



FIRST CHURCH CHATTER

March 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.

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:

[Repair the Breach](#), Rev. Dr. Audrey Price
[Justin Adkins](#), from Isaiah 60:1-5
[March and April Birthdays](#)
[Spring Comes](#)

[There has been inquiry about ways to help the Ukrainian situation and these sites were recommended in Friday's eblast. "During these anxious times, there are things we can do for people who remain in Ukraine and for the 2 million-plus people who have evacuated. Please follow the links below for ways you can help financially and otherwise:](#)

[United Church of Christ Global Mission Partners](#)
[United States Agency for International Development](#)
[A Super Site for Ukrainian Aid](#)

"In addition to prayers for our Ukrainian siblings, let us pray for the wisdom of world leaders, for de-escalation of violence, and for the strength and compassion of those offering assistance."

Based on Isaiah 58:1-3, 5c-9b, 11-12

Rev. Dr. Audrey Price, Executive Minister of SNE Conference of UCC for Strategic Operations

Repair the Breach

Isaiah 58:1-3, 5c-9b, 11-12

- 1 *Shout out, do not hold back!
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins.*
- 2 *Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and
did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.*
- 3 *“Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,
and oppress all your workers.
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?*
- 6 *Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?*
- 7 *Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring
the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*
- 8 *Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing
shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator[a] shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*
- 9 *Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help,
and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,*
- 11 *The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.*
- 12 *Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the **repairer of the breach**,
the restorer of streets to live in.*

Repair The Breach: Being Prophetic, Relevant, Transformative

Good morning First Church Williamstown!! It is good to be with you this morning. I bring you greetings from the Southern New England Conference staff where I serve as the Executive Minister of Strategic Operations and an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Thank you also for being a congregation committed to racial justice and anti-Christian Nationalism work. Your ministry is witnessed in the public square and among interfaith and ecumenical partners. The conference is also deeply grateful to your faithful financial commitment particularly through your proportional giving and Our Church's Wider Mission offering.

During this time of pandemics—deep-rooted systemic racial injustice and COVID- 19—your faithful service and financial offering are not only important but also a balm in Gilead. Praise God!

Beloved, with as much you have done and are doing, there is still much and deeper work to do. Ekklesia – the Greek word normally translated as church is more accurately translated as “the called and chosen, the gathered, faithful of God”—the ekklesia is responsible for repairing the breach. The breach is wide, and we, the church, are either widening it or repairing it. The Conference invites our local churches to endeavor in ministry that is Prophetic, Relevant and Transformative. This is the work that leads to repairing the breach.

The pandemic of racism. For over 400 years, this nation has been infected with racism. Upon the establishment of this nation, racism was first codified and continued through the forced migration arrival of African people via the Middle Passage onto this soil.

What do I mean by this? Well, I remind you coronavirus was first identified in 1965. Then in 2019, a new coronavirus was identified as the cause of this current disease outbreak. How did this novel outbreak happen? It happened because when the first virus/infection happened, it was medicated and not eradicated. Medicating temporarily resolved people's symptoms, they began to feel better, colds were cured, people stopped dying and a new normal commenced. However, the virus was medicated and not eradicated, so it mutated. That which the church does not eradicate, mutates. Upon its mutation, the virus grew more resistant, tenacious and lethal.

Mutation after mutation after mutation and now 50 years later, previously created vaccines are no longer effective, previously administered medications, no longer resolve symptoms. In a new normal since its discovery, a novel coronavirus was birthed. One that is more powerful and deadly than ever before.

So, what am I saying? The church is not called in this time of sinful pandemic of racism and other isms that seek to eradicate the human dignity and very life of God's children to be complacent. The church is called to repair the breach.

That which the church does not eradicate, mutates. Racism has mutated century

after century after century.

From enslaving Africans, to indentured servitude, to Jim Crow era, to assaults of policing and militarization of communities of color. ISAIAH beckons us, Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. This is time for us to BE the Church.

And in being the church, It is time to Repair the Breach. The alarm has been sounded, Hear the call of God:

- 2 *Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake
the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.*
- 3 *“Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,
and oppress all your workers.
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?*

Fasts that serve our own purposes keeps us in our comfort zone. We cannot intellectualize the dangers of this pandemic. We must be prophetic:

- 6 *Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?*

Repairers of the breach challenge and tear down systems that seek to oppress and marginalize like challenging racism at local police departments that bring about structural change. Prophetic means boldness in speaking truth to power and dismantling racist paradigms, ideologies and structures even if they do not negatively impact you directly.

You should be sufficiently moved if they negatively impact your siblings in Christ, any of God’s creation, all of humanity. Being prophetic means doing ministry in the hard places. It’s not about feeling good about what we are doing, or the low hanging fruit of justice— book study, mission offering—but it does mean speaking against unjust policies, repealing inequitable laws, voting for candidates who care about social politics and work towards equity, diversity and inclusion in the law, representation and social systems.

Be Relevant. Meet the immediate needs and secure future needs.

- 6 *Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?*
- 7 *Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked,
to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*
- 8 *Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing
shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator[a] shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*
- 9 *Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help,
and he will say, Here I am.*

This is the hands-on work of the church. Do not fret, however, The church does not go alone! God will never leave or forsake us! Engage in this work with community partners, interfaith missions, ecumenical collaborators.

**Be Transformative. When the world encounters you,
it shall never be the same...for the better.**

- 11 *The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and
make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of
water, whose waters never fail.*

So I ask, where within First Church Williamstown is this geyser that produces this restorative, this replenishing, this refreshing gift. This gift that can water the dry places within this nation...the dryness created by frustration, despair, anger, the dryness created by disappointment, disillusionment, dismemberment; the dryness created by the darkness of injustice, inequality, and the iniquities of America. Where, oh God, is that fresh spring of water? **You are called to be the repairer of the breach**, the restorer of streets in which for all to justly live.

How does the church repair the breach?

In order to repair the breach, we must contemplate and critically examine, who is God calling us to become?

You must discern if being dynamic, hospitable and a family-friendly hub is enough. Is this keeping you on the path of being prophetic, relevant and transformative or making you comfortable? In order to repair the breach, we must ask first, **How do I repair the breach?**

How do I repair the breach?

When you look reflectively and honestly at your action, inaction, complicity, enjoyment, investment in ideologies and systems that create, enforce and protect injustice, prejudice and oppression. When you confess to God and yourself these shortcomings, seek forgiveness and reconciliation and turn from these comfortable and familiar ways. When you turn towards liberative and life-giving ways that waters the souls of God's people.

How do you repair the breach?

When you engage in ministry that is the ever-flowing, unquenchable, relentless, transformative and liberative spring of water for all of humanity. When you follow and eventually become one with the river that quenches the thirst of the marginalized, ostracized, and dehumanized among us.

You ask, "**How do I repair the breach?**" When you believe in the depths of your soul, vote for, give financially towards, serve steadfastly in the building of the kin-dom of God where every identity of God's people is equally respected and affirmed. How can you repair the breach? When you live fully, and boldly into God's call of justice work.

When your life's work gives witness to

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and
recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

You Begin to Repair the breach!

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Sermon by Justin Adkins on 2/13/22, from Isaiah 60:1-5

Isaiah 60:1-5

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Holy One rises upon you.
For behold, darkness covers the earth,
and thick darkness is over the peoples;
but the Holy One will rise upon you,
and glory will appear over you.
Nations will come to your light,
and world leaders to the brightness of your dawn.
Lift up your eyes and look around:*

***They all gather and come to you;
your children will come from afar,
all your precious ones will be presented with honor.
Then you will look and be radiant,
and your heart will tremble and swell with joy.***

I know this is not always the case here, but today I am going to speak directly to the passage that Ruth read for us this morning from Isaiah 60. A passage that is actually a cornerstone of the Christian faith and the spread of Christianity. When I found out what today's passage was, it spoke to me and actually fell in line with thoughts I've been having about the earth, light, climate change and colonization.

I have been thinking about light a lot lately. A few years ago I started centering my spiritual practice on some of the pre-Christian traditions of my Nordic and Anglo-Saxon ancestors. This is a privilege that I am able to know where my ancestors are from and how they came here to what we now call the US. I have been moving my body and spirit with the seasons as they present themselves to me and light is a big part of this more animist connection to the spirits of the land.

My current spiritual practice calls on a contemporary version of Nordic animism and a Buddhist based philosophy. It's actually not so odd to think of the two together as the travels of my Scandinavian ancestors most likely put them in communication with those practicing Buddhism about the same time Christianity also came to Northern Europe. For me the core of my daily practice is rooted in connection and oneness with the earth and the impermanence of all around and within.

Even back in my days when I identified more with the Christianity I grew up with, I have always rejected the idea that humans are here to dominate and rule the earth or anyone for that matter. The question to me has always been more about how we can work together in mutual aid for the freedom of all living beings.

As I came out of the Christianity of my past, Buddhism became a greater part of my life and the philosophical traditions of training my mind and the practice that Buddhists call "meta" or loving kindness. I wake every morning and recite a prayer of sorts that all living beings be at peace, that all living beings be happy, and that all living beings be free from suffering. I don't know any living being who is happy and at peace while being dominated or ruled by a god or other humans so the idea of spirituality based on lords and rulers is not where I personally land.

Belief and the spiritual life are not stagnant. Nothing is permanent and so I continue to grow in who I am and my connection to the spirit world. Today I share with you thoughts I have been having as my personal practice shifts and grows.

I look to my ancestral traditions, before my ancestors were colonized by Christianity, before the witches and shamans and traditional practitioners were burned and hung. Before we then in turn did the same to indigenous people around the world, and most especially for us in what is now called the US, what we did and continue to do to the

people native to this land. My ancestors in particular had their traditional ways eradicated through Christianity and then in turn, in the name of Christ did the same to the Po-cum-tuck people as they massacred them in what is now called Deerfield.

See, Christianity is a religion that has been focused on domination and rulership of the earth and the idea that through Christ one can eradicate the darkness of sin and bring light, the light of Jesus as seen prophesied here in this passage. This passage in particular has led to colonization. This passage led to my past profession as a missionary, bringing light to the dark world. The thing is, the way I see it now is that we need to focus on light, on our connection to each other and the earth not on dominating the earth and making it work for us. Later here in Isaiah 60 it talks about no longer needing the sun or the moon. But the sun and the moon are us. They are part of the living breathing earth.

My ancestors came to this land thinking it was the land God had promised. They thought they needed to eradicate the darkness of the earth based traditions of the native Americans and that God would bless them and then they would possess this promised land forever. We cannot just read this passage, here in what we now call the US without acknowledging this and our current complicity in the continued oppression of Native Americans.

You can still see Jesus as the fulfillment of this prophecy if you want, but we additionally need to rebuild our connection to the light, to the water, to the air, to the land. We need to go beyond land acknowledgments and statements of decolonization and work together being led by native Americans and change the way we approach everything. Additionally, I want to challenge you as I challenge myself to think about Colonization, and the eradication of earth based traditions as one of the greatest contributors to global climate change.

So, I come back to the light. I don't look for the light in one god prophesied to come, as is suggested here in Isaiah but I look to the light of the past and present so that I can come alongside others and create a more inclusive and equitable future.

We are currently in February, or if I look to some of my ancestral traditions, in the Nordic calendar Goa. Throughout Northern Europe and the English isles, this has historically been a month of recognizing the beginning of spring, for the light has come back. The days are getting longer and the light has returned. This is a time of preparing for planting the next crops.

What crops are you planting today? What seeds of hope and community are you contributing to?

I decided this year to not complain about the cold. Instead I decided to embrace it as my ancestors did so long ago. To use this as a time for planning, to watch the movement of the sun and the moon. A few weeks ago I started to notice that I needed to turn on the lights outside our little shop on Cole Ave a few minutes later. For the light is

returning. We have been planning what we might plant this year. We have been working with our farmer friends on what they might grow for our little herbal shop. We have come together with other businesses in North County to see how we might work together, not in competition, but in mutual aid and cooperation. I am not looking for anyone to save me, or to save Williamstown, but I am looking to gather my neighbors to discuss how we might join hands together to work with the topography of the land and the seasons to create a more inclusive community. I have been dreaming of a community with more economic and racial diversity and where queers like myself feel free to be themselves. This is the vision that makes my heart tremble and swell with joy.

I want to leave you today with the thought that to do this we need to also make amends to those we and our ancestors have harmed. We need to listen and be led by the Stockbridge-Munsee community on how we might move forward together on this land. On how we can respect and honor the land and water that we are part of. For those of us who are not Black, we need to make reparations to the Black people who we enslaved to make this village beautiful. We need to work together for a path forward where we toss out some of our current ways and thoughts on how the town should be and explore other opportunities that might not fit the way we have always done things. This might be uncomfortable; those of us who experience white privilege will need to listen more and walk more softly through this earth. But as we listen to the light and the cries of the land that is us - as we are all one, we will see a place where glory will appear. Not as nation-states but as people and earth connected. I don't have many answers, in fact I have mostly questions, but I do know that we can move forward together in a state of awe and wonder and for change for the greater good.

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2022 March and April Birthdays

<u>March 2020</u>		<u>April 2020</u>	
4th	Adrianna Brown	7th	Will Howie
4th	Ann Clark	8th	Dick Markham
7th	Carl Faulkner	8th	Ian Longhurst
13th	Sam Kobrin	13th	Anne Short
13th	Jake Kobrin	13th	Cynthia Payne
14th	Anna Bennett Robertson	19th	Hanbin Koo
18th	Wendy Hopkins	19th	Mark Seifried
20th	Phil Smith	26th	George Robertson
20th	Cristina Mancilla	30th	Ward Bianchi
21st	Judy Reichert		
24th	Troy Kobrin		
24th	Shira Lynn		
29th	Cesar Silva		
30th	Laura Kobrin		

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Spring Comes
Snow gives way to Earth
We are reborn



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