a similar way to the assumption that monarchs ruled because they were placed in office by God's will. For a democracy, governance would have to be justified by a unifying perception of God's will in and among The People.

The founders of our nation all read Rousseau, and bore his advice in mind while crafting our original documents. But they added a new understanding to that of the old philosopher. They recognized the variety of theologies among themselves and intentionally blurred the religious lines between themselves. You can see evidence of this in references to a Creator, to divine Providence, and any of a number of other metaphors obliquely pointing toward God but never directly identifying God. And you will uncover no, absolutely no, references anywhere to Jesus Christ.

Our civil religion, as Rousseau insisted it must, always recognizes a special relationship between the United States and God but not a specific way of experiencing

that relationship, religiously speaking.

And, getting back to communion now, for Christians this ought to present a distinct problem. We believe in Christ as the Head of a Church on earth and in heaven. Notice in that statement, that our religion recognize no boundaries. You heard this in our opening hymn.

We need to treat such attitudes as Manifest Destiny and American Exceptionalism with suspicion and doubt. That is not easy, because the most popular of the songs of our civil religion tend to resonate with these sentiments.

Case – “God Bless America,” a song which prays for God to look upon our country with distinct favor:

Shortly after the First World War, while in military service at Camp Upton in Yaphank, Long Island, Irving Berlin wrote a patriotic song that he considered placing in his musical revue, Yip, Yip, Yaphank. Considering it too somber for his light-hearted purposes, he shelved it. But in more somber times, with the world at war again, Berlin remembered his piece and offered it to Kate Smith to sing for an Armistice Day radio broadcast in 1938...

*Song*

*God Bless America*

Irving Berlin

While the storm clouds gather from across the sea,  
Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free.  
Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,  
As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer:

God bless America, land that I love:  
Stand beside her and guide her  
Through the night with a light from above.  
From the mountains to the prairies  
To the oceans white with foam,  
God bless America, my home sweet home.

“God Bless America” would eventually become so popular and so widely sung that Irving Berlin gave up copyrights to it, signing them over to the Boy Scouts of America. Whenever the song is used in a public gathering, it is fitting for a contribution to be made to the Boy Scouts. (That’s a hint for those of you wanting to help out your church’s Boy Scout Troop 301.)

But it doesn’t take much for patriotism to turn to jingoism, and it wouldn’t take long for “God Bless America” to become so familiar that some good-hearted Americans actually began to grow sick of it. Case in point: the folk musician Woody Guthrie in 1940 responded to “God Bless America,” with his own song, “God Blessed America.”

For his part, Guthrie had spent the Depression as a migrant worker, as had millions of other people in poverty. He believed that the solution to the Depression lay not in keeping the country as it was, which was what he seems to have thought Mr. Berlin’s and Miss Smith’s prayer sought to do, but to establish the United States with a government that reflected his own Christian values. He wrote:

[T]he Rich should give their goods unto the poor. I believe in this way. I just can’t believe in any other way. This is the Christian way and it is already on a big part of the earth and it

will come. To own everything in Common. That's what the Bible says.

Guthrie put his own patriotic sentiment to words and music:

*Song*

*God Blessed America for Me*

Woodie Guthrie

**This land is your land, this land is my land,  
From California to the New York Island  
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf Stream waters,  
God blessed America for me.**

There was a dry and biting humor in the words, an irony apparent when one contrasted the sight of Kate Smith, familiar in an understated gown with a costume brooch or a pin and her hair drawn back in gently sophisticated formality, calling down the beneficence of God... with that of Woody Guthrie, who looked like... well, frankly, he looked like a hobo, because for much of his life that's exactly what he was. Miss Smith's voice was pure and full and rich with refinement and skill; his was a nasal twang designed not to deliver a sentiment, as hers was trained to do, but to call out a message. "God blessed America for me" was a deliberate challenge to American-style acceptability.

Its lyrics contained socialist sentiments Guthrie associated with Christian living.

Over time, he softened the irony of his anthem by changing its verses' last line to "This land was made for you and me," but he never withdrew its message:

As I went walking that ribbon of highway  
I saw above me that endless skyway  
I saw below me that golden valley:  
This land was made for you and me.

I roamed and rambled, and I've followed my footsteps  
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts  
All around me a voice was sounding,  
"This land was made for you and me."

Was a high wall there that tried to stop me  
A sign was painted said: Private Property,  
But on the back side it didn't say nothing —  
This land was made for you and me.

When the sun come shining, then I was strolling  
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds rolling  
The voice was chanting as the fog was lifting,  
"This land was made for you and me."

One bright sunny morning in the shadow of the steeple  
By the Relief Office I saw my people —  
As they stood hungry, I stood there wond'ring if  
This land was made for you and me.

**WE SHARE OUR BLESSINGS WITH OTHERS**

*Invitation*

Roger Barnes

As Christians we are unconcerned with national boundaries. Our

concern lies with the unity of all creation and affirming our oneness with all people and the earth. Through the wealth of resources God provides us we extend the Redeemer's love and healing into the entire world, and offer care and comfort that others need. We are stewards of all the gifts God has given, and our Creator invites us to find ways to touch lives wherever there may be need. I am here to remind you that our ministries are possible in part through donations of money, as well as of time and skill. But we are not passing the plate yet, so please either send your offerings in support of First Church by mail or online, or else (those of you here in person) place them in the offering plate in the Narthex. If you would like to make a donation and you are financially able to do so, you can either send a check to

First Congregational Church

10 West Lockwood Avenue

Webster Groves, Missouri 63119

or give electronically from our "Donate" page of our website –

FirstChurchWG.org/Donate. Thank you.

*Narration*

Rev. Denoon

All of us have sung the familiar song of our civil religion, "America the Beautiful." In 1931 it was in contention with "The Star-Spangled Banner" for adoption as the national anthem.

Its origin story goes this way, and I think that an Open and Affirming church standing in the Congregational tradition of the United Church of Christ deserves to know this.

During the summer of 1893, in a period in American history that Susan B. Anthony called, "the epoch of the single woman," one such woman was Katherine Lee Bates, a professor of English at Wellesley College in Ohio who was also the daughter of a Congregationalist minister.

Wellesley paid its faculty at that time, \$400 a year plus meals and laundry. Even then, \$400 a year didn't go very far. So, to supplement income faculty would write books, go on lecture tours, or take summer jobs teaching at other institutions. Dr. Bates had taken that summer off, to teach at Colorado College in Colorado Springs. While there, as she would write, she and some colleagues decided to scale Pike's Peak.

"We hired a prairie wagon," Bates recalled later. "Near the top we had to leave the wagon and go the rest of the way on mules. I was very tired. But when I saw the view, I felt great joy. All the wonder of America seemed displayed there, with the sea-like expanse."

She composed a poem, including images of "spacious skies" and "purple mountain majesties." Very much like Woody Guthrie's song, her poem would be polished over the next few years.

At first, she submitted the poem to the national publication, *The Congregationalist*, and it ran there for the issue of July 4, 1895. It appeared in print a number of other times, finally catching the national eye in the *Boston Evening Transcript* in 1904. In 1911, in its final form, it was put to the music of Samuel Ward's tune, "Materna."

Catherine Lee Bates was, as I have observed, unmarried. She had had two quite deep attractions to men, one that almost ended in marriage. But it would have meant Dr. Bates giving up her career as a professor, and she decided instead to remain that “single woman” Miss Anthony had referred to. But Dr. Bates fell in love again, and actually for twenty-five years kept house out of wedlock with another of Wellesley’s professors. This was the founder and chair of the school’s Department of Economics, Dr. Katherine Coman.

I thought it would be important for an Open and Affirming church in the Congregationalist stream of the United Church of Christ to know that:

*Offertory Music*

*America the Beautiful*

Words: Katharine Lee Bates

Music: Samuel A. Ward

## SACRAMENT OF CHRIST’S TABLE

*We Lift Our Joys and Concerns*

*Fraction*

*Prayer of Our Savior* (Unison)

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

*Communion*

*\*Prayer of Thanksgiving* (Unison)

**We thank you, God, for inviting us to this table where we have known the presence of Christ and have received all Christ’s gifts. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and let us show forth your praise in our lives through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.**

Probably the most dear to my heart of all the contributions to the music of our civil religion is *Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing* by James Weldon and John Rosamund Johnson. The Johnson brothers began their careers in education.

In 1894 James Weldon Johnson was a teacher at The Stanton School, a public elementary school developed for Black children under the rules of segregation in Jacksonville, Florida. In 1900, for the observance of Lincoln’s birthday, Dr. Johnson composed the words to our closing hymn. His brother composed the music. And the five hundred schoolchildren of the Stanton School would sing it.

It is significant to realize that the song was not composed for July 4<sup>th</sup>, and that July 4<sup>th</sup> can be a problematic holiday for African Americans as a celebration of freedom, since the Declaration of Independence did not establish Black independence or liberty, and the Constitution would actually, formally institutionalize their oppression.

In this shadow, James Weldon Johnson would write one day, unsurprisingly, that the first words of his song that came to him were

Sing a song, full of the faith that the dark past has taught us.

Sing a song, full of the hope that the present has brought us.

Johnson would eventually become the principal of Stanton and add a high school curriculum. But with an eye toward his personal betterment, he would pursue a legal degree and would become the first African American to pass the bar in Florida. In 1906, Teddy Roosevelt made him American consul to Venezuela and Nicaragua, a post he held until the end of the Taft administration in 1913.

Afterward, James Weldon Johnson joined his brother John in New York when he returned and became part of the Harlem Renaissance, writing a novel and several musicals about the Black experience in America.

In 1920 he was elected the first African American executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a post he held until 1930.

While he was secretary of the NAACP, Johnson's *Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing* would become known as the Negro National Anthem. I think it is important for us to sing it now, as a majority White congregation with a vision towards justice and peace, to affirm that the Black experience is a fundamental part of the American experience, and that the American experience has in it an intersecting reality of a civil religion that unites us all, even if that religion is not Christianity... and it is not Christianity.

Lift every voice and sing till earth and heaven ring:  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty.  
Let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea!  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won!

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died,  
Yet with a steady beat have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our parents sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,  
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered.  
Out from the gloomy past till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,  
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way,  
Thou who has by Thy might led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee;  
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee.  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand  
True to our God, true to our native land.

**\*CLOSING HYMN**

*Lift Every Voice and Sing*

J. W. & J. R. Johnson

Lift every voice and sing till earth and heaven ring:  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty.  
Let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea!  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
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Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee.  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand  
True to our God, true to our native land.

**\*BENEDICTION**

Rev. Denoon

**POSTLUDE**

*March*

Colin McAlpin

**DISMISSAL**

Roger Barnes

***We light the globe today*** to remember Catherine Twining Moody who joined First Church on July 4, 1880. Her legacy includes the 75th anniversary history booklet, poems and hymns, and six generations of her family as members here.

Bob, Helen and Barron Moody

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*Sunday worship each week will be shared in person for those who wish to attend and streamed live on YouTube, starting at 10:00am ([bit.ly/FCCWG-YT](http://bit.ly/FCCWG-YT)).*

*A Time for Fellowship will be provided in Memorial Hall and the Jubilee Garden, each Sunday after worship for those in person. Masking and distancing – optional. Our Virtual Coffee Fellowship is no longer available.*

### ***How to Donate to First Congregational Church***

You may leave a donation in the offering plate in the Narthex.

Send a check made out to **FCCWG** at:

First Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

10 W. Lockwood Ave.

Webster Groves, MO 63119

or visit the Donate page on our website at: <http://firstchurchwg.org/donate> to make an electronic contribution

### **We Hold in Our Prayers**

- Our residents in assisted living and skilled care – Sharon Beal, Shirley Chase, Joyce Berger, Paul Davis, Margery Gable, Charles Griffith
- All people who are living with dementia, their families and their caregivers – Bob Buerk and others
- People we love who are living with cancer – Bill Barrett, Margaret Gustafson, Peter McHugh, Bob Moody
- All those the world regards as disabled – especially David & Becky Scott
- People recovering from recent hospitalizations – Jean Kohler, John & Betty Kerr
- People with mental illnesses, as well as the people who love and care for them
- People who are lonely or alone because of the pandemic
- Those whose employment and businesses are at risk
- COVID-19 patients
- First responders and their loved ones
- For our governmental leaders, and for healing for our country and all its people
- Peace with justice

### **Thank you to this Week's Hospitality Team**

Jacquie Bryant, Liu Lin Theo, Rosemary Hensley, Tom Waltz, Sharon Love, & Carolyn Woodsmall

### **Electronic Device Users**

If you wish to access our wi-fi, our network connections are: fccwg1, fccwg2 or fccwg3. The password for each is firstchurch.

### **Finding Your Way at First Church**

**The Nursery:** The Nursery is attended today. The Nursery is located through the double doors at the end of the Narthex (foyer), turn left. Nursery/Toddler Room is on your right (Dutch doors).

**Restrooms:** Family restrooms are located to the right of the Narthex (foyer) as you go to the Library (look for the blue library banner) and to the left of the Narthex just before the double doors.

## **Week at a Glance**

### **Sunday, July 4 – *Independence Day***

Sacrament of Christ's Table

**9:00 AM** - Brown Baggers

**9:00 AM** - 11:00 AM Nursery Care Available

**10:00 AM** - Worship

**10:15 AM** - Sunday School

**11:00 AM** - Inquirers Orientation

**11:05 AM** - Coffee Fellowship

### **Monday, July 5**

**Office Closed**

### **Tuesday, July 6**

**(Darrell is on Vacation and will return Wednesday, July 13)**

**10:00 AM** - Memorial Service: Fred Kaul

**12:00 PM** Communications Team

### **Wednesday, July 7**

**(Dave is on Vacation and will return Monday, August 2)**

**9:30 AM** Yoga with Jeanene - Inglis Room

**6:00 PM - 9:30 PM** Bridge Club

## **Please register your Christian Education student!**

If you have a child who will be participating in nursery care, kids' church, or youth activities, please complete a 2021-2022 registration form and return it to Halley Kim. There are printed forms on the table in the Narthex next to the Covenant News.

## **July Birthdays**

Connie Kitchen – July 2

Kara Hoganson – July 6

Katie Didriksen – July 9

Loryl Breitenbach – July 10

Katy Ver Hagen – July 11

Barbara Krewson – July 12

Marilyn Davis – July 13

Jeanene Harris – July 13

John Shoulberg – July 19

Greg McCoy – July 28

Emma von Weise – July 29

Alice McHugh – July 31



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Webster Groves, MO 63119  
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Assistant Custodian – Gus McLean

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Webster University – Rev. Laurel Hayes  
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*Seek Christ in each. Serve God in all.*

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