



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Straight to the Point

May 19, 2020

Reflection for the Week

We all want and need various certitudes, constants, and insurance policies at every stage of life. *But we have to be careful, or they totally take over and become all-controlling needs, keeping us from further growth.* Thus, the most common one-liner in the Bible is “Do not be afraid”; in fact, someone counted and found that it occurs 365 times!

-- Richard Rohr in *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*

Reflection Question: “Do not be afraid” is in the Bible 365 times. That’s once for each day of the year! Who was the messenger (“angel”) who encouraged you to “be not afraid” today? Pray a prayer of gratitude for that person!

Prayer Concerns

Marly Van Berkum’s sister
Bob and Leone Eidsmoe
Mike and Deb Timblin
Tia Iddings
Greg Johnson
Roberta Pendleton’s family
All “Essential Workers”

Larry Shaver
Katherine Trautman
Ginger France’s sister
Mark Schmedinghoff
Greg Gregerson’s father
The Bilka Family

Checking in With Each Other

Remember to “check in” with the person(s) before you and after you in the last church directory. We want to make sure everyone is connected. If you have not completed the Church Directory Update form for our new Directory, now is the time! Help us keep in touch with you during this time.

The form for the directory is also attached to this week’s email and on the church website at www.1stcongregationalucc.org. Please fill out the form and email it to Tiffany, the church administrator, at office@firstcongregational.net. You may also print and mail it in, if necessary.

Communion on June 7, 2020

We will celebrate Communion on June 7th, the first Sunday of the month. For those who cannot join us on Zoom for Worship, we will make sure Communion comes to you. Please contact Jan Nowlen or Tiffany in the Church Office if you would like Communion brought to your home!

Prayer for Our Way Forward

The spiritual discipline for our Church Council for April to June is Discernment. Everyone can join the Council in prayer – here's how:

The question to lay before God each day is:

“Why did God call together — here and now, in 2020 — this group of elders who are engaged in the arts, the community, and personal and spiritual growth?”

Then become silent and listen for the still, small voice of God – the voice that says “do not be afraid” to leave the known ways behind and speaks of the new life and opportunity we are being led into.

For your daily prayer time (30-60 minutes), you may want to:

Sit – dropping down below your opinions and your known experience — and listen for the revelation that is coming to you

Walk – engaging your natural breath and rhythm – and observe the revelation that is coming to you

Attend to the invitation you are beginning to hear in the stillness. It should be larger than anything you can control or direct. You will not know the way . . .

What you bring to the next meeting will be something brand new.

It will not be something you have shared at Council before.

It will not be something you know how to do.

It will be something you are willing to give yourself to wholeheartedly – and it will necessitate your full participation.

As one colleague reminded me 9 years ago when I left California, after living there 31 years, to move to a new life in North, and then South, Dakota:

“The proof of God’s leading is that we shall end up where we never intended to go.”

-- *Pastor Anne*

FCUCC is Closed Until at Least September 1st UCC Churches to Stay Closed Into the Fall

On May 17th, taking into account the recommendations of our UCC Conference (see the May 15th letter below), the FCUCC Council voted to keep our church closed until at least September 1, 2020.

May 15, 2020

Dear Friends of the Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota Conferences of the United Church of Christ. I am the Reverend Brigit Stevens, your Conference Minister.

First, let me say, I miss you! I miss the hugs, handshakes, the coffee hours, and the smiles of being physically together! I even miss some of the driving to get to you! Not all of it, but a lot of it! Because I knew at the other end of each drive, I would get to be with you. I miss you.

And, I'm worried about you. I know that the Bible tells us not to worry, to give them over to God and let go of them ourselves. And I am reassured that the reason our scriptures tells us to do this, is because God knows that we need this reminding, over and over again. God knows that worrying is a part of being human, and we need God's help with it. So, I've been turning a LOT over to God in my prayers

lately. Some things, I've been turning over and over again, like your safety and well-being. And the safety and well-being of your neighbors and your community.

I continue to be grateful for the work that our conference boards of directors did a little over one year ago in articulating our WHY statement for our conferences. It has been really grounding for me in this time. Why are we called to be the United Church of Christ in this time and in this place? To live into God's extravagant welcome and advocate for justice. So that, all know love, safety, belonging, and dignity.

Love, safety, belonging, and dignity. All. God's extravagant welcome. All. These are the words ringing in my heart and attached to each of my worries, my prayers, that I am laying at the foot of the cross.

The question that the Associate Conference Ministers and I are being asked most these days is, "When can we gather again?" The truth is, I don't know. My whole being wants to give you a date. I want you to be able to mark your calendar so you can plan for that big celebration and reunion of sorts. But I don't know. I don't know when we will be able to open our physical doors so that all may know love, safety, belonging, and dignity there.

I DO know that the basic information about COVID-19 that inspired us to close our buildings in the first place, hasn't changed. It is still highly contagious; it still affects people who have other medical challenges and vulnerable immune systems in terrifying ways. And the best way to prevent its spread is to severely limit our contact with other people and wash our hands many times a day.

And the new information we have about the virus from the last few months, strengthens the advice of staying physically distant from others and washing our hands frequently. People of ALL ages, even babies and children, are contracting the virus and suffering significant illness, and sometimes even death. There is evidence that the virus may travel further and hang longer in

the air from the droplets in the breath of an infected person than previously known. Six feet between us, even for casual conversation, may not be enough. Some reports are pointing us to 13 feet, with face masks for everyone. And, lots of people are carrying the virus and don't have any symptoms, so they can share it without even knowing it.

Because the basic information hasn't changed, neither can the practices we have adopted over the last several weeks:

- Our congregations still have significant numbers of people in the groups highest at risk of death from contracting COVID-19.
- Although there are advances every day in research labs and clinics around the world, there is still no cure, proven treatment, or vaccine. My hope lies in the sheer numbers of brilliant human beings working on this! And, it normally takes years, not weeks, to develop vaccines and months for new treatments.
- We do know that the virus is transmitted in the air. So, even with disagreement about how it may be transmitted on other surfaces as well, being physically next to each other isn't safe. Even if your particular sanctuary has space to be marked off and provide 13 feet of distance in all directions between each family group in the pews or chairs, maintaining that distance would be impossible. On top of that, we sing together. When we sing, we expel air faster and further than when we speak. As we learned in the news reports of several choral groups that met in the early days of the pandemic, singing gatherings easily become disease transmission events.
- And, although there have been good advances in tracking where the illness has spread, tracking isn't a cure. Tracking shows us where physical distancing broke down and/or didn't work. It tells us where the virus has been so we may change our behavior and make further infections less likely.

Until there is a significant change in all these realities, it's not going to be safe for us to get together at church again for quite a while. I know there is a lot of talk about getting to work again and opening and closing parts of communities and commerce based on the local spread of COVID-19 and community needs. Generally, that makes sense. However, the number of people in our congregations who are at high risk, the way the spaces in which we gather for worship are set up, and what we do when we are together, make it unlikely that it will be safe for us to gather for some time.

Until there is some significant change in the information we are receiving, we need to plan on our current practices continuing at least into the fall of this year, but possibly for a year or more.

Take a deep breath. Let it out slowly. This is a lot to take in.

I recognize the challenges that this presents to you, to all of us, and that it leads to many, many hard decisions. To be honest, even creating this message was really difficult. I am afraid that some of you will react quickly with some version of our good old UCC saying, "You can't tell me/us what to do." It is true. I cannot make any congregation do anything. AND, it is my job and my calling, to tell you what I believe you should do, in the best interest of our theology and ministry. And I am personally afraid of missing any opportunity to speak a word of advice or guidance that might just save someone's life.

I STRONGLY ENCOURAGE you, to form a task force in your congregation to share the burden of these hard, hard decisions. Invite your Associate Conference Minister or me to join you for a meeting or two as you make plans. Let us help you navigate the hard conversations and connect you with the resources you need: the CDC information, your insurance carrier, and others, to make good decisions.

I have faith in all of us to, with God's help, to pull this off. I am convinced that on the other side of this when we're all vaccinated and able to be together again, we're going to be amazed at what we, and God, have done. Right now, you are learning and growing and stretching, and although it isn't comfortable, it is fruitful! Many churches that are currently having worship online are reporting that attendance and participation is actually up. You are honing skills and learning new ways to do ministry with those who are homebound, because that's all of us now. You are becoming better at integrating those who cannot be physically present because of health concerns or other life circumstances. We are learning that, although our buildings are important, it is not our mission to serve them but to make sure they are in service to us and our communities. We will still go through some very hard times ahead but, in the end, I really am convinced we'll be better.

In the meantime, do what you can to protect the mental, physical, and spiritual health of those who are the lay and clergy leaders in your congregation. This is not a sprint. It is a marathon. The pace might not be as fast as it once was but we are all still running. **Insist that your pastor and your leaders take time off and rest.** Pay particular attention to those who might have children or dependents at home. They have been learning to be teachers and caregivers in new ways now, too. If you have skills that you might be able to offer that you haven't yet, offer them. If there are things you would be willing to learn to help, offer that, too. If you have the capacity to share more, financially, than you currently are please do since many are suddenly able to share nothing.

We will make it through this and we will be different. Maybe better. There will be much to grieve along the way but also time to laugh, pray, and get to know each other better, too.

Most of us recently read the story about the post-crucifixion disciples hiding in a room afraid and alone when, surprise! Jesus showed up. Pay attention dear siblings. Jesus is with us.

Blessings, Brigit

Keep the Connection -- Join us on "Zoom"

Todd Siefker will be sending out an invitation link right before each event.

6:30 pm Wednesday – Weekly Reflection Time

9:30 am Sunday – The Admiration Series

10:30 am Sunday – Worship, Sermon, & Prayer

ZOOM Meetings – Be Sure to Invite Others!

Each of us knows people who need connection during this time. Invite your friends to attend the Wednesday night or Sunday morning sessions (and Fridays, once we get started) – you can send your friend the invitation link or send their email to Todd so he can send them the invitation. This is a way to reach out and enlarge our caring community!

Before each Zoom session, you will receive an email invitation to the session. By clicking on the link in the invitation, you should gain access to the session.

On Wednesday evenings, at 6:30 pm Todd Siefker will lead a reflection time.

On Sundays, we will host a two-part session beginning at 9:30 a.m. and lasting until 11:30 a.m.

- Todd Siefker will begin with the Admiration Series and discussion at 9:30 am
- At 10:30 a.m. Pastor Anne will lead a Worship Service.

You can join in at any time during the morning.

Friday Bible Study with Pastor Anne

We can't meet at Pierce Street Coffee Works, but we can gather at our own tables and meet on Zoom. If you – and your friends – are interested in a Friday study, contact Tiffany in the church office. Let her know if Friday morning or afternoon is better for you.

Remember to Support FCUCC Financially During this Time!



During this COVID-19 event, having no in-person services has impacted our normal income. Thank you to those who have mailed in checks!

FCUCC Finances for April 2020

April income from members	\$9,027.00
April ordinary expenses	<u>\$7,039.68</u>
Net Profit for April	+\$1,993.26

Expenses taken from the Endowment at Council's direction:

Missions (Special Gifts for COVID help)	\$4,000.00
Capital Expenditure for Sign	\$11,157.06
Total Money spent from Endowment	\$15,157.06

You can help us stay on track by mailing in your check or setting up an automatic payment from your bank. You can also contribute through a simple app called [Tithe.ly](https://www.tithe.ly).

Tithe.ly is our online, app and web-based giving system. Tithe.ly is convenient because it:

- Accepts debit, credit or bank account info
- Can be set up for a one-time payment, or automatic regular payments
- Can be changed at any time (there are no contracts or commitments)

Go to <http://get.tithe.ly> to sign up online, or download the app on any iPhone/Apple or Android device.

New Moving-On Box Needs

Bath Towels/Hand Towels
 Children's plastic drinking glasses
 Potholders
 Toilet Bowl cleaner/brushes
 Fry Pans/Saucepans
 Silverware

Moving on Boxes Challenge: a note from Michelle Sherwin

Mother's Day 2020 will be unlike any other years we have experienced! Many of us are trying to figure out a way to give a heartfelt gift to one of the most important people in our lives. Just a card seems like all we can physically provide this year, due to our social distancing and COVID precautions.

Here is an idea to fill your card with love and honor for your mother and give needed help to other mothers who are ready to "move on" to a better life for themselves and their children. Give a gift of a donation to FCUCC "Moving On Boxes" ministry in honor of your mother, your grandmother, your aunt.... and that person who has been like a mother to you. It is a beautiful way to honor a mother who has given you love and nurturing, to now allow another mother to provide a better home for her family.

Send your contribution to the church and we will be able to fill those Moving On Boxes to their brims!

While Mother's Day has come and gone, we are keeping this challenge up, as needs have not diminished, and our community can use all the help that we can provide.

Sanford Center Summer Program

Sanford Center hopes to begin their summer programming on June 8 or 15.

As in past summers, FCUCC members are asked to provide cereal and individually wrapped snacks and juice boxes/water for these children. You may bring your items to church and place them in the shopping cart in the front narthex. The church office is open M-F 10-2. OR you may drop your purchases off at the Sanford Center at 1700 Geneva St. IF you would prefer to send a check to the Sanford Center for snack purchases, that would also be appreciated. Please make your check to the Sanford Center and write "FCUCC Summer Snacks" in the memo line.

The mailing address is:

SANFORD CENTER
 1700 Geneva St
 Sioux City, IA 51103

THANK YOU for your support of this important ministry to some of our community's most impacted children.

Missions Committee

Congratulations For Our High School Graduating Seniors

PHOEBE SCHWERIN, AUSTIN JOHNSON, and ELI MILLER.

Help us celebrate their momentous event on Sunday. We will be having a parade **past YOUR home!** Please be outside on your lawn and we will drive by so you can cheer and wave and wish our seniors God's Blessings, Good Luck and Happiness! Cards and Signs will be appreciated! Plans are to meet up in the church parking lot and start on our trek around Siouxsland when the service ends. Please call or send Tiffany an email if you would like to be on the parade route so we can drive by your place with our special parade.

Rummage Sale

For those of you doing your spring house cleaning during this time, there is plenty of room to store things you wish to get rid of. Just bring them to church when Tiffany is in the office (10 a.m. to 2 p.m.) and she will open the doors for you.

Sharing Our Community Memories and God Moments

In the spirit of Pastor Al Hohl's book on Prayer we've been talking about the importance of Remembering. To Pastor Hohl, forgetting is not the opposite of remembering. He says that DISmembering is actually the opposite of REMembering. He writes, "...to not remember is to tear apart. What we tear apart runs the risk of being scattered in our imaginations" (Hohl 2020, 172). I believe we would rather not run this risk.

We are starting our own Story Corps Project. We would like your story about how this faith community has benefited your life in written, audio recorded, or video recorded format. Please send them to Todd at tsiefker@gmail.com or back to Tiffany at our church email at office@firstcongregational.net. In case you need some prompts from Pastor Anne to get started, here are a few that might help:

- I came to FCUCC because . . .
- The person or group here who has made the most difference in my life is ___ because . . .
- I learned something new here that deepened my faith when . . .
- I was able to make a difference in the community/wider world through FCUCC when . . .
- A time I met God through FCUCC was . . .
- A favorite memory I have of my time with FCUCC is . . .

Church Office Hours

Monday – Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Church Contact Information

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Church Staff:

Rev. Dr. Anne Dilenschneider, Interim Pastor

Tiffany Watts, Church Administrator

Todd Siefker, Intergenerational Coordinator

Rick Darrow, Organist

Nate Hettinger, Choir Director

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The "Straight to the Point" Deadline is Monday at Noon!