



FIRST CHURCH CHATTER

April 2021

We are always looking for stories, poems, photos, 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. Thanks.

In this month's issue of the Chatter, we have included several written discussions and information about our church's Covenant and flags displayed in our sanctuary, the American flag and the Christian Flag. At the last Church Council meeting, there was discussion about whether we, as a church, wished to continue referencing our church's Covenant during our special meetings and if we wished to continue with these above mentioned flags positioned in our sanctuary. Church Council acknowledged that these are discussions with church members and friends which will be held and asked the Chatter to provide some of the information. If after reading these articles, please feel free to contact Rev. Mark Seifried or Lynn Chick, moderator, if you have comments or questions.

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, photos, 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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n.b. If you receive the Chatter as a PDF the links within the articles function to take you to external sources, if you wish.

David Langston, our new deacon, has written some thoughts and included his research about the Statement of Faith and our church Covenant.

UCC Statement of Faith and Covenant

The 1981 Version "In the Form of a Doxology"

This version of the Statement of Faith was approved by the United Church of Christ Executive Council in 1981 for use in connection with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the denomination. It expresses another path toward shaping the statement in more 'inclusive' language, this time changing most references to God to 'you', and removing the line referring to creation.

*We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit,
God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God,
and to your deeds we testify:
You call the worlds into being,
create persons in your own image,
and set before each one the ways of life and death.
You seek in holy love to save all people from
aimlessness and sin.
You judge people and nations by your righteous will
declared through prophets and apostles.
In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and
risen Savior,
you have come to us
and shared our common lot,
conquering sin and death
and reconciling the world to yourself.
You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ,
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages,
tongues, and races.
You call us into your church
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world
and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.
You promise to all who trust you
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
your presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in your realm which has no end.*

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you.

Amen.

Here is the text of our covenant which we profess at every annual meeting:

Covenant

The covenant is based on the original 1765 covenant of this Church. The original document was destroyed in the fire of 1866. The covenant has been reconstructed from later versions and installed by the Board of Deacons on the occasion of the Church's bicentennial, May, 1965, then later revised to add inclusive language.

"We desire and by the Aids of Divine Grace do promise to walk in all the Statutes and Ordinances of the Lord, to assemble for God's Worship, to keep Holy the Sabbath Day, to maintain Family Religion and Secret Prayer, and to honor our High and Holy Vocations by Lives of Piety toward God and Benevolence toward all People, and so do now join ourselves into this Church and covenant to walk with it in Christian Love and Faithfulness according to the Rules given us in God's Holy Word. This we do in humble Dependence on God, praying that God will enable us to be Faithful and Steadfast in this Covenant. Amen."

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Covenant Thoughts

In looking over the wording of the congregational covenant I can see several possible contexts for understanding what it is up to.

Knowing that the covenant's wording has been modified by the our congregation in the past few decades helps a lot because that would help account for the mixture of religious ideas echoing the past with some modern adaptations.

One of the more obvious echoes of the past includes the phrase that sounds so odd to modern ears, "secret prayer," — a term that is the final item in a sequence that works down through a hierarchy from the entire community ("assemble"), to the family ("maintain Family Religion") to the individual ("secret prayer" in a closet). I have already said in another message that this phrase echoes Matt. 6:6 where Jesus enjoins the disciples to shun the hypocrisy of ostentatious public prayer and enter the intense privacy of a closet for "secret prayer." The sequence — congregation, family, individual — aligns with the descending hierarchy of Massachusetts religious authority that made

FCC Open and Affirming Covenant

community, not the individual of our post-modern context, the final arbiter of legitimate belief (Quakers or Anne Hutchinson faced punishment for asserting the primacy of individual authority that ran counter to communal discipline).

By contrast there is an odd mixture of archaic and modern concerns when the covenant on one hand affirms that personal piety is directed toward God and then on the other hand identifies “benevolence” as directed toward “all people.” I gotta think that this strange mixture is the direct result of our recent revision because it echoes a modern chestnut of liberal Christianity, “the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man” — and if someone suspects that liberal Christianity was not clued in on gender issues, they would usually be correct.

The questions become even more religiously complex when we consider that “benevolence toward all people” also echoes the rational religiosity of the Enlightenment. Strange.

Traditional congregationalists of Mass. said piety involved — in equal measure — the social obligations toward community and family alongside personal pursuits like Bible study and devotion (secret prayer, as it were). Evidence of piety toward God had its public demonstration in care for community.

So when our current covenant divides those considerations, I begin to suspect we are witnessing the revisions made by a modern temperament that carries an unusual allegiance to rational religion.

That question gets even weirder when we come to the combination in “Christian Love” that is exercised “according to the Rules given us.” This phraseology rings no bells among colonial figures, but to see it show up in our times is jarring after the tsunami of Romantic theology that shaped the nineteenth century’s opposition between love (as emotional tenderness) and rules (as constraint and obligation) and sentimentalized “benevolence.”

How that complex of discordant affirmations show up in our covenant is a puzzle, and I have only a couple of hypotheses about how this phrasing has cropped up in our own covenant, and none of them is conclusive.

Best Wishes, David Langston

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First Church has a long history of welcoming LGBTQ+ individuals. We’re proud members of the United Church of Christ (UCC) denomination, which ordained the first openly gay pastor in 1972, before most churches were even arguing about homosexuality. First Church voted as a congregation to be “Open and Affirming” in 1992, which is a UCC designation of explicit welcome to LGBTQ+ people at all levels of church life.

As we state in our church’s 1992 Open and Affirming covenant,

“We recognize our need and desire to be a household of God where people may enter, be welcomed and grow in the body of Christ, covenant with God and one another to receive and accept persons as members, employees and friends without fear, prejudice or discrimination due to race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, faith tradition, nationality, marital status, physical condition, or financial situation.”

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Secret Prayer

Regarding the question of what the archaic language about secret prayer in the church covenant might mean:

Here is the New International Version translation of [Matthew 6:5-6](#)

5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

The KJV of verse 6 is nothing but a little more insistent, repeating the word, “secret,” in case the reader misses the point that devotion is to be “unseen.”

6 “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

The promise of an open reward fits nicely with the Calvinist notion that saintliness was demonstrated not by works performed by the believer in public but by

the rewards that divinity provided without public exhibition of saintliness – not that New England was ever short of church members putting in such an effort.

My guess is this biblical injunction is the basis for the covenant's encouragement of "secret prayer" -- plays off the Congregationalist emphasis on grace, not works.

David Langston.

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An Act Relative to Work and Family Mobility

by Bridget Spann, our Community Outreach Organizer
(<https://malegislature.gov/bills/191/HD1719>)

Lead Sponsors: Reps. Farley-Bouvier (HD.448) and Barber, and Sen. Crighton and Gomez (SD.273)

This bill would enable all qualified state residents to apply for a standard Massachusetts driver's license or identification card, regardless of immigrant status, while keeping our Commonwealth in full compliance with REAL ID requirements.

- Increases Public Health safety amidst Covid-19 pandemic. We need to protect the health and safety of immigrants who work in every corner of our Commonwealth by increasing access to COVID-19 testing, vaccines and food distribution. Public transportation, ride-sharing and school buses increase the risk of exposure due to the inability to socially distance; personal vehicles provide the safest way to travel during a pandemic.

- Driving is essential to mobility in Massachusetts, especially outside Greater Boston. Public transit options are far too limited to enable most residents to get to work, take their children to the doctor, or buy groceries.

- Tested and insured drivers make the roads safer for everyone. All drivers need to know the rules of the road, pass the same driver's test, and be properly registered and insured.

- More drivers will have a positive effect on our state's economy. State revenue will increase as more residents pay for licenses and auto registrations. Fewer uninsured motorists and more drivers in the insurance pool could also lower everyone's insurance rates.

In states like New Jersey that recently passed this law, it's estimated that insurance companies will bring in about \$233 million in additional premiums each year

and the state of New Jersey would take in \$11.7 million in license fees.

- Immigrants who are currently barred from driving are a vital part of Massachusetts' social and economic fabric. An estimated 185,000 immigrants without status lived in Massachusetts as of 2016 – roughly one-fifth of the immigrant population. Many live in mixed-status families; about 1 in 20 U.S. citizen children in our Commonwealth live with at least one undocumented family member. In 2016, undocumented immigrants contributed \$8.8 billion to the Massachusetts economy, and they paid an estimated \$184.6 million in state and local taxes.

- Under the Biden Administration, the need for the passage of the drivers' licenses bill in Massachusetts is just as urgent. Under the Obama/Biden administration, over three million immigrants, without status, were deported. Massachusetts has the authority to implement these protections and can be the 17th state to pass this legislation.

- There is bipartisan support for driver's license legislation across the U.S. Sixteen states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico already allow residents the right to apply for driver's licenses regardless of immigration status, including our neighbors New York, Vermont and Connecticut. Most recently, New Jersey and Virginia passed similar legislation. States with Republican governors have done so too – in Utah, Nevada and New Mexico.

“This bill would promote trust between law enforcement and all the communities we serve and protect. In order for our state's police officers to best do their jobs and remain safe while doing so, they need to be able to identify who's behind the wheel.”

-Chief Brian Kyes, President, MA Major City Chiefs of Police Association & Chelsea Police Chief.

For more information, please contact:
Dalida Rocha, SEIU 32BJ drocha@seiu32bj.org
Natalicia Tracy, BWC NTracy@braziliancenter.org

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Work and Family Mobility Act - Discussion

In my role as community outreach organizer at First Congregational Church Williamstown, I work with 6 different immigrant families to connect them with community resources and support.

Living in the Berkshires and relying on public transportation is a huge challenge, especially with groceries, laundry, or small children. Accessing specialized medical care or immigration appointments in Boston, Springfield or Hartford, CT is a logistical feat to attempt without a driver's license; due to a routine lack of viable public transportation options (meaning one that doesn't necessitate an overnight stay because schedules are so limited), First Congregational Church Williamstown has coordinated volunteer drivers to transport immigrants to important medical and legal appointments.

Now COVID-19 has exposed the ways in which people of color and immigrants, many of whom are essential workers, have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The inability to apply for a driver's license has further exposed many immigrant families to unsafe transportation options. Consider this: do we really want those needing to get tested for COVID-19 to take public transportation to the testing site, thereby exposing others? And how do you access drive thru COVID testing without a driver's license? And finally, for those fortunate enough to be vaccinated for COVID, what was requested at the door to verify that you are a MA resident? A state-issued identification card, which many of our MA residents cannot easily access.

16 states including VT, NY, and CT have already made driver's licenses available to residents regardless of their immigration status, which has resulted in more licensed (trained and insured) drivers on the road, a reduction in hit and run accidents (<https://www.npr.org/2019/05/24/719959760/licensed-undocumented-immigrants-may-lead-to-safer-roads-connecticut-finds>), and more revenue for the state via RMV and insurance companies.

As the parent of a 17-year-old who recently obtained her driver's license, I greatly value the driver's education and road safety instruction that my child received, and the test to verify that she was using those skills behind the wheel.

When a law enforcement officer pulls over a driver without a license, this road stop may become a time-consuming activity that can take an officer off the road for a few hours and involve an immigrant in the criminal justice system. Undocumented immigrants are not so much undocumented as they are without status. They have passports, consular identification cards, and birth certificates from their home countries that prove their identity. Allowing immigrants to access driver's

licenses would enable them to share their verified identification with law enforcement, which is partly why this legislation has received the support of the MA Major City Chiefs of Police Association, with a particularly strong endorsement from its President, Chelsea Police Chief Brian Keyes.

Earlier this week, the Boston Globe Editorial Board released an op-ed citing why the passage of the Work & Family Mobility Act is essential for racial justice, public health, public safety, and economic equity. It's time for a more equitable Massachusetts."

Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier is a lead sponsor for the Work & Family Mobility Act ([HD.448 / SD.273](#)) and Senator Adam Hinds and Representative Paul Mark are co-sponsors.

TODAY please contact our other Berkshire reps, Rep. John Barrett (john.barrett@mahouse.gov) and Smitty Pignatelli (rep.smitty@mahouse.gov) to ask them to co-sponsor the Work & Family Mobility Act (HD.448 / SD.273), legislation which supports the health and safety of us all."

Thank you
Bridget Spann, Community Outreach Organizer
First Congregational Church Williamstown
organizer@firstchurchwilliamstown.org

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Material gathered and Presented
by Leon Aalberts
Flags in the Sanctuary

"Gleanings from a Google search
for 'Do flags belong in church'.

1. Christian Flag

The Christian Flag is an ecumenical flag designed in the early 20th century to represent all of Christianity and Christendom. Since its adoption by the United States Federal Council of Churches in 1942, it has been used by many Christian traditions, including the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Moravian, Presbyterian, Quaker, and Reformed, among others. Africa and the Americas are regions of the world where the flag remains popular.

The Christian Flag was first conceived on September 26, 1897, at Brighton Chapel on Coney Island in

Brooklyn, New York in the United States. The superintendent of a Sunday school, Charles C. Overton, gave an impromptu lecture to the gathered students, because the scheduled speaker had failed to arrive for the event. He gave a speech asking the students what a flag representing Christianity would look like. Overton thought about his improvised speech for many years afterward. In 1907, he and Ralph Diffendorfer, secretary of the Methodist Young People's Missionary Movement, designed and began promoting the flag. With regard to the Christian symbolism of the Christian Flag:

The ecumenical organization, Federal Council of Churches (now succeeded by the [National Council of Churches and Christian Churches Together](#)) adopted the flag on 23 January 1942, 45 years after unofficial use since 1897; the Federal Council of Churches represented Baptist, Brethren, Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, Methodist, Moravian, Lutheran, Oriental Orthodox, Polish National Catholic, Presbyterian, Quaker, and Reformed traditions, among others.

During World War II the flag was flown along with the U.S. flag in a number of Lutheran churches, many of them with German backgrounds, who wanted to show their solidarity with the United States during the war against Germany.

In 1907 Overton teamed up with Ralph Diffendorfer, secretary to the Methodist Young People's Missionary Movement, to produce and promote the flag.

Timothy Wesley tells the story in his book [The Politics of Faith During the Civil War](#), a wartime Methodist church in border-state Missouri was being used by both Northern and Southern Methodist congregations. The Southern Methodists arrived one Sunday morning to find an American flag hanging from the pulpit, left over from the Unionists' meeting. Some Unionists were attending the Southern Methodist meeting that day, and after the sermon, they took down the flag and held it over the door, trying to force the Southern Methodist minister to walk under it. This was too much for the Southern sympathizers to take. One pro-Southern woman grabbed the flag, threw it on the ground, and stomped on it to show her contempt for Lincoln and the Union. Clearly, church and the flag had become hotly politicized!

Scholars agree that flags became more common in American churches during World War I. German immigrant churches and pastors suffered humiliating incidents related to the flag, with pastors being forced

to genuflect before the flag and kiss it by anti-German nativist crowds.

In the late 1910s, the Ku Klux Klan was revived as an anti-immigrant, anti-Communist movement. Klansmen pointedly gave a number of local churches and pastors American flags, which they insisted that they display in sanctuaries. A letter from Klansmen to a Methodist minister in Arkansas stated that the Klan stood for the "two greatest gifts that Heaven has bestowed, namely the Holy Bible" and "the American flag."

Some pastors rejected overtures to display the flag. When Herman Hoeksma, minister of a Christian Reformed church in Holland, Michigan, refused to put the flag in the sanctuary during World War I, he was reviled as a pro-German traitor and a Communist. One newspaper suggested that Hoeksma should be deported or shot. Another Dutch Christian Reformed minister in Iowa was run out of town, and had his church burned by vigilantes, for declining to display the flag. (For more, see James Bratt's [Dutch Calvinism in Modern America](#).)

For more on this see "[Iowa Bable 1918](#) in "resources" – If interested for more check with Leon, this was his home region.

As we look at the question, we should remember that the early church did not fly an American flag; nor did any church prior to the 18th century. Furthermore, there are churches throughout the world that continue to gather regularly and who do not fly American flags.

Many churches began to display American flags during WWI because the flag was a way to test the loyalty of immigrant churches and their pastors to the United States. After D. W. Griffith's film [Birth of A Nation](#), the KKK experienced a 1920's revival rooted in bigotry toward black and immigrant communities, and they used the American flag as a principal promotional symbol. Their propaganda efforts included visiting churches to distribute Bibles alongside American flags. As the flag and the Bible began to hold hands in the 20th century, even more churches incorporated flags into the sanctuary during WWII as a way to honor and remember those fighting in the war. Patriotism and Christianity continued to soar in post-WWII America, and in 1954 Eisenhower added "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance. Churches bought more flags.

2. [Do Flags Belong In Sanctuaries? Why Flags In Churches?](#)

Christian Nationalism = to show the nation that this

congregation was loyal to the country

During World War II the flag was flown along with the U.S. flag in a number of Lutheran churches, many of them with German backgrounds, who wanted to show their solidarity with the United States during the war against Germany.

The Church is universal. It transcends any one nation, since people of every nation on earth are embodied in the church of Jesus Christ. We affirm this each time we sing "[In Christ There Is No East or West . . . no South or North](#)." The use of a flag of any one nation tends to conflict with this conviction of the universality of the Christian faith.

Baptist

I am not ashamed of that flag because it stands for freedom even if we abuse some of those freedoms. If someone is ashamed to honor this flag they can move on to a better nation if they can find it. People desire to come to America from all over the world. Yet when others come here, they need to leave their flag home and honor this flag. If you can't honor it, then don't live under it. I am not ashamed to be an American.

Our church will proudly fly the flag of the United States of America! One nation under God. A nation that offers us life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Seek that in Russia, Cuba, Venezuela, North Korea or China and see what you get. I want to encourage the churches to pray for America. Be grateful she gives us the freedom to worship as we desire. Our military died for this flag and shame on the churches for not flying Old Glory which many of their members fought and died for. Church members tell you pastors not to be ashamed of the flag of the United States of America. The home of the free and the brave!

Mike Holloway is senior pastor at [Ouachita Baptist Church](#) in West Monroe.

Baptist (2)

At best, an American flag in a sanctuary symbolizes that the United States occupies a place of extremely high value for a church community. At worst, it communicates who and what we truly worship as American Christians. We do not have an American flag in our church, but we're not free from the idolatry of nationalism either. I hope that as Christians we will continue to be challenged by God's radical love and grace that has no boundaries and shows no partiality.

And may our spaces of worship communicate the same message.

A Christian church has absolutely no business displaying a national flag in the sanctuary, at least not as it is commonly done. The church born at Pentecost was a reversal of Babel, not a doubling down on the fragmentation of Babel.

3. How Should They Be Displayed?

John Calvin: three marks (the preaching of Christ, the proper administration of the sacraments, and church discipline) not only identify a true church (which is faithful to God's word), these marks define the mission of the church. If the Christian Flag is to the right and highest is it not the responsibility for the church to speak truth to power?

Only stated rule about the American Flag is in the military it is to be to the right and higher.

If we believe that Jesus is Lord should the proper symbol of the Lord to be to the right and higher?

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/547248/rules-displaying-american-flag>: NO FLAG CAN HOLD

PROMINENCE OVER THE AMERICAN FLAG—THOUGH THERE ARE TWO EXCEPTIONS.

For Americans, Old Glory is tops when it comes to the flag-flying game. But despite the general rule that it should always be the most prominent, it's not always the most important.

[Section 7 of the flag code](#) decrees that no flag should be placed above the flag of the United States, but one exception is that the flag of the United Nations can be flown in a superior position, although only at the U.N. headquarters in New York.

One other exception involves a church's pennant being allowed to fly above the American flag during services performed by naval chaplains while at sea. As for your house? It looks like you should definitely make sure the American flag is up top.

PC-USA (Presbyterian)

Where to place them. Which flag (i.e., if the "Christian Flag" is displayed along with the United States flag) is to be given the place of highest honor?

Codes of flag usage dictate that the American flag should always be given precedence. But when considering the question of flag display in the church it

is important to note that the established code for placement of the American flag is basically a military rule, and is secular in nature. It is not binding for civilian use. Prescribed usage was established by the United States government for use by the American armed forces, but no federal law binds civilian usage. However, in June 1943, Congress codified “existing rules and customs pertaining to the display and use of the U. S. flag in public places.” The military rule designates the place of honor at the speaker’s right if the flag is on a platform or chancel, and at the people’s right if its position on the floor level indicates it as the people’s flag.

But if a church intends to display flags, how should they be displayed in light of the Christian profession of supreme allegiance ascribed to God? Should the flag of any nation be placed in a position of honor above a Christian symbol, such as “the Christian flag?”

In churches that display flags, “the Christian flag” properly takes precedence over any national emblem to make it clear that for Christians, allegiance to God has a higher claim upon us than allegiance to any nation. This is underscored in General Assembly responses to overtures concerning flag use. General Assemblies of Presbyterian churches that are now part of [The Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#) have adopted resolutions touching on this subject. 1942 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America that endorsed the use of the “Christian flags”

While affirming that within the Christian tradition the Cross is a sufficient symbol for loyalty to God, General Assembly also recognizes the generally accepted Christian flag, not as something important in itself but as a symbol of the Kingdom of Our Lord; sanctions its use, on appropriate occasions, in churches and during services of worship, either by itself, or with another flag or flags; and urges that whenever the Christian flag is used, it should have the place of honor, worthy of the Kingdom for which it stands, and should never be subordinated to any secular flag. This means among other things, according to the generally accepted code, that it should have the highest position if one flag is above another, it should lead in processions, it should be placed on the right of a minister or speaker if used on the chancel or platform or on the right of the congregation or audience if standing on the floor.

The General Assembly of the former United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1955 acted on an overture concerning flag display. That Assembly took no clear stand on the issue but left it for each

session to decide: That since there is such a divergence in the use and placement of most symbols in the sanctuary, and since there is no rule or directive in The Book of Government and Worship on the matter of the placement of flags and symbols, we believe that it therefore becomes the matter of each Session to determine for itself the mode and manner of displaying flags within the sanctuary.

A compromise placement of the flags some churches use is the rather awkward arrangement of placing the national flag outside the chancel at the right of the congregation (as it looks forward), and “the Christian flag” at the right of the minister inside the chancel, thereby giving a place of honor to both flags. It may be, however, that this arrangement makes other implications that are best avoided.

Since we profess God as sovereign, claiming our highest allegiance, and since God’s realm extends beyond the bounds of any one nation, embracing all nations, it is preferable that no national flag be displayed in a Christian place of worship.

4. The Christian Flag “The Christian flag,” has no proper claim for being the Christian flag. It does not have universal acceptance. It is rarely, if ever, used outside the United States. Even in those few denominations where you can find this flag used, its use is not universal. This flag therefore has no claim to being a unifying symbol of the Christian faith, but was clearly developed in reference to the flag of one nation – the United States. Even its color – red, white and blue – betray a design to harmonize with the flag of the United States.

In January, 1942, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, having received many inquiries concerning the use and positioning of flags in churches, passed a resolution advising the churches. The resolution stated that the cross itself (without the addition of a church flag) was a good and sufficient symbol for use in churches, but that where a flag “representing the loyalty of the church to its Head is used along with the flag of the nation in the sanctuary, the symbol of loyalty to God should have the place of highest honor.”

Let it be underscored that it is the cross itself, rather than a flag, that should be seen as the universal symbol of the Christian faith. Because of this many church leaders affirm that neither the flag of any one nation or the so-called “Christian flag” belong in the place of worship, because they fail to express the universality

of the Christian faith, and contribute to an ambiguity about loyalties.

Orthodox Presbyterian

I can think of nothing in Scripture which would command us to give respect to the nation-state within whose boundaries our services are being held during the worship service; the flag being, of course, a representation of the nation which is intended to receive the same reverence due the nation.

While having an American flag in the sanctuary may be common within the borders of the United States, I can think of no "general rule of the Word" which would recommend this practice.

Showing respect for our great country is one thing, but assuming that Christianity and America are bound together is a far, far different thing. Keep in mind that the church is not limited by oceans or other boundaries. It permeates all societies and involves all races and all kinds of people. Its citizens are members of all lands. It has no allegiance to any particular country, and will exist when every land might fall. It is this heavenly country that I am a patriot; a citizen of above.

Maybe we should fly flags of every nation in our churches?

Texas Baptist Conservative

There is a church not far from my house that proudly flies the flag in front of its sanctuary. Actually, it flies three flags – the United States flag, the Texas flag (of course) and the Christian flag. But here's the problem. This Baptist church flies the American flag above the others.

“If you choose to fly an American flag outside your church, are you choosing to give to government something that belongs to God?”

This leads to my problem with the flag, or flags. [Title 4, Chapter 1 of the United States Code](#) details the “laws relating to the flag of the United States of America.” The code is very explicit about displaying the flag and in the section about “position and manner of display” clearly states: “No other flag or pennant should be placed above or, if on the same level, to the right of the flag of the United States of America.”

So, when a church erects flagpoles outside its building and hoists the American flag and the Christian flag, that church immediately puts itself in an unwinnable

situation. By law, the church cannot fly the Christian flag above the U.S. flag, and the U.S. flag must be at the center. Yet by scripture, the church cannot put country equal to or above Jesus Christ. By raising the U.S. flag over the Christian flag and making it the center of attention, the church near my house appears to put country over Christ.

“give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21).

If you choose to fly an American flag outside your church, are you choosing to give to government something that belongs to God?

But as a Bible-believing follower of Jesus, I cannot put my country above Christ; nor can I say America is even equal to him. I can love both, but not equally.

5. Where Else Might They Be Displayed?

In U.S. evangelical Christian schools, it is customary for the Christian flag to be displayed opposite the U.S. Flag.

#3 Immigrant and ethnic minority groups embraced the idea of displaying the flag in religious services as a way to affirm their patriotism. Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox immigrants from Europe routinely displayed the flag in parades and meetings in the 1920s.

Leon Aalberts

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April Birthdays

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Material presented by Deborah Brown
for the Chatter

(For our friends who do not get the electronic Chatter,
we have included material about Peace Pilgrim
Mildred Norman.)

Peace Pilgrim

See the link, "[An Extraordinay Life](#)," by Ann Rush
with John Rush

*"[Friends of Peace Pilgrim](#) is a non-profit, all
volunteer organization devoted to spreading Peace
Pilgrim's Message. Our mission is continually being
fulfilled by the living efforts of "Friends" of Peace
Pilgrim and peace seekers throughout the world. The
first Peace Pilgrim Center opened in 1983 in Helmet,
CA, in the home of John and Ann Rush, who knew
Peace Pilgrim for 24 years. She was often a guest in
their home, and they published her Steps Toward Inner
Peace booklet while she was alive. After 18 years the
Center relocated to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada
in Somerset, CA. Then, in 2005, we moved again. Now
different aspects of our work and service are based in
Connecticut, California and Oklahoma. Many gifts,
mostly small, have made it possible to send hundreds
of thousands of free copies of our book and other
materials to anyone who asks. Publication and mailing
costs are paid for by donations from Peace Pilgrim's
friends throughout the world who want to share her
inspiring words with others. We invite you to look at
our offerings, make a donation as you are able, and
join the tens of thousands of Friends of Peace Pilgrim
around the globe."*

A pamphlet about Peace Pilgrim and "Steps Toward
Inner Peace" can be found on the church office door.

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March into April

by Adrian Dunn

Red onions soften in the kitchen,
topple from their bowl
to the counter
their purple skins splitting and sloughing off
like winter jackets
their roots stretch out
and touch the limits of their captivity,
all their sweetness
transformed into green shoots
reaching for the light of the ceiling bulb

Lingering winter has frayed me too,
all my sweetness
transformed into green longing
Time moves at the pace of
an ant navigating
the hills and valleys of my carpet
Light expands but fails to warm the
frozen soil

I gather the onions and toss them
on the compost heap,
daffodil blades erupt through
the last of the snow,
a lone bluebird
calls to his mate
but she has not yet returned

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Strolling in the Spruces

by Bridget Spann

With inspiration from Mark Seifried, this past fall Anne Short and I invited people to start meeting at The Spruces on Tuesday mornings at 11am for a stroll. This activity, which I planned with others in mind, has become one of my favorite activities. What a treat it is to share joys and concerns in person with others and to walk with different people each week. I have appreciated experiencing the changes in the seasons while also recognizing how hardy people can be, showing up to walk even on wintry days. Together we have acknowledged our challenges dealing with the pandemic and mourned the loss of loved ones. We have celebrated the sighting of a bald eagle, an embrace of gratitude by a couple together for 40 years, and the miracle of a vaccine administered just in time for spring. All are welcome. Please join us.



-Bridget

We've had great weather for weekly flat terrain walks; the views of the mountains from the Spruces always surprise me; it's one hour of connecting with others I

have missed seeing at FCC. What is it about being out in nature that inspires natural conversations? It's become a weekly appointment with others and myself; it's not just for women; it's a novel way to actually be with people in the midst of continued pandemic isolation.

-Sally S.

Allen notices the mud on the floor of my car. I notice that I feel a little less isolated after walking with the Spruces group..... one of many small life enhancers in this difficult time.

-Lyn R.

Meeting friends whom we do not recognize at first under hats, masks and glasses at the Spruces on Tuesdays is a joy! And then everyone takes off in small groups at different speeds. It is a lovely sight. I look forward to watching Spring arrive from week to week.

-Susan S.

While I take Tassie, my golden retriever, to walk at the Spruces almost everyday, Tuesdays are different! At 11 each Tuesday, no matter what the weather (!) we meet to share a few thoughts (and a stretch) before walking the loop with FCC friends. I treasure this sharing time. A time to soak in the beauty surrounding us and talk about whatever comes to mind. Sometimes the conversations go deep, other times not. Sometimes there are 2-3 of us; other times 8-9. Some walk at a good clip, others stroll. It is a precious time, for which I'm grateful. (as is Tassie!)

-Jinx T.

I did not know what to expect for my first time of strolling in the Spruces and I came away with many good feelings. It was wonderful to see so many friends in person. The weather was beautifully warm and sunny. Before we began, Bridget gathered us in a circle and invited each of us to say one's name and to tell what was in our heart. Then we set off, accompanied by Jinx's friendly and obedient (no leash) dog. During our two routes, I visited with different people and got to know them better. I came away spiritually refreshed and physically exercised.

-Susan C.

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