

FIRST CHURCH CHATTER

February 2021

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 10th 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. Most of all please 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.

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 today's Chatter:

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["Thoughts of Spring in Winter"](#) - Hugh Guilderson

["Love in the Time of Covid"](#) - Hugh Guilderson

Zoom, Pew-Hopping, Contemplation,
Birds, Haiku, by:

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[Susan Smith](#), [Elizabeth Smith](#)

["Haiku,"](#) Liz Costley

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Eros

Based upon the Song of Solomon 4:1-8

January 10, 2021

Rev. Mark Seifried online for

First Church Williamstown, UCC

“As I begin a reflection on romantic love, let me define what I consider *eros* to be and what it is not. First, what it is not. *Eros* is not the puppy love of adolescence, though it may begin that way. *Eros* is romantic love, but it is not the kind of love that makes you insane – literally insane. The infatuation stage of falling in love is insanity, you know. Neurologists have studied brain activity and they verify that parts of our brain shut down when we fall head over heels for someone. It’s the part of our brains that say, “This would be the perfect time to breed. Nothing else is more important. Otherwise, I would not be feeling this way in my loins. This shortness of breath. This perspiration. This obsession.” That is not *eros*. That’s raw biology to help our species survive.

“*Eros* is not pornographic, although *eros* is often expressed sexually, especially when our bodies are young and pulsing with hormones. *Eros* does not exploit the lover’s body. *Eros* finds joy in the lover’s body. *Eros* finds delight in the lover’s mind. *Eros* finds connection with the lover’s spirit. *Eros* sees the lover for who he is, with all his blemishes, curves, and wrinkles. *Eros* is fully aware of those unique qualities and more and celebrates her in all her glory. *Eros* does not smother. *Eros* gives her room to breathe, to be herself so she can be fully alive to your uniqueness, even your wrongheadedness. *Eros* relentlessly forgives. *Eros* takes our frailties and vulnerabilities into its care.

“*Eros* is romantic love – the love of poets that, rather than making us feel out of sorts, grounds us in our being and helps us understand the persistent Love of the Divine. *Eros* makes us confident in who we are. *Eros* is moved by both a soft gaze and a romp in the hay. The way we express *eros* is unique to each relationship.

“I remember a few years back. I was serving a congregation that was discerning its wedding policy after same gender marriage became legal in Massachusetts. We had small group meetings according to the demographics of the congregation.

“There was one group for the youth group, one for people in their twenties and thirties, and one for middle age folk. There was another for retirees. At the lunch meeting of the retirees, we invited folks to speak from their personal experience regarding marriage and same gender relationships.

“After a few people got up and told stories about their children being gay or knowing that their grandchild was queer even before they could ride a bike with training wheels, a man named Ron stood up and said, *‘I think we should love all people as children of God, but I do not think two men or two women could have the same kind of love as Rachel and I have. So, I don’t think the church should marry same gender couples.’* Ron went onto talk about the special things Rachel does for him – like ironing his shirts, tending their garden, and having raised their five children with selflessness.

“The person moderating the discussion thanked Ron for his remarks. The room was silent because that was part of the discernment practice – to give silence between each testimony so it could be received as an offering from the heart of the speaker and to the heart of God.

“The next person to speak was Melissa. She told Ron and Rachel that she loved them very much and that she has admired their family for more than sixty years. And then she said, *‘What you have is precious. No one else has had what you two have and no one ever will. Quite frankly, Ron, I don’t want what you and Rachel have. It wouldn’t work for me and it wouldn’t work for Larry. The love that I share with my husband is every bit as rich and meaningful but it’s not the same as what you and Rachel have. Larry not only irons his own shirts, he irons our linens and used to make dinner every night of the week except on Saturdays. I took him out to eat on Saturdays to give him a break. He was the one who helped the kids with their homework while I graded papers or went to committee meetings at night. Now, when we are not traveling, Larry spends much of his days in his wood shop or snowshoeing and I cook, knit, and read. We love one another dearly. Our retired marriage looks almost nothing like yours, though. I hope you wouldn’t have prevented Larry and me from getting married if you knew how differently we would express our love for each other than you and Rachel do.’*”



“Melissa went onto talk about her best friend from college being a lesbian who had been in a committed relationship with her wife for thirty-eight years and about her grandson dressing up in high heels and playing with army men. She expressed that, no matter how her grandson lived or whom he loved when he grew up, she hoped that the church would bless him and her family by accepting his unique way of loving and moving through the world.

“As you might imagine, during the time of silence, there were audible deep breaths and some tender sobbing. Something profound had happened. Something holy. Something that changed the course of binary thinking about loving relationships as right or wrong, good or bad, normal or abnormal. What Melissa pointed out is that romantic love is holy. If it is mutual, compassionate, life-giving, and fulfilling for those involved, it is a gift from God. If it is beneficial to community life, it is a gift from God. Love that is genuine, love that is just is a gift from God.



“Don’t be fooled though by pollyannish talk about romance: eros takes work. It takes daily commitment, but it’s not how much you want this

kind of love to succeed, it’s how willing you are to work for it. It’s how willing you are to put your needs aside sometimes for the good of the relationship. Keeping the love light burning takes work: carving out time for romance, surprising the lover with gifts or special dates take work. And sometimes, if you are too subtle with that loving gesture, it goes unnoticed. Sometimes it catches the lover off guard and falls flat. Yes, eros takes work. I suggest that lovers carve time out of their schedules every week to get lost in each other by playing together and making love.

“Eros is paradoxical. Last week, I had the honor of officiating at the wedding of a young person who grew up in this community and his beautiful bride. Justin and Ruth selected a reading from the Lebanese-American writer, poet, and artist, Kahlil Gibran. The work is entitled “Love One Another.” It goes like this:

*. . . let there be spaces in your togetherness,
And let the winds of the heavens dance between
you.
Love one another, but make not a bond of love.
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores
of your souls.
Fill each other's cup, but drink not from one cup.
Give one another of your bread, but eat not from
the same loaf.
Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let
each one of you be alone.
Even as the strings of a lute are alone though
they quiver with the same music.
Give your hearts, but not into each other's
keeping.
For only the hand of life can contain your
hearts.
And stand together, yet not too near together.
For the pillars of the temple stand apart.
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in
each other's shadow.*

“It doesn’t make sense to want closeness with a lover and seek some distance. Yet, healthy eros needs both closeness and distance. This is the kind of romantic love about which philosophers and poets muse, but not the sappy, impossible smothering kind of love that talks about two hearts beating as one. Healthy eros affirms both the individual and the couple.

“This is the kind of love that knows the words “Yes, dear,” may be among the greatest sources of strength for the relationship. This is the kind of love that sustains us into old age when a peck on the forehead at bedtime is as meaningful as a candlelight dinner. Eros is romantic love, yes. But it is only foolish up to a point. Eros may be about physicality for certain seasons. It is mostly about the spiritual chemistry that is shared by two soul mates. Eros helps the partner or spouse be more of themselves, not half of the other. Yes, eros is romantic and sometimes erotic. And it’s more than that.

“Every lover knows the gorgeousness of the other and she knows her partner’s rough edges, perhaps more than that person knows himself. She sees him at his weakest and holds that in sacred trust. They see each other just as they are and they can not only tolerate the eccentricities and lunacy in the other, they can find joy in the lunacy and trust that the other as being fully committed to the relationship.

“Yes, at the heart of eros is honesty and trust – trust that when the world falls apart, this love is strong enough to endure. Trust that I will share my deepest fears and confess my most terrible thoughts with you; trust that you receive my spirit as something sacred and like no other love you have ever experienced; trust that is stronger than intellect and more profound than anything you have ever known.

“Eros is an enigma and a gift, even for the intellectuals among us because this kind of love defies logic and theory. Listen to for wisdom and paradox of eros as articulated by the 13th century Persian poet and mystic, Jalal al-Din Rumi.¹ I have edited the patriarchal language to be more inclusive of gender differences.

*Lovers and people of intellect cannot mix:
How can you mix the broken with the unbroken?
Cautious people of intellect shrink back from a dead
ant:
Lovers, completely carefree, trample down dragons.
The intellect says: “The six directions are limits:
“there is no way out.”
Love says: “There is a way: I have traveled it*

¹Jalal al-Din Rumi, “Lovers and Men of Intellect” in Sacred Poems and Prayers of Love, compiled by Mary Ford-Grabowsky (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1998), pg. 81.

*thousands of times.”
... The intellect says “do not go forward,
annihilation contains only thorns.”
Love laughs back: “the thorns are in you.”
Enough words! Silence!
Pull the thorn of existence out of the heart! Fast!
For when you do you will see thousands of rose
gardens in yourself.*

“Thanks be to God for the gift of eros. May we all experience grace upon grace in the rose gardens of ourselves and our lovers. Amen.”

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(1) *Thoughts of Spring in Winter*

*Snow clouds drift onto mountain tops
the ground will hold the snow 'til April
when the snows run downhill
to fill the rivers
wet some cornfields
turn the valleys green
and renew our hope.*

(2) *Love in the Time of Covid*

*We cannot hold hands
we know as well as our own
we no longer sit
in the sun of their smile
they do not feel
our kiss beneath the mask.*

Hugh Guilderson

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Zoom, Pew-Hopping Birds, Contemplation, a Haiku

Sally Sussman:

“Zoom church has certainly been different than being in the sanctuary on Sundays at 906 Main Street. Based now at home, I do the opposite of what I have routinely done for over forty years at First Congregational Williamstown.

“When at church, I am a pew hopper. Here at home, I set up my iPad each week on the kitchen table by the large window looking out onto a pine close to the house. In my at-home church pew while listening, I watch chickadees and other birds and squirrels scurrying around the small tree.

“On many Sunday mornings I have enjoyed seeing spring, summer, fall, and now winter while gazing out this window. I miss our beautiful church windows, especially when the screen shots of the sanctuary are shown.

“I’m curious about others’ current church pews. Do people have a Sunday Zoom routine like me, or pew hop?”

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Jinx Tong:

“Hello!

“Here are a few more thoughts re: zoom church viewing.

“Unlike Sally, during worship services in our sanctuary, I find myself gravitating to the east side, midway back. Zoom church is similar: I habitually position myself next to a bay window overlooking Galusha fields and the Taconic mountains beyond. Here I watch an array of birds at our feeders: finches, jays, cardinals, juncos, woodpeckers (all three), and the squirrels as they exercise their "rights" to the birdseed, an ongoing battle!! All evidence of God's glory! What a wonderful background and accompaniment to our Sunday worship. I am blessed!”

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Adrian Dunn:

“Zoom church service has kept me going through this pandemic.

“It is interesting to see members in their homes, to see the artwork on their walls, bookcases, and their faces without masks. In some ways, it is more intimate than in the church where everyone is dressed up. I still look forward to the day we can be back in the church, rustling in our pews, and having real cups of coffee together in the hall. Till then, I can still feel connected through Mark's sermons and Ed's brown shoes tap-dancing on the organ pedals.”

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Jean Vankin:

Although I love sitting in the historic pews of our church sanctuary I find I am so very HAPPY in ZOOM church where I can see and feel close to ALL.

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Susie Smith:

“I just wanted to say that those of us who are sitting comfortably at home realize the immense amount of work done by others in our congregation to bring us a meaningful and graceful service every Sunday.”

Thank you.

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Elizabeth Smith:

ZOOM church: I will miss the intimacy and informality of ZOOM church when we return to the pews. I believe there are constructive ways to continue this experience that we can imagine together.

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Liz Costley:

Shining squares of hope

Ed's hands and feet dance with grace

A new perspective

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VOLUNTEER AWARDS

As is our practice we often take time at the Annual Meeting to acknowledge church members who have extended themselves beyond the typical FCC contributions of time, talent, and energy. This year nominations clearly pointed to some very deserving friends.

First the ***Marion Shaw Award*** named in memory of Marion Shaw who was so devoted to many aspects of the life of this church, this year's honorees have displayed such devotion and dedication for many years, and with incredible regularity and reliability. I'm speaking of the leaders of our *Take-And-Eat Ministry* who have just "retired" from their post.

Please give a warm round of applause and appreciation to *Marilyn Faulkner, Jean Vankin, and Kay Sherman*.

Thank you!

The Steward of the ***Meetinghouse Award*** is intended to acknowledge a member or friend of the church who has made an impact on our physical plant. Our honoree this year is the daughter of a hardware store owner, no stranger to repair and renovation, and a woman who is willing to tackle any big job. She has spent countless hours in the bowels of our beloved building and knows every nook and cranny of the space. She is willing to herd cats to accommodate our diverse demands of an old building while appeasing the powers that be in the Town Building Department. Of course, you know by now, that I am speaking about *Susan Yates-Mulder*. Susan, we all appreciate what you have taken on during your tenure on the Stewardship Team. Every one of us here has benefited from your effort.

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Thanks,
Adrian

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February 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.

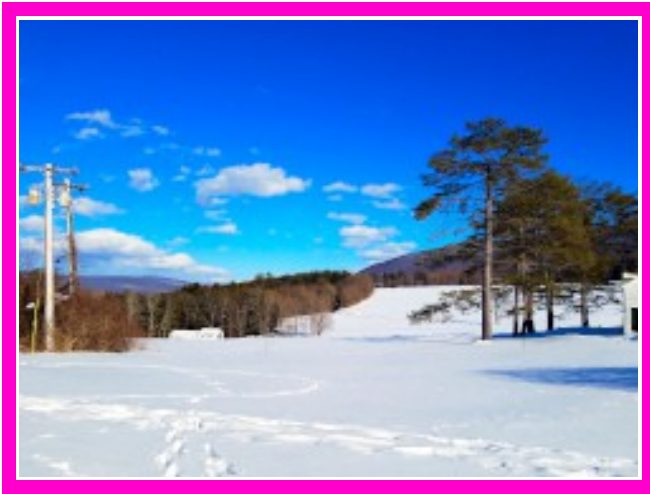
- 2nd Carolyn Behr
- 10th Elayne Murphy
- 13th Paul Rix
- 14th Carrie Waara
- 18th Oliver Longhurst
- 19th Carol Johnston
- 19th Bob Janes

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The *Not in Our County Task Force* will meet Thursday, Feb. 11, 6-7:30 PM on Zoom. Please email [Adrian Dunn](#) for Zoom link. The NIOC Task Force will continue deliberately on ways we can live our pledge to work with our neighbors to create a safer community for everyone. All are welcome to participate.

Winter scenes at [Mt. Hope Farm](#):



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COUNCIL ON AGING

The [Williamstown Council on Aging](#) in partnership with the [Milne Public Library](#) is offering a service to older homebound people who would like to check out library books, DVDs, or CDs. Individuals can call the library, 458-5369, to request materials between the hours of 10-4 Mon, Tues., Thu; 10-6 on Weds, and 10-2 on Sat. (The library is currently closed on Fridays.) If you need a library card, it will be issued when the request for materials is received. Library staff will contact the Harper Center and a Council on Aging volunteer will pick up and deliver the requested items to your home; and then pick up and return them to the library on the appropriate date. Books can be checked out for three weeks; movies and DVDs for 7 days.

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