

# FIRST CHURCH CHATTER

February 2022

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.

We are continuing the new layout this month, with larger, 1" margins, to show the poems and reflections as they were intended. We await your comments if you want this to continue or prefer the columns as has been our previous style. You can connect with Jody Green, Anne Atkinson Short or Carrie Waara for comments if you wish.

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.

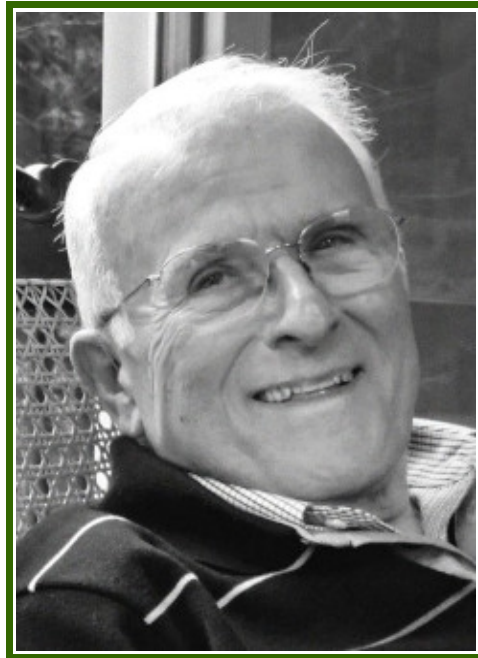
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Hyperlinks: If you received this as a \*.pdf file, use the links to take you to Chatter pages, internet sites and such, or to open your email program to respond to an author. If you received a paper copy, links to the sites can be copied and pasted into your browser to take you to those sites.

*In today's Chatter:*

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Robert K. Buckwalter, Pastor at First Church Williamstown from 1980-1989



With sadness, Williams notes the passing of retired College Chaplain Bob Buckwalter on Saturday, January 15, 2022.

Bob arrived at Williams as college chaplain in July 1991, after having served as pastor of the Japanese American Ethnic Church in Alameda, CA, and of Congregational churches in North Adams, Belmont and Williamstown, Mass. He retired from Williams in 2000, and later relocated with his wife, Kris, to the Maine coast, where he lived at the time of his passing.

Bob's family plans to hold a celebration of his life at a later date, out of respect for pandemic restrictions. In the meantime, condolence messages can be submitted via the Chad E. Poitras Cremation and Funeral Service website, [www.mainefuneral.com](http://www.mainefuneral.com).

For a rich tribute to Bob's life, please see his obituary in the [Berkshire Eagle](#).

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## State of the Union R. E. Markham

I suspect that many will agree with me that the state of our union is not great. So many challenges, problems, and issues, it gets overwhelming at times. While not denying negatives about our country, perhaps it would help to recall principles from our Constitution and insights from our spiritual depths.

Although flawed, our Founding Fathers resisted what they perceived as British authoritarian rule, and then wrote fundamental principles and values into our Constitution that have inspired many over the centuries. These include the rule of law, the search for truth supported by facts, the separation of church and state, and the notion that no point of view is sacrosanct. Let's bring these principles to the forefront and make sure they are acknowledged and practiced.

We can tap into the deep wisdom of those who have long been admired, people like the Buddha, Jesus, yes Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and all the women who have been nonviolent leaders. Unlike some contemporary evangelists, they advocated non-violence and the practice of love and compassion in the midst of huge challenges.

It might help to ask ourselves "What kind of country do we want?" And, "what is the legacy we want to leave our beloved children? Do we want to continue "business as usual" consuming more than we need, stressing the individual over community, despoiling our natural paradise, practicing hatred, devaluing people of color, being critical of any one not agreeing with us, practicing violence instead of love and compassion? Is that the kind of legacy we want for our children?

I think not. If we continue in this vein, we'll likely spiral downward into more and more strife, hatred, and violence leaving our children with little to look forward to and causing them to lose hope that things could get better.

What I'm advocating may seem naive, but I maintain that continuing current practices are signs of weakness, and that moving toward a more positive world will require courage and strength. Let's renew our faith in constitutional principles and the life of the spirit, surrender our hatreds and, working together, meet the challenges of our time.

May love and hope prevail.

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## Smith College Academia - Faith McClennan\*



"Two of Smith's academic centers have new directors. At the Lazarus Center for Career Development, Faith McClennan was named dean for career services and director. Previously associate dean of career development and field work term at Bennington College, McClennan is committed to creating bridges for students between knowledge acquired in the classroom and co-curricular experiences. ...." [Smith Alumnae Quarterly Winter 2022](#), p.14

\*Wife of Rev Mark Longhurst

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### February Birthdays

11	Elayne Murphy
13	Paul Rix
14	Carrie Waara
18	Oliver Longhurst
19	Carol Johnston
19	Bob Janes
27	Carolyn Behr

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### *Paradise*

Based on Ecclesiastes 2:1-16, 22-25, January 30, 2022

Rev. Mark Seifried online for First Congregational Church Williamstown, UCC

It's a miracle that we can worship together and yet not be together in the same physical space. Technology is a miracle. Life is a miracle. You are a miracle. The recently deceased Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh believed in miracles, writing: "People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child—our own two eyes. All is a miracle." (*The Miracle of Mindfulness*)

We don't have to believe that to be the case. We can believe that life is awful, that people are terrible. We can stew that we are on the brink of another world war. We have a choice of fretting or rejoicing about life. We have the option of not giving a damn or sensing and manifesting transformation with hope and joy. For some people, giving a damn would be a miracle. For others, five worry-free minutes would be miraculous.

What did you think of that reading from Ecclesiastes? It's a doozy, isn't it? It says, "There is no enduring remembrance of the wise or of fools, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How can the wise die just like fools? What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity." Wow, what's the point of living? That's the question of the day ... or maybe that's the question of a lifetime? What's the point of all this?

This writer Ecclesiastes has lived a full life. A life of love. A life with disappointment and loss. A life of privilege. A life with worry. A life of vanity, as he puts it. A life of learning ... and enough wisdom to conclude, you can enjoy food and drink and your work, if you are wise enough to savor them – to taste divine ecstasy in a juicy pear, to smell paradise in toasted cumin seeds or the top of an infant's head, to sip eternity from a cup of tea. Heaven is as accessible as a deep breath.

Life is a miracle. We can believe that or not, but do not tell me I am a fool for believing it is. Do not tell him he is clueless because he opts to find joy while cleaning bathrooms. Do not tell her she is crazy because she believes that people are good and beautiful and miraculous. Do not tell us that this God we worship is all made up in our minds. Our hearts know. Our dreams are not some altered state – just another dimension of being. I would like to take 24 hours away from sanity sometime to live a full day in dreamland.

Scratch that ... this is dreamland. You can experience paradise with every breath ... and between each breath. How will we ever experience heaven if we fail to feel the miracle of this moment – whenever and wherever "this" is? How will we ever receive the miracle for which we pray if we see ourselves separate from the Miracle Maker?

Walt Whitman's poetic praise carries some heft on this theme when he asks,

*Why, who makes much of a miracle?  
As to me I know of nothing else but miracles,  
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,  
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,  
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,  
Or stand under trees in the woods,  
Or talk by day with any one I love,  
or sleep in the bed at night with any one I love,  
Or sit at table at dinner with the rest,  
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,  
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer forenoon,  
Or animals feeding in the fields,  
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,  
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown,*

*Or of stars shining so quiet and bright,  
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in spring;  
These with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,  
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.*

*To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,  
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,  
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,  
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.*

*To me the sea is a continual miracle,  
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the waves—the ships with men in them,  
What stranger miracles are there?*

Paradise is not some fantasy world, beloved. We are living in paradise. You are looking into the eyes of God whether on your enemy's face or looking at your own mug in a mirror. The story you tell yourself about them changes the relationship. Are they strangers or are they kin? Are they beautiful or are they ugly? Are they trustworthy or are they a con artist. The story you tell about yourself makes all the difference. Are you beautiful or are you ugly? Are you trustworthy or are you an impostor. The answers live within your spirit. A question worthy of pondering is: "Who and what control your spirit?"

Our brother Dick Markham calls the spiritual realm of being "a deep dimension." In his book *Two Dimensions of Reality*, Dick writes, "We largely assume that humans are separate from other humans and from nature. This conventional notion disregards or ignores the depth perspective which supports seeing humans as emanating from a deep dimension. When we do this, we overlook the notion that at the deepest level we are all in this together. We are distinct from one another, but not separate."<sup>1</sup>

Dick rightly observes that, "Increasing numbers of humans are questioning a conventional worldview. They accept a depth perspective of reality, enjoy their individuality without reification, participate in groups while recognizing their relativity and fallibility, are convinced that spiritual power is more potent than social power, enjoy love as rooted in a depth dimension, appreciate freedom as emanating from that dimension, practice restorative justice, and consider compassion as a strength. They recognize their creativity is also rooted in the depth dimension."

Dick concludes, "Whichever assumption is most prevalent in a culture has a bearing upon whether or not our species will survive." To that, I say "Amen, and thank you for your wisdom and grace, Dick." We are souls occupying bodies, all intricately connected to one another and to the natural world. Our demise will be our disconnect from the spiritual dimension.

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<sup>1</sup>R.E. Markham, *Two Dimensions of Reality: a depth perspective on our time*, (Manchester Center, VT: Shires Press, 2020), pp. 52-53.

You know, Jesus taught about how we are to survive as a species, only many of us reject that teaching because it has been co-opted by those “washed in the blood of the lamb,” Born Again Christians. We run the risk of peril if we throw the baby out with the bathwater. Dick Markham echoes what Jesus proclaimed to his followers who were seeking salvation: “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again of the Spirit, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” (John 3:3) It’s almost the same as what the Bhagavad Gita teaches: “We are born into the world of nature; our second birth is into the world of spirit.” Islam teaches about living with born again freedom of the spiritual life, too.

Listen for the Spirit’s invitation in a wonky fable from the Sufi poet and mystic, Rumi,<sup>2</sup> which goes like this:

*A merchant kept a bird in a cage. He was going to India, the land from which the bird came, and asked the bird whether he could bring anything back for it. The bird asked for its freedom, but the merchant refused. So the bird asked the merchant to visit a jungle in India and announce his captivity to the free birds who were there.*

*The merchant did so, and no sooner had he spoken when a wild bird just like his own fell motionless out of a tree onto the ground. The merchant thought that this must be a relative of his own bird, and felt sad that he should have caused this death. When he got home, the bird asked him whether he had brought good news from India.*

*“No,” said the merchant, “I fear that my news is bad. One of your relations collapsed and fell at my feet when I mentioned your captivity.” As soon as these words were spoken, the merchant’s bird collapsed and fell to the bottom of the cage. The merchant thought, “The news of his kins’ death has killed him, too.” Sorrowfully, he picked up the bird and put it on the windowsill. At once, the bird revived and flew out the window to a nearby tree, saying, “Now you know that what you thought was disaster was in fact good news for me. And how the message, the suggestion of how to behave in order to free myself, was transmitted to me through you, my captor.” And he flew away, free at last.*

Beloved, the freedom of heaven is within you. The way you spend your time, the things you choose to think about, the people with whom you engage make all the difference. There is a thin veil between the realities of the temporal life and the transcendent life of the spirit, between the torment of hell and the wonderment of paradise. A breath, a pause, a gaze, a touch, a pose, a bell, an “ahh” with intention, a kiss, a laugh, a prayer can help you transcend one reality to the other. Praise be to the Spirit that paradise is as near as the beat of your heart.

Amen?

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<sup>2</sup>“The Indian Bird” by Rumi in *Tales of the Dervishes*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1970) pg. 189/

## News - Josie Eusden

Dear Friends and Relatives,

January 2022

Happy New Year! Despite the ongoing Covid challenges that we're all facing, there is lots of good news to share! With the help of my children, I'll give you all the updates.



**Andrea and Charlie** continue to enjoy retirement in ME and co-hosted the beautiful (and twice-postponed) wedding of their son **Sam to Stacey Terry** in CT. The newlyweds live in Boston, MA, and work for LogMeIn and the Financial Times respectively. **Ben and his fiancée Darian Surratt** bought a home in Providence, RI and work for Sensata Technologies and Twitter. They are planning a September 2023 wedding.

**Alan and Lynn** continue their work and volunteerism at the Corning Museum of Glass and The Rockwell Museum in NY, and revel in their role as grandparents. **Will and Olivia** live in Sharon, MA with nearly 4-year-old Teddy and almost 2-year-old Sophie, and work for Sensata Technologies and as a psychotherapist in private practice. **Caitlin** lives in Brookline, MA and works at Wayfair. **Greg and his girlfriend Krissy Taft** live in Cambridge, MA and work for SimpliSafe and Athena Health.



**Dyk** concluded his 30+ year teaching career at Bates College and **Lydia** continues teaching at Hebron Station School in ME. **Spencer and Emily Blackmer** were married on a gorgeous September day in Randolph, NH. The newlyweds live in Tahoe City, CA and work for the University of Nevada and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. **Riley** lives in Tokyo, Japan where he works for ABLIC semiconductor company and as a freelance model and DJ.



**Sarah and Andy** continue working at MIT and the U.S. Postal Service. **Nick** lives in Brookline, MA, works at the Asperger/Autism Network, and plays with his bands Ice Giant and Wake of Sirens. **Julia and her boyfriend John Lomax** live in Melrose, MA and work for the Commonwealth and New England Life Care.



I will celebrate my 97<sup>th</sup> birthday on February 5<sup>th</sup>! With love and best wishes for 2022.

**Josie Eusden** c/o Andrea Eusden, 325 Maple Hill Road, Auburn, ME 04210

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## Small discussion groups during Lent and Easter!



The deacons are asking if anyone of our friends and church folks might like to create a topic for small group discussion over zoom and facilitate that group during this special time of our Christian calendar. If you are interested, please get in touch with Deacon Gail Oberst to talk this over with her.

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