



# FIRST CHURCH CHATTER

December, 2020

**We are always looking for stories, poems, thoughts to contribute. If you have notices about upcoming events which you would like published, please let Anne Short or Jody Green know and we will try to include. We try to publish by the beginning but realistically often it is sent out by the 10<sup>th</sup> or so.**

As described by our new President Elect Joe Biden, these will be the darkest of days during these next few months until a vaccine is forth coming. Anne and I wish that you all will be able to celebrate this holiday season with hope and joy for the coming days, that you will be able to remain connected with family and friends either in person from a distance, on the phone and/or zoom calls, but most of all that you will take care of yourselves and stay safe so that we can all gather together again in our beloved church and celebrate our blessings. Many thanks to our beloved interim minister Rev Mark Seifried for his thoughtful sermons that hold us together and for our devoted zoom team of Anne, Lynn, Deacons, Teague, Ed and the choir. **Happiest of Holidays and Merry Christmas to all of you!**

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.

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## 1<sup>st</sup> Church Teams and Committees

Below are the different Teams and Committees which make up the First Congregational Church. As we enter the end of the year and the end of responsibilities of some of the team members, the Chatter thought it might be helpful for those of you who would like to get involved in work of your church, to know these groups.

Stewardship: Best wishes to all in this season of Christmas and New Year. The materials have arrived to complete more of the fire suppression system. Work will begin soon in the attic and sanctuary. There are some delays in starting the work to cover the inside of the louvers, but we hope to start this soon also. It will be helpful to prevent most snow and driving rain from entering the steeple until the renovations can be done. I was in the steeple on Saturday December 5th and despite the weather there was not much leakage. The replacement of the insulation that was moved to install the fire suppression system in 2019 is complete which will reduce our energy use in cold weather.

The 2021 Pledge drive is underway. We have received 46 pledging units as of 12/7/2020. Thank you everyone for your generosity. Pledges can be done online through the Church website or by mailing to the church office, 906 Main St, Williamstown, MA 01267. First Church has been an inspiration with its adaptation to the challenges of Covid 19. Please support us so we can continue this good work. The stewardship team has adopted using email if possible, to communicate donation statements. This week donation statements for 2020 to date should be appearing in your inboxes. Please let Elayne or Susan Yates know if you have questions or concerns.

The nominating committee is working to find replacement members for the stewardship team. I will be rotating off after completing 4 years on the team because of my new role as President of the Williamstown Meetinghouse Preservation Fund. I will continue to attend the stewardship team meetings as a liaison with the new non-profit. The Williamstown Meetinghouse Preservation Fund (the new non-profit) has been approved as a corporation and we are completing the paperwork for our non-profit designation. The task force is working diligently to decide on the proposed board membership both community members and church members. We have also begun work on the outlines

of the capital campaign project. There are 3 officers of the corporation at this point: Susan Yates – President, Bruce Grinnell- Treasurer, and Pat Leach-Clerk.

Personnel: The Personnel Committee meets when necessary. It serves to establish and review Church personnel policies. Collaborating often with the pastor, the Personnel Committee assists with carrying out policies, establishing job descriptions and supporting church employees. The committee seeks members who have knowledge of human resources, who work well with others and understand employment policies and practices. This group is looking for 2 new members to help Liz Costley with their tasks.

Outreach: Outreach meets once a month, typically in the early evening the first Wednesday of each month. Team members work on a range of projects related to the church's community commitments and living our faith in the world. A great joy of Outreach is working closely with our wonderful Outreach Organizer, Bridget Spann! Major activities include organizing church and community members for advocacy around important local and national issues; deepening partnerships with organizations and other churches in support of collective impact to address pressing community needs; and requesting and reviewing grant applications from partner organizations.

In recent years, Outreach has focused its work on immigrant justice, food insecurity and homelessness, youth employment and empowerment, and racial justice.

In 2021, Outreach will continue a strategic visioning process to refine FCC's mission focus to ensure the greatest impact in our community given our financial and human resources. New members will be asked to dive right into that visioning process and to work closely with community partners to understand their needs and how the church might help meet them. Outreach is losing two members so would appreciate help if this appeals to anyone.

Education: Our team needs a minimum of three new members next year. Lyn Rork, Leon Aalberts, and Dick Steege will be going off the team. In addition, an additional two would make a better mix of ideas and sharing of tasks. Mac Bellner will continue her work in this committee.

Because of the Corona virus, we have not been able to gather groups together indoors. We did have a very successful afternoon with two children and their parents when I led them to several sculptures at the Ground/works installations at the Clark November 13th.

Anne O'Connor has been instrumental in working with St. John's installing the Story boards beside their church and ours, assisting Bridget Spann in beginning weekly Story hours for both adults and children. A wreath making the First Sunday of Advent was planned as well.

As mentioned earlier, the virus has directed activities to those that can be done outdoors. With the anticipated vaccine, things should change greatly, enabling us to gather inside, making the possibilities much wider. For this reason and to create a more critical mass of participants, we need at least 2 -3 people who would enjoy enlarging our Christian Education/ Family engagement program.

Fellowship: Carolyn Behr, Susan Briggs and Barbara Hadden have been creating wonderful fellowship opportunities during these covid times. They are always appreciative of helping hands.

Deacons: 2020 Deacons: Margaret McComish (Chair), Jinx Tong (Vice Chair), Lynne DeLay, Richard Markham, Margaret Oxtoby, Sam Smith, Carrie Waara. (Sam and Margaret O. are due to cycle off in 2021, and we are in discussions with the nominating committee about their replacements).

Quoting from our Church Bylaws, “as ordained members of the Church, the Deacons, with the Pastor, have responsibility for the spiritual life of the Church.” So we meet monthly, with Pastor Mark and often with Minister of Music Ed Lawrence, on the second Wednesday of the month, mostly to “discuss and plan worship, including the role of music and other arts in the service, and alternative services and spiritual practices.”

The Deacons assist with baptisms, communion, and bereavement and memorial services. The Bylaws also say that “in the absence of the Pastor, the Deacons and Minister of Music shall be responsible for all devotional services of the Church.” That is why we were very busy this year February-August inviting guest preachers and developing (!?) ways to worship together remotely.

We also are tasked in the Bylaws with securing Interim Pastors—so we are the search committee who brought us Pastor Mark this August! (The

Moderator will name the search committee for the Settled Pastor.) We also “assist the Pastor in seeking new members, preparing them for Church membership, integrating them into the life of the Church, and supporting their continuing commitment to the Church.”

To sum up, we deacons are a kind of spiritual vitality team, representing, growing, and deepening the warm welcome and spiritual home that is First Church.

Nominating: The Nominating Committee consists of two or three members who are responsible for filling vacancies among Church officers, ministry teams, at-large members of the Church Council, Delegates, and the Personnel and Nominating Committees. Its work takes place generally from November - January, culminating in the presentation of a full slate at the Church’s Annual Meeting. Present members are Magnus Bernhardsson and Liz Costley

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Shawl Ministry:

Since 2004, Shawl Ministry has been a part of First Congregational Church UCC, Williamstown, MA. Our mission is to bring love, warmth, joy, comfort and healing to members, friends and acquaintances of the church. Members of the church offer names of people who would benefit from a shawl.

Before Covid we met at 9 a.m. the third Sunday of every other month, September through May, but now that is not possible. New knitters to the group call me and I meet then at church to discuss the pattern, yarn and size needles. Other interested knitters would appear at a scheduled meeting. Some knitters have purchased their own yarn and needles (Lyon Brand Homespun Yarn, 3 skeins, size 11 or 13 round needles) while others are given yarn from our supply at church. A list of recipients and a scrapbook of thank you notes has been kept since the beginning, 2004. The Shawl Ministry is looking for those people who would like to learn knitting or are the world's best ( or somewhere in between). If you are one of those people who are willing to give it a try, please contact Abbie Hadden.. She would love to get you started in making “shawls of love and joy”

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## Not in Our County Task Force

The Not in Our County Task Force, a project of the Outreach Committee approved by Church Council in August, has been identifying ways to fulfill the Church's pledge to counter racism and other forms of prejudice in Williamstown.

In addition to the weekly Friday afternoon vigils to support the Black Lives Matter movement, the NIOC group has written letters of concern to the Williamstown Select Board, and a letter of support to the town's DIRE committee which has been charged by the Select Board with identifying ways town government can fulfill the Not in Our County Pledge.

In October, members of the task force, along with other church members, participated in group discussions of [Resmaa Menakem's My Grandmother's Hands](#), a book that explores the uses of body awareness practices to heal racialized trauma.

We have explored ways we might work with members of Congregation Beth Israel and St. John's Church. In January, thanks to Pastor Mark, we will study restorative justice processes with members of those congregations and members of Community Bible Church.

Members of the task force regularly attend meetings of the Select Board, the DIRE committee, and the Racial Justice Police Reform group to follow the town's process for creating a more equitable, welcoming, and safe community.

Members of the task force are Adrian Fox Dunn, Bridget Spann, Carrie Waara, David Langston, Elizabeth Smith, Hugh Guilderson, Lynn Chick, Lynne Delay, Margaret McComish, Pastor Mark Seifried, and Sarah Sussman. We welcome new participants. Email Hugh ([hughlg@c4.net](mailto:hughlg@c4.net)) or Adrian ([adrianfdunn@gmail.com](mailto:adrianfdunn@gmail.com)) to receive the Zoom link. We are taking December off to celebrate Christmas. Next meeting is TBA. [\(Back\)](#)

## **Two Dimensions of Reality**

By Richard Markham

I'm in the process of self-publishing a book about two dimensions of reality. Its first chapter follows. Those interested in getting more information can send an email to [richanddonella@gmail.com](mailto:richanddonella@gmail.com) (not Richard) and I'll provide them with the Table of Contents.

### A Perspective on Our Time

Our world is reeling today with the collapse of what we've considered to be normal. We have no guarantee of economic recovery, institutional racism and prejudice remain firmly in place, democracies are being threatened by authoritarian tendencies, and conspiracy theories are on the increase. Climate disruption continues, millions of homeless refugees struggle for survival, COVID-19 undermines business as usual, and polarization reigns. So much confusion, chaos, uncertainty, anxiety, instability, and fear. Things seem to be falling apart.

Contemporary culture has many features worthy of admiration, but also is characterized by materialism, consumerism, exploitation of the land and people for profit, rigid political and religious ideologies on the left and the right, huge corporations and bureaucracies, proliferation of hate groups (currently more than a thousand), radical disparity between rich and poor, individualism, and extravagant use of fossil fuels and other resources.

Many may be tempted to return to normal due to many positive features of our cultures, but why continue the negative practices that have been and are so destructive? The ongoing threats of COVID-19, economic disruption, racial unrest, and climate change makes a return to "business as usual" unlikely and undesirable. Is there anything we can do?

**YES.** The first step is to honestly acknowledge the damage done by previous generations throughout history and by many systems dominant in our contemporary world. Secondly, we need a deep perspective, a "depth perspective" that questions destructive practices, accepts human finitude and fallibility, and affirms a deep, wordless, eternal, and invisible dimension of reality within everything and which also transcends existence and our categories of space and time.

The following essay compares two different dimensions of reality and suggests how world views influenced by conventional assumptions about reality differ from those emanating from a depth perspective. Part Two asks “What Difference Does it Make?” and compares conventional and depth perspective interpretations of several major concepts. Part Three distinguishes between spirituality and religion and offers interpretations of several religious ideas from a depth perspective. Part Four compares assumptions underlying conventional and depth perspectives about humans and knowledge. The title to Part Five asserts “We Have a Choice” and explores the options from which we might choose.

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### **Noteworthy Pleasures**

Here are a couple of items from a little cookbook, Noteworthy Pleasures. It is compiled by Jeffrey Frank Wacks Memorial Fund. They might tickle your funny bone.

1. A three year old said this about her Thanksgiving dinner-“I don’t like the turkey, but I do like the bread he ate. “
2. A balanced diet is a cookie in each hand.
3. There’s more to life than chocolate, but not right now.

*Hope you have a cheerful holiday. My family will focus on keeping safe and have Zoom gatherings! Best Wishes to all. Anne Short*

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### **Jean Donati, Interlochen, 1941**

My sister, Li, just turned 16, and I, not yet 15, spent 6 weeks in the summer of 1941 at the [National Music Camp](#) at Interlochen, Michigan, near Traverse City. Even then, I think I had some idea of how privileged we were. Li was pretty good on the flute, and I had shown some ability on the violin, but surely neither of us was a star.

Mother and Dad drove us out there from our home in Erie, Pennsylvania, and came back at the end to pick us up. Although we didn’t know it then, that was the last tranquil summer for some years, since it was in December that the U.S. went to war. I don’t remember being particularly aware of the war already raging in Europe.

At Interlochen, there was a girls’ camp on one side of a lake, and a boys’ camp on the other. We wore uniforms: dark blue corduroy knickers and light

blue long-sleeved cotton shirts. Probably there were regulation sweaters, too.

I think that still in 2020 the campers wear similar uniforms. We slept in log cabins, with perhaps a dozen campers in each. Every day we had orchestra, chorus, dance, and either a private lesson or practice for the lesson. My violin teacher was Boris Schwarz. The orchestra was pretty good; that summer there was a nation-wide musicians’ strike that left national broadcasting companies without a regular orchestra, and our camp orchestra was, at least some of the time, the substitute. I was in the second violin section. There were weekly auditions, and we got moved around, but I think the concertmaster, a boy whose name I can’t at the moment recall, but on whom I had a crush, stayed in his seat throughout the summer.

We had a medium-well-known conductor, different each week, to lead us both through rehearsals and the weekend concert. Fabian Sevitsky, a nephew of Koussevitsky, was one. Paul Whiteman was probably the one who excited us most, since he was well known as a big band conductor. I think it was Sevitsky who singled me out to scold for wearing a baseball cap; I was mortified, of course, and am still a bit puzzled over the whole incident. I’m sure that I was a really poor dancer, but expect that I was adequate in chorus and orchestra. In any case, I achieved a kind of fame: Lucien Aigner, a photographer with enough skill to have his work published even then by such as The New York Times, came to Interlochen to shoot a page for the Sunday NYTimes rotogravure section. There is on the front page of one issue a good-sized photo of me and another girl singing - no identification, of course. Some unkind soul assured me that my photo was chosen because I “looked like a Russian refugee.”

Why does that still bother me a tiny bit after all these years? The sequel to the Aigner story is that, early in 1960, when we as a family wanted a family passport, the Great Barrington photographer was Lucien Aigner! A few years later, he took a photo of Cino using a telephone that was used in some advertising. And only five years or so ago there was a retrospective of Aigner’s work. I wonder whether any of the Schabacker/Donati photos were displayed. Anyway, for me the Interlochen summer of 1941 was truly memorable.

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## December Birthdays

If you see these folks, say Happy Birthday. Perhaps a special birthday card would be appreciated. We want to celebrate all of your birthdays, so let Anne Short know your birthday date so we can celebrate you.

- 6 Sam Smith
- 7 Leon Aalberts
- 7 Magnus Bernhardsson
- 8 Lynn Chick
- 9 Betsy Burris
- 10 Anne deGersdorff
- 21 Karen McComish
- 22 Margaret McComish
- 23 Jinx Tong
- 29 Jina Ford
- 30 Charles Fox

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Above are some pictures of Carrie Waara's home decorations, her advent wreath. John and Jody's outdoor wreath decoration is also included.

