



FIRST CHURCH

CHATTER

July 2020

We have included articles about our new interim minister, Mark Seifried, so you can get to know him better. We will be welcoming Pastor Mark on August 10th and all will be looking forward to his arrival. Carolyn Behr wants to create a "welcome basket" to give him and is looking for contributions. Here is her email:

I plan to organize a welcome basket (or baskets) of goodies for him when he moves to town - baked goods, casseroles, fresh produce from some of our gardens, perhaps a gift card to Wild Oats.

So, if you would like to help, please let me know. In fact, I would like to accumulate some of these things as soon as possible, storing whatever is possible in my freezer to be pulled out quickly when he arrives. We have no word yet about any food allergies or dislikes, so we will just go ahead with whatever you think is delicious.

If you can make a casserole or bread or a dessert in the next couple of weeks, please label it and put it in a dish or box that does not have to be returned. We will arrange to meet somewhere so I can store your creation in my freezer.

Enjoy this Chatter and within you will find these articles:

- [Reverend Mark Seifried, Interim Pastor](#)
- [Sam and Elizabeth Smith, Caretaker Farm](#)
- [Rachel Payne, June 21, 2020 Sermon](#)
- [July Birthdays](#)

This is another edition of our church newsletter. We thank those members and friends who have contributed stories, biographies, reflections, letters, poems and encourage any who wish to contribute to our church newsletter. As you can read in this edition, we have many talented friends and church members. We would like to get to know all of you better and encourage you to send your thoughts, poems, stories to us to publish. Thanks so much.

The newsletter will be printed at the beginning of each month and be sent via email to church members and friends, be sent by mail to those who would prefer a written copy and be available in the foyer for all to pick up when the church is reopened. In the meantime, we will deliver the Chatter to those who would prefer paper copy or don't receive email.

We are always looking for stories, poems, thoughts to contribute. Please send to Anne Short or Jody Green for future editions.

Rev. Mark Seifried
Interim Pastor



The Rev. Mark Seifried joins First Church as an intentional interim minister in August. Mark came to New England to attend seminary at Andover Newton Theological School over 20 years ago. He found so many kindred spirits that he never left. Since coming to the ministry, Mark has worked with urban, rural, and suburban congregations in the United Church of Christ throughout Massachusetts. First Church Williamstown is his eighth interim ministry setting.

Pastor Mark will cover pastoral duties such as preaching, visitation, counseling and administrative duties, plus will help us implement our vision, plan for the future, and be an active help in the search and call processes. Mark will be with us until the time we call a new settled minister.

Mark has lived in Boston for the last eight years. He is relocating to Williamstown to minister with us. He was born and raised in St. Louis, MO. He did his

undergraduate work in Consumer and Family Sciences at Purdue University. He has lived in Nashville, TN and Birmingham, AL. He went to culinary school, managed restaurants for 10 years and worked as a vocational manager with people having dual diagnoses of intellectual disabilities and emotional distress.

Pastor Mark loves to read and listen to chamber music and jazz. He is an avid hiker, loves to garden and otherwise spend time outdoors. In the colder months, he will exercise indoors at a nearby gym. Mark practices his faith daily with Bible reading, contemplative prayer, and mindfulness, focusing on simplicity, honesty and loving kindness. Mark is very excited to be joining First Church and experiencing the richness of life in the Berkshires!

To read about how Pastor Mark describes his approach to intentional interim ministry and spiritual discernment continue reading below.

How Pastor Mark approaches Interim Ministry

The interim time is a process of spiritual discernment to discover who the congregation is, who the congregation's neighbors are, and what God is calling the congregation to do and become. My approach to each interim ministry varies, depending on the needs and circumstances of the setting. I work with church leaders to set goals and expectations for the interim time before I ever become "employed" by the church. I am an intentional interim minister because I work toward specific goals and objectives. I do this work collaboratively with congregational leaders, but also through discernment that comes from my own spiritual practices. I believe that the Holy Spirit is constantly moving in churches that are spiritually alive and open hearted. Open hearted congregations are open to testing the Spirit and doing discernment together. Together, we create a future based in vision and mission.

This time of uncertainty is exhilarating and scary. The risks we take for bringing the gospel to life bring us closer to God and our purpose as human beings. What we are striving for is a transformative spiritual movement. Having had extensive training and served numerous congregations, I have tools for

ministry to help congregations for present challenges and to help create a new and revitalized future. In congregational life, numerical growth begins with spiritual growth. I want to help lead a congregation who desires spiritual growth. The present changing landscape of ministry in which we find ourselves is ideal for that.

From Pastor Mark's May 6, 2020 Letter to Our Church's Search Committee:

Thank you for your important work during this uncertain, scary, and blessed time of global transition. As we emerge from physical distancing, local churches will have opportunities as never before to serve communities finding themselves in various states of trauma, grief, and deep spiritual need. I feel as if God has prepared me to lead and serve your remarkable congregation as we work toward re-ordering values, common life, and priorities in ministry.

Throughout the last twenty years, I have served congregations in transition and trained other pastors to help churches to become more faithful, healthy and resilient. More than a few of those congregations had fears about their future. I helped lead them all to a place of stability and helped set up the next pastor for sustainable and fulfilling ministry.

The congregation I presently serve is a mission church for people living in poverty. Our liturgical life is "bare bones" as most of the congregation's energy is focused on food ministries. I have been working 40-plus hours a week adapting the operations to go from serving indoors to outdoors, 400 to 700 families a month, securing PPE, re-training volunteers, and partnering with other organizations....

The following authors and their books have helped Pastor Mark in his practices of **Spiritual Discernment**:

Luke, the Physician and Evangelist,
"The Gospel of Luke."

This is my favorite gospel as Luke's portrayal of Jesus is one of a boundary crosser – between social, religious, gender, and spiritual boundaries. As a disciple of Jesus, my starting place for discerning

God's will is Jesus' teachings, his way of ministering, and his mystical union with the Holy. Luke invites Christians to probe and question boundaries that are often arbitrary and set limits as to who can share power for the sake of maintaining economic privilege.

Thomas Merton,
"The Seven Storey Mountain."

Merton helped the church rediscover its soul after centuries of institutionalism. His journey probed the depths of spirituality and social justice. He invited readers to do the same. Merton helped me to question what it means to be a person of faith while engaging the world in all its beauty and horror.

Mary Oliver,
"A Thousand Mornings: Poems."

Poets such as Oliver use words to cut through the mundane so that we might recognize the Sacred. Oliver helps me aspire to see Truth in all things, especially those that are revealed in the natural world. This collection was part of my spiritual journey that now includes an hour each morning for spiritual practices of "waking up" to God.

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II,
"The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement Is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear."

Barber is a guide to 21st Century Christianity spirituality that bridges the gap between personal piety and social activism. He begs readers to ask, "What is the right thing for Christians to do when so many people are being discounted as second class citizens?"

Pema Chödrön,
"When Things Fall Apart."

This Buddhist monk sees the crux of a full and healthy spiritual life dependent upon the manner with which we approach suffering. Chödrön offers guidance to accept life on its own terms. She paints a landscape as to how one might manage an interior life when the outer world is turned inside-out.

Sam and Elizabeth Smith's story of how Caretaker Farm came to be, part 2. The earlier part 1 of their story was printed in the February Chatter.

What Possessed Us - Part II

Fifty years ago, twenty million Americans participated in hundreds of Earth Day rallies and consciousness-raising “teach-ins” all over the country to raise environmental awareness and to recognize the need to turn ourselves around and live in common purpose within the capacity of our planet.

Our “turning around” physically materialized on a small homestead of 34 acres, sold off from a depleted 210-acre farm. In ten years, Caretaker Farm would become one of the earliest organic farms in Massachusetts and one of the first six farms in the country to adopt the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model of farming.

By the mid-80’s, our farm stand was selling NOFA*(1) certified organic vegetables, herbs, melons, raspberries and strawberries, fresh eggs, honey from our bees and fresh bread from our bakery. Visitors were invited to pick their own flowers, to visit the pigs – anything to encourage them to experience the beauty of the farm. We were also making deliveries of fresh vegetables to local restaurants, small grocery stores, food co-ops and colleges. All of this was accomplished with apprentices who lived and worked side by side with us from April through November in exchange for a hands-on education, room, board and a small stipend.

After sixteen years of operating in this manner, with much consideration, we made the decision to close the farm-stand and retail accounts at the end of the season. Attached to this announcement was an invitation to come to a “revival” in the barn to learn about Community Supported Agriculture and to participate in the evolution of Caretaker Farm. At that epic meeting, a core group of loyal farm-stand patrons volunteered to work with us to draft a CSA proposal to present to the community at the Grange Hall. The proposal was enthusiastically received with almost one hundred families pledging immediate support for the inaugural 1991 CSA season.(2)

In the ensuing decade, Caretaker became a thriving CSA and a cherished community institution. This, in turn, led to an increased concern for the future of the farm beyond our lifetime. We were aware that if the preservation of the farm as an ecologically sustainable, permanently affordable working farm was to happen, it had to be a value that was shared by everyone.

After six years of work with Equity Trust, Inc.(3) and Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, we resolved the many legal and financial challenges to preserving the farm in perpetuity. Ultimately, the dream was realized in partnership with the State of Massachusetts, which purchased the development rights (APR)(4); the Town of

Williamstown, which contributed through the Community Preservation Act (CPA); the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, which purchased the land; the new farmers, who purchased the farmhouse and buildings; and many dedicated community members who contributed to the “Campaign for Caretaker Farm.”

On March 17, 2006, the farm transitioned into the Caretaker Farm Community Land Trust to be held as an ecologically sustainable, permanently affordable working farm in perpetuity. Sam and I stepped aside and with lasting gratitude, turned over the farm to our chosen successors, Don Zasada and Bridget Spann.

So what is the rest of the story? Don, Bridget, Gabriela and Micah live in the farmhouse and we moved across the driveway into the original herdsman’s cottage. To our delight, there are other farmers in our family: Our oldest daughter Barclay and her husband Tony founded Indian Ridge Farm and Bakery in Norwood, CO; our daughter Annie and her husband Jim started Red Shirt Farm in Lanesboro; and our son Sam and his family are members of Caretaker and produce a fair amount of maple syrup.

We feel blessed every day to be living in the midst of our beloved farm, forever grateful to have shared the experience of farming with so many people.

Visit www.caretakerfarm.org for history, apprenticeships, community land trusts, the CSA program and photographs. Shares are now available for this season!

Sam, Elizabeth, Don, Bridget, Gabriela and Micah 2006



1. NOFA – Northeast Organic Farmers Association
2. Increased over the years to 275 summer shares and 100 winter shares, and the Berkshire Food Project
3. Equity Trust, Inc. “Promoting equity in the world by changing the way people think about and hold property”, Chuck Matthai, Founder
4. Agricultural Preservation Restriction

Community Supported Agriculture consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or spiritually, the community's farm, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production

Caretaker Farm Community Land Trust - The house and farm buildings are owned by the farmers, who lease the land from the WRLF over a 99-year lease term.

"The Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation needs to preserve farms. A key to preserving farms is to make the land and the infrastructure affordable to farmers. The Caretaker Farm project gives the WRLF the opportunity to move beyond farmland preservation to farm preservation. This is an important distinction and critical to the survival of small family farms."

Leslie Reed Evans, Executive Director, Emeritus, Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation.



Vegetable-Bean Casserole
"Diet for a Small Planet"
by Frances Moore Lappe 1985

Very simple and absolutely delicious!
Serve with hot cornbread and a big green salad

- 2 cups cooked snapped green beans
- 2 cups kidney beans* plus some liquid
- 2 cups fresh sliced tomatoes or canned tomatoes, including the liquid.
- 2 cups grated cheddar cheese

Grease a casserole and layer in thirds the kidney beans, green beans, tomatoes and cheddar cheese, ending with the cheese. Bake 350 degrees for 1 hour

*Soak the kidney beans overnight – cook with a clove of garlic, bay leaf, a sprig of oregano (1 tsp. dried), and lots of black pepper or use canned instead. I cook all of my dried beans this way which gives them a wonderful flavor.

Violins available to good homes

I have two rather good violins, one three-quarter size and one full size, that need a good home. Nobody in my large family has expressed an interest in owning them, and I'd like to give them to a needy, serious, and talented young person. If you have any suggestions, I'd be happy to consider them. I've written a short history for each of them. Thanks, Jean Donati. 458-5604.

Below are the July birthdays for some of our congregation friends. If you see these folks this month please wish them a "Happy Birthday"

- July
1. Laura Vankin
 2. Deborah Brown
 3. Jean Vankin
 7. Penny Bucky
 14. Gail Oberst
 20. Nancy McIntire
 22. Tom Costley
 24. Teague Murphy
 26. Ben Kobrin
 30. Mark Longhurst

This is our wonderful new summer interim, Rachel's June 21st sermon. People have raved about it so we thought you might like to read it in print.

Rachel Payne

Title: "Black Lives Matter and the Coming of the Kingdom" Scripture: Matthew 4:12-27



Good morning, church.

When I was planning this sermon, I wanted it to be a real barn-burner. I wanted it to be fiery, unyielding -- and even apocalyptic. I wanted to say it all: To name and denounce all the ways that white supremacy manifests itself in our church, all the ways we are complicit in systemic racism, and all the ways that we are falling short of our duty to dismantle it. In my fantasy sermon, any Black person who happened to hear it would say, "That white girl gets it." In short, by virtue of my performance, I hoped I'd be marked as one of the "good ones": One of the white people who are not part of the problem, but who are doing something about it.

Eye rolls welcome.

The last time I preached, I talked a lot about my fantasies of virtue and purity. Well, here we are again.

But when talking with my Zen teacher, I finally had to ask myself, who would benefit from such a sermon? No one.

Such a sermon would be nothing more than blame-shifting: Drawing an imaginary line between the functionings of white supremacy and me, the woke white girl.

Even the fact that I name myself as a "girl" shows how I try to escape responsibility. I am a 31 year-old

woman who has inherited this racist culture and its institutions, participated in them, benefited from them, and helped reproduce them, while doing precious little to disrupt them.

I am not separate from white supremacy, and the more I try to distance myself from it, the more I perpetuate it.

So, since the text I chose for today reflects my barn-burner aspirations, I've had to rethink it. With this text, we have the fearsome and apocalyptic Jesus. I don't know about you, but every time I hear Jesus say (depending on the translation) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," or "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," or, much more loosely, "Change your life. God's kingdom is here," I get a bit panicky. If the kingdom of heaven is almost here, what should I do?

I chose this text because I feel the same panic when I look at the uprisings for Black liberation and an end to police brutality. What should I do?

Truly, I don't know.

I've realized there's a connection between my racism and the fact that I've always discounted the apocalyptic Jesus. The thing about the apocalyptic Jesus is he always provokes a crisis with his demandingness. Repent, he says. Change your life, he says. The time is now, he says. Hearing these words I feel threatened. My way of life is at risk.

Because when Jesus gets down to specifics about repenting and changing one's life, it's always too much. "Sell your possessions and give the money to the poor." "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." "Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The way of living that Jesus preaches is too much, I protest. I cannot possibly live up to it. If I try to live this way, I will fail. So I don't even try.

Something similar happens when I hear the demands of the leaders in the struggle for Black liberation. Reparations now, they say. Abolish the prison system. Defund the police. Realize that your whole way of being is founded on anti-Blackness. Listen to the pain of Black people all around you -- pain you are benefitting from. Change your life! Repent! The time is now.

I can't do this, I protest. You are being too demanding. If I try to live this way, I will fail. So I don't even try.

Given my fears of what true freedom for Black people would cost me, it's little wonder that I've preferred the "peace and love" Jesus, who is all compassionate, all forgiving, all merciful. I don't want Jesus the apocalyptic, anti-imperial prophet, who is fierce, demanding, and revolutionary.

My approach to Zen has been the same as my approach to Christianity. I have eagerly embraced my Zen teacher's saying, that when it comes to the Bodhisattva vow to save all beings throughout space and time, we can only do what we can, when we can, in the amount we can. We pre-fail, because our vow to save all beings is infinite, and we are finite.

I have taken too much comfort in my finiteness and it has become an excuse. The fact that my capacity is limited does not negate my vow to save all beings.

Without the polarity between vowing to save all beings and acknowledging that my capacity is limited, my practice is lifeless. Without that tension my faith falls slack into rationalization.

I have often excused myself from the struggle for racial justice by saying, "What I do will never be enough, so, why bother?" It is true that our service will never be enough. And -- it is devastating that it is not enough. The cries of the world are directly related to this not enough. Not enough is not a free pass. Not enough is a heavy weight that we must carry.

So when Jesus challenges us to repent and change our lives, simply saying "I can't, but Jesus will forgive me" betrays the love that he offered us.

We must say, I will repent, I will change my life, and I will fail. And still I will strive to realize the kingdom of heaven on earth.

And when our Black brothers and sisters and siblings tell us that we must change everything, because this whole country is built on the exploitation, torture, and murder of Black people, we must say yes, it's true, and I will join you, I will change my life, even though I don't know how. Even though I know I will fail and that what I do will not be enough.

Friends, I believe we are living in an apocalyptic moment in the sense that a veil is being lifted -- the veil that made it possible for those of us who are not Black to not look at how we participate in the brutal oppression of Black people.

A veil has been lifted, and the kingdom of heaven has drawn near. That kingdom is not here yet, but it's close enough for us to see a whole new way of living. A world

in which we do not know what to do, because the scripts of white supremacy are no longer available to us. A world in which we no longer have access to delusions of purity or control. A world in which we can no longer draw lines between ourselves and that which we would disown. Instead, in this world, we navigate and negotiate together through a gray area where power is shared and we are no longer at liberty to shut out one another's pain.

That's the kingdom of heaven that I see, brought near by the Black Lives Matter movement. Perhaps it's better described as a kin-dom. In this kin-dom, those of us who are white do not know what to do. As a white woman, I am utterly bewildered, and I will fail again and again. I take comfort in the advice of Cornel West. Cornel West is fond of encouraging progressives in this moment of crisis by quoting the playwright Samuel Beckett, who said "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

I pray that we have the courage to keep seeking for the kin-dom regardless: Through failure, through fear, through not-enough-ness, through white fragility, through scarcity thinking, through conflict, through fatigue, through doubt, through utter embarrassment and humiliation. Because in this kin-dom, if we can realize it together, we will no longer need to pretend that lies are truth, that I am separate from you, that perpetuating others' pain is the only way to survive, and that we must settle for comfort in the place of true joy.

Friends, we must repent. The kin-dom of heaven draws near. The time is now to side with Black people seeking liberation. Seeking dignity, freedom, and the ability to breathe. We have to wake up and that starts with repenting, with mourning, with sitting with the fact that those of us who are white have utterly failed the Black community. That we have participated in and perpetuated systemic racism and reaped rich rewards, and that dismantling the system is our responsibility.

God, help us to repent: The kin-dom of heaven draws near.

