

January 2021 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595
515-832-2232
<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>

“Make me a channel of your peace...” —*Prayer of St. Francis*

On the first and second days of Christmas I was blessed to enjoy morning walks in Graceland cemetery, and those walks were profoundly moving! This was in part due to the “perfect” midwinter conditions in the cemetery: the temperatures were chilly but not unbearable due in part to an almost surreal calmness of the air, the cemetery was completely deserted of the usual walkers and joggers, and even the traffic on Beach and Ohio Streets was very minimal, leaving a profound sense of quiet in the area. These morning walks were profoundly *peaceful*, and in that peace I felt a most incredible ease and lightness of heart that is difficult to describe. Both the surrounding space of the cemetery and my inner space felt composed; calm; with no trace of tension or turmoil of any kind. There was a sense of weightless grace, a lightness where both I and the creation felt completely free of any burdens, sorrows, or urgencies that would steal the benediction of perfect peace. Those moments were so thoroughly refreshing and so utterly desirous that I walked longer than usual, not wanting this oasis of peace to end. But of course in time it did end as I corralled the pups into the car and drove out of Graceland and back into my “life”—where restless thoughts and sensory overstimulation and cares and duties and fears and heartbreaks and goals and desires of every kind welcomed me back to my “real” world.

And yet those extraordinary moments in the cemetery have made me wonder yet again about the extraordinary nature of peace in our busy, scattered and often anxious lives. While I should not make judgments about what goes on inside other people, my observations lead me to conclude that a real sense of peace—such as I experienced in Graceland this past week—is rarely experienced and cultivated in human life...indeed it is almost completely nonexistent. Certainly it is almost completely nonexistent in my life or I would not have been so moved by the experience of it! And yet—why is this? Do we have no use for such a blessing because we are infatuated with messy emotions and desires and ambitions of every kind? Is it because we associate peace with idleness, complacency, and “naval-gazing” which seems non-productive and a waste of human steam? Do we not wish to drink from the well of peace because we are afraid we will develop a liking for its sweet taste—and we are afraid the well will dry up, or we will be barred from it because we are too needy, or sinful, or unworthy? Are we afraid that peace will make us weak and vulnerable in this hardscrabble, dog-eat-dog world of ours?

Why do we claim we want to experience peace and yet minimize its import, dismiss its call to us, even run from it out of discomfort—or fear? What exactly is keeping us from experiencing *real* peace? I believe the answer is... “God.” *God* is keeping us from peace, because *God is peace*...and in spite of what we might tell ourselves and others *we want no real part of God*. And you can judge the truth of this statement yourself, for if a human being really wants God, God comes, and peace comes, and everything non-peaceful in you dies...because God and God’s peace cannot co-exist with our anxious pains that we mistake for our reality, *for our very selves*. As Satan noted in *Paradise Lost*: “Better to rule in hell than serve in heaven,” and humans have a remarkable track record of choosing our hells—and contenting ourselves with them—rather than choosing the peace of heaven.

And yet God will not give up on us, and so God sends us mystics, and Christs, and poets, and dreamers, and *revelations* to remind us of what we have chosen, and what we would gain if we would only choose differently. The few fleeting moments of external peace I knew while walking in Graceland earlier this week opened the door for me to experience the peace that dwells within me...the peace of God that is my birthright as a child of God who shares in God’s nature of perfect peace. That we have chosen to believe that this world cannot function out of that experience of

perfect peace is the original lie of Satan or the human Ego, and it is this lie that creates the world we experience as “fallen.” And yet Jesus, even as he faced his own unjust and cruel death in this unjust and cruel world, gave to his disciples his peace...a peace he shared with God with which he conquered this world. (John 16:25-33) Jesus the Christ, the Light of the World, came to show us the true nature of peace which is only experienced in our union with God, and his call to us as his disciples is to seek our God/Peace, and surrender to its Life in us...and thus become channels of that peace to a world that has forgotten the import and the NEED for peace.

And so as a new year begins and you decide what resolution you may attempt in 2021...I can think of no better resolution following the chaos, fear, upheavals and conflicts of 2020 than to resolve to become a seeker of authentic peace and a channel of God's peace to the world. And how to do this? Here are some suggestions:

Pray/set your intention to have experiences of authentic peace, and then create opportunities to experience peace in your day. We all take time to sleep and to eat and tend to our other human needs. We also need to take time to intentionally cultivate the experience of peace. Spend time every day alone; spend time in nature; spend time in meditation, prayer, or reading works which fill you with peace. Make room in your day for peace to happen, and you will begin to carry it with you into the rest of your day.

Take a fearless inventory of your non-peaceful behaviors and what you hope to achieve by them. Ask the Holy Spirit to illumine your behaviors for you so that you can understand your underlying motivations and how they sabotage your sense of peace. Take your inner healing seriously, and make old unhealed wounds that rob you of peace a priority to heal in 2021, even if that includes seeking counseling or working with a spiritual director or Lightworker or other healer.

Choose how you will feed your Spirit. Choose the fruits and expressions of peace rather than the seeds of discontent, chaos, fear and anxiousness that pervade our culture. Disengage from spending unnecessary time with non-peaceful people, for chaos and turbulence are transmitted from mind to mind like a virus! Limit your use of the media—especially social media! Once again a new study has come out that makes a correlation between excessive use of social media over time and depression in its users. <https://www.webmd.com/depression/news/20201214/too-much-social-media-time-could-raise-risk-of-depression#>

Make Peace with God. I don't have to tell you that this is key in all theistic religions, and even non-theistic religions point to our need to surrender to the source reality that is beyond our limited minds and small egos. Acknowledge your resistance to union with God, and seek to understand why you fear God. Search for spiritual teachings that ease your fears of God. Believe that God is wholly and holy love, and that you are already in deep, unbreakable union with God at your core. Be unafraid to look within, for there the God/You union and peace reside.

Friends, if there is one good thing that 2020 has brought to us, it is the clarity of seeing that both we and our world are not what we want them to be! The pandemic has helped us see clearly the ugly dysfunction, the insanity, the misery and the woes the lack of peace is generating in our individual and collective lives! This need not be, but only if we will commit to becoming children of peace and channels of peace in our world. No doubt you are familiar with the inscription at the base of the Hiroshima Children's Peace Monument: "This is our cry. This is our prayer. For building peace in this world." Yet there is an even more important inscription on one of the peace bells there, written in both Greek, Japanese and Sanskrit. It says: "Know Yourself." *It is impossible to know true peace without knowing yourself...and it is impossible to know yourself without also knowing God.* In this Good News lies the hope of our inner peace, and the hope of peace among all people! —Pastor Craig

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

M 8 am - 11 am

Church Staff

Rev. Craig Blaufuss, Pastor

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Pastor's email: revcraigblaufuss@gmail.com

Michele Omvig: Admin. Assist. 269-7210

Church's e-mail: administrative.office@fcuccwc.org

Dale Olson: Stephen Ministry Ldr 839-5619

Sunshine Duffy: Choir Director 835-7626

Melissa Hindt: Organist 712-351-1074

Curt/Lorraine McCoskey: Cust's. 832-5341

Tracy Wehrhan: Church Treasurer 297-0370

Dale Olson: Financial Secretary 839-5619

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

- 3 - Alec Tudor
- 4 - Mary Vavroch
- 7 - Kallista Gilbert
- 10 - Peyton Oberender
- 12 - Amanda Maass
- 13 - Jennifer Gilbert
- 14 - Marjorie Groves
- 14 - Travis Wearda
- 18 - Mike Tudor
- 21 - Cooper Askelson
- 27 - Al Fiala
- 28 - Jennifer Brim
- 30 - Jenny Maass
- 31 - Kolleen Taylor

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

- 1 - Lynn & Sherry Leksell
- 4 - Don & Gene Royster
- 12 - Keith & Dawn Holdgrafer
- 17 - Wil & Marjorie Groves



Parish Nurse News

Advice from a Snowman

- Be a jolly, happy soul.
- Spend time outdoors.
- Stay cool.
- It's OK to be a little bottom heavy.
- Avoid meltdowns.
- Be well rounded.
- Live well.
- Life is short.

ANNUAL MEETING

Due to COVID we will not have an in-person Annual Meeting this year. The only business that must be voted on is the proposed slate of officers and board/committee members for 2021. Since the budget vote went so smoothly, it has been decided to handle the Annual Meeting in the same way. Around the 19th of January you will receive an email listing the proposed candidates. Instructions as how to vote will be included. ALL votes will need to be received by Sunday, January 24th. If you have anything that you would like added to the email for the congregation to consider, please contact Gretchen McGlynn by phone or email. 823-4763 or jamesa.mcglynn@gmail.com.

Michele will be sending out the complete annual report electronically. If a paper copy is wanted contact Michele via administrative.office@fcuccwc.org

Indoor Worship Services Suspended

Because of the rising cases of Covid19 in our county and beyond, the Cabinet voted to suspend all in-person worship services. Audio recordings will continue to be sent out.

Pecans

They are \$12 a bag for halves or for pieces. You can make your check out to Haystack Circle. They are in Fellowship Hall so you can stop by and pick some up.

Meetings

Meetings in the church building may resume! To schedule a meeting please contact Michele by email: administrative.office@fcuccwc.org or at 832-2232 on Monday mornings. Please note that meeting dates are limited to Tuesdays through Thursdays.

Our December "We Care" bags delivered to our Sunday School and KLAB kids included a couple of Christmas crafts. Madison and Brayden Babington, and Brynley, Casyn, and Tyler Weig show their Christmas craftiness!



The Salvation Army bell ringing campaign of 2020 was very successful! Three churches organized teams to ring: First Congregational rang on 3 occasions, Trinity ELCA rang twice and Asbury UMC rang once. The total collected was an impressive \$3609! Of this total, First Congregational collected \$1960! We want to thank all of our 2020 ringers for your willingness to ring outdoors during a pandemic to raise these needed funds! God bless you!



NOTICE

All persons entering the building are warned the Hamilton County Public Health will not notify the church or pastor of individual positive cases of Covid 19. If there are multiple cases linked to the church location, a courtesy call will be made to the pastor, but no names given.

When an individual test is positive, they are asked to name the people they were in contact with-in the past 48 hours before receiving the positive test results. (Contact= within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more). IF the infected person supplies names, those individuals will be notified and asked to quarantine for 2 weeks.

Therefore, the cabinet requests individuals entering the church building and later testing positive for Covid 19 inform Pastor Craig.

Treasurer's Report

| <u>INCOME</u> | <u>November</u> | <u>YEAR TO DATE</u> |
|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Pledges and Offerings | \$18,425.00 | \$159,470.18 |
| Other Income | 0.00 | .00 |
| TOTAL INCOME | \$18,425.00 | \$159,470.18 |
| <u>EXPENSES</u> | | |
| Outreach and Mission | 11,083.38 | \$17,842.66 |
| Pastoral Services | 7,716.60 | 86,548.93 |
| Maintenance and Repairs | 1,545.64 | 23,384.70 |
| Church Office | 2,382.48 | 30,743.79 |
| Music Ministry | 1,039.50 | 7,981.25 |
| Christian Education | 20.00 | 141.75 |
| Local Ministry | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Misc. Expenses | 32.07 | 1,077.45 |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | \$23,819.67 | \$167,720.53 |

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Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of:

