



# FIRST CHURCH CHATTER

August and September 2023

**August Birthdays**

**September Birthdays**

- |  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sam Humes                | 1 <sup>st</sup> Abbie Hatton      |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Arlene Kirsch            | 22 <sup>nd</sup> Adrianna Duhan   |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> Lyn Rork                 | 25 <sup>th</sup> Marilyn Faulkner |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> Faith McClennan          | 27 <sup>th</sup> Elizabeth Smith  |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> Adrian Dunn              | 28 <sup>th</sup> Brad Wells       |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> Trevor Murphy           |                                   |
| 22 <sup>nd</sup> Barbara Hadden          |                                   |
| 24 <sup>th</sup> Annie Parkman           |                                   |
| 24 <sup>th</sup> Auguee Penalozza        |                                   |
| 28 <sup>th</sup> Austin Penalozrian Dunn |                                   |

This is another edition of our church newsletter. We thank those members and friends who contribute 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 during 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 the meantime, we will deliver the Chatter to those who would prefer paper copy or don't receive email.

We are always looking for stories, poems, thoughts to contribute. If you have notices about upcoming events which you would like published, please let Carrie or Jody know and we will try to include. We try to publish by the beginning but realistically often it is sent out by the 10<sup>th</sup> or so. And this Chatter, because of vacations, is for August and September.

In Today's Chatter:

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.....Margy O'Connor
- [Church Organ Refurbishment](#).....  
.....Ed Lawrence, Minister of Music

## About Faith

Adrian Dunn

I defected from the Catholic Church of my childhood when I was 16. I couldn't reconcile the idea that a single French kiss could potentially send me to everlasting hell. It made dating difficult. It also put in doubt all the other beliefs that I had been made to memorize. Rote beliefs, sins categorized according to hundreds-year-old decisions, most of which seemed arbitrary, made to maintain the power structure of the culture. Only a few of them made natural sense, like Thou Shalt Not Kill. Bearing False Witness and Stealing also made sense to avoid.

But there was too little in the religious practice of my youth to inspire knowledge of or contact with God. The admonition to "know, love, and serve God in this world" sounded straightforward enough. But how did you know God in the first place? I was told in the stories of mystics that more direct experience of God was possible. Yet to my sixteen-year-old self, a French kiss was as close as I'd gotten to a transcendent experience.

It took fifty years for me to get back into an actual church, though I searched for knowledge of God in many settings. I participated in yoga and meditation classes (God is within me), singing circles, including the High Spirit Singers lead by Rev. Arnold Thomas (God is channeled through sacred songs). A women's spirituality circle in which we celebrated the seasons with songs and ritual (God is in nature) and Twelve Step meetings (the Higher Power is in each other)--each added their perspective. Along the way, I have had some transcendent experiences, but they were inevitably fleeting. Intermittently, I longed for a spiritual community, but had trouble finding the right one and eventually gave up. Then Trump was elected, which felt to me like a threatening cloud had settled over us. The threat felt deeper than political disagreement; it was a moral and ethical one. The way he demeaned groups of people, setting them up for ridicule and violence, was frightening and needed to be confronted.

Pastor Mark Longhurst held a Candlelight Vigil for mourning and solidarity. It was open to everyone, so I attended, along with other community members, Williams students, and several Williams student choirs. We sat in a circle and shared, prayed, and some wept. I felt at home in the circle and began attending services shortly after that. A year later, I joined the church as a member. I knew very little about the history or structure of the church, but trusted my intuition that this was where I wanted to be. I wanted a community that was concerned with kindness and justice, that was inclusive, and that had a deep commitment to a moral basis for interacting with others.

I didn't know when I joined that UCC was a non-creedal denomination. The services had reflections of Catholicism—hymns, prayers, readings from the Gospels, Communion, etc. But no one had ever asked me what I believed, which was fine with me. My 'beliefs' were often amorphous, shifting, hard to pin down. What I cared about was feeling the spirit, whether it was out in nature, in loving interactions with other humans, or in communal singing or other settings. I had decided very early on not to adopt others' beliefs, but to give my allegiance only to my own experiences.

During Rev. James Lumsden's time with us, he hosted a book group that discussed *Learning to Walk in the Dark* (2014) by Barbara Brown Taylor, American Episcopal Priest and academic. In it she quotes James Fowler from his book *Stages of Faith* (1981):

*Religion, faith, and belief are not the same thing, he says, though we often speak of them as if they were. In the sixteenth century, "to believe" meant "to set the heart upon," or "to give the heart to," as in, "I believe in love." But in the centuries following the Enlightenment, secular use of the words "belief" and "believe" began to change until they said less about the disposition of one's heart than about the furniture in one's mind. By the nineteenth century, when knowledge about almost anything consisted*

*chiefly of empirical facts, belief became the opposite of knowledge. A person's belief in God was reduced to his or her belief system—the unprovable statements of faith that person judged to be true.*

This page was a revelation to me. If beliefs are what we set our hearts upon, then I know what I set mine on. Besides the spontaneous feeling of spirit, I have learned over the last few years in the church that being reminded to practice kindness, to see the bigger picture, to let go of pettiness, to do acts of service to others—all of these are reinforced in the church. These acts of devotion are what I observe in this congregation and I'm grateful for the opportunity to participate.

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## Personal Revelations

Richard Markham

My first revelation occurred when I was 11 years old when I asked “Why am I here, “Why is Anything Here? If God is responsible, “Why is there even God? “Why isn't there Nothing?” Everything in my normal experience was brought into question. It seemed so strange that anything existed at all. This resulted in my having a somewhat skeptical attitude toward everything most people thought of as real,

Years later when I was having difficulty meeting the challenges of teaching history to high school students, I was nearly in a panic when preparing classes for the following week. I fell to my knees saying “I need help.” Suddenly, I experienced what I came to accept as a “moment of grace” which alleviated my anxieties and I felt more calm. At nearly the same time, I began studying books by Alan Watts and became convinced by him that there is a spiritual dimension underlying and within all of existence . Together, these experiences constituted my second profound revelation.

These revelations lay largely dormant for more than ten years. I continued being skeptical of traditional Christianity, but then in the midst of trauma resulting in the decision to leave my marriage and family, I again searched for insights and devoted more than two years systematically studying the theologies of Paul Tillich, Nikolai Berdyaev, Thomas Merton, and others leading to my third major revelation, namely there is much more depth and richness to Christianity than I ever had imagined.

With the arrival of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I experienced my 4<sup>th</sup> revelation, namely a growing awareness of mysticism and explored how the views of Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeau, Eckhart Tolle, and others could help me and others become less dominated by ego, be more consciously “present” in our day-to-day lives, and more in tune with the wisdom of the Old and New Testaments. Accepting these revelations can help us better meet the challenges of our crazy and bizarre culture.

Richard Markham

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## Heard at Church Council 7/18/23

Margy O'Connor

- Council had a good turnout as we welcomed Rev. Deanna, joining us for the first time. There were three items on Moderator Betsy Burris' agenda: Financial Projections, Start of the Pledge Drive, and Building Task Force Update. Big topics, interesting and serious discussions!

### 2024 Financial Projections

- Treasurer Lynne DeLay presented a detailed 2024 Financial Projection as a starting place for the pledge and budget process. She reported next year's Anticipated Income is down following the loss of long time

members who were significant donors, plus decreased income from our invested funds as financial markets have not fully recovered. Space rental income is increasing, but not a major funding stream.

Her Projected Expenses started with the current year's budget numbers, adjusted for 2024 known changes in added personnel costs, benefits, insurance and administrative costs. Other expense categories were held even.

- What does this mean? Given these early projections the church could be facing a shortfall of some \$38,000 in the 2024 budget. Lynne D. will meet with each Ministry Team as they look at their budgets, and to help them consider how they make financial decisions. Rev. Deanna advised that each Ministry Team should examine their mission and goals for the next year. Betsy asked what guardrails are needed for the budget? Can we agree on shared collective priorities to inform spending goals? Thoughtful discussions indeed as we start these processes!
- Note: Major building renovations and new roofing are no longer in the church budget as they are now under the care of the Williamstown Meetinghouse Preservation Fund (WMPF), which is a separate community non-profit created to preserve the iconic building.

### **Start of the Pledge Drive**

- The Annual Pledge Drive starts in August! Our goal for Pledged Contributions is \$200,000 to be raised by October 1st. The goal is down \$20,000 from the current year. Only with the pledging results in hand can our Ministry Teams create a realistic 2024 Budget by November to present to the congregation. Our Fiscal Year starts January 1st so we can't dally.
- Leon Aalberts has prepared a lively and upbeat Pledge Invitation letter for mailing on August 1st to 120 or so friends and members. He also challenged Council members to join our efforts to "sell" and explain the benefits and need for pledges. We celebrate that our Church is still thriving with energetic leadership. What does it mean to us to be able to continue the momentum of our various ministries to each other, the local community and the wider world? You will see a Minute for Mission during Sunday services throughout the pledge drive with testimony as to how active the church is, how much it means to us, and how we are deeply involved in spreading the gospel of love and justice in concrete ways.
- So Everybody, get those pledges in by October 1st! I know I'll be raising mine.

### **Building Task Force Update**

- Betsy reminded us that the mission of the Building Task Force, which was formed last October at the All-Congregational Special Meeting, was to look into selling the church building. She and about six of our members, plus Rev. Deanna after she accepted our call, met every two weeks for months. They met with community members, state and federal legislators, representatives of Williams College of course, and quite a number of town and northern Berkshire community organizations.
- BTF's Report: Williams College does not want to buy the church building, though it possibly might have some future interest in renting a part of the north wing. No other interested buyer was discovered. However, the Building Task Force does not see their work ending!
- Community groups who spoke with the Task Force were very interested in seeing the church building as a **potential Community Center** and gathering space for some of their organizations' activities. Among the town and area needs that were identified: There is no town space nor activities for teens outside of the high school. Young people need an in-town place for homework help and tutoring. We have a stage, we would love to see summer youth theater revived. More room is needed for social services information, meetings and larger event space, or for the distribution of basic necessities. A program coordinator who could organize the use of space and events would be required; could the town support the hiring of such a person?

- The Building Task Force remains relevant and important because it is also having ongoing discussions with legislators and potential funding agencies. Some potential Federal funds in discussion would be earmarked for meeting our Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility requirements. But the money couldn't come until 2025....
- To the Task Force, the issues are challenging, but to them it's also a wonderful and inspiring time as we ponder our Church mission and future. We can start with a few small things that meet community needs to get a feeling of what can be done. We can show that if the building is used more broadly, and repaired and cared for, that the community will benefit.
- Council voted unanimously to approve a motion to change the charge for the Building Task Force: "To continue to explore options with the community, and to secure the economic sustainability of the building."
- The Congregation can look forward to a Second Hour program in the Fall from our inspiring Task Force folks. We'll hear more details of their work, and of our beloved building's potential as a future Community Center!
- Council members left the meeting filled with hope for the future and gratitude for the Church's Building Task Force and their vision.

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## Church Organ

Ed Lawrence, Minister of Music

Our organ, built in 1956 by the Andover Organ Company has served us well during its life. There have been few problems, and we have survived with regular tunings, mostly twice a year. Over the years, we have had a few special things done to improve the instrument; one such project several years ago helped put the reed stop in better shape, for instance. Since at least the 1960s, the Potter-Rathbun Company, from Rhode Island, has serviced our instrument. Sadly, during the shutdowns of the recent three+ years, the company, unable to cross state lines, lost significant business and had to close. We have a new arrangement with Stefan Maier Tracker Organs of Orange Mass. to care for the organ.

Recently, we have had a few problems with the organ in places difficult to access. At the suggestion of Mr. Maier, we decided to take the organ apart for a thorough cleaning, allowing for work to take place in those difficult areas at the same time.

Our organ contains 1,400 pipes, ranging in size from 8 feet to smaller than one inch. Beginning in late August, a team from Tracker Organs removed most of the pipes. Pipe after pipe was passed over the organ console, down scaffolding set up in the sanctuary, and carefully placed in trays to be transported to the shop to be cleaned. The largest pipes remained in Williamstown for pressure washing on site. Our organ folks report being very impressed with the careful work that was done in building our organ those 60-some years ago. As it is being reassembled, they say that it looks as though the organ had been built just one year ago.

We were lucky to have our electronic keyboard for worship on Aug. 20th and 27th. It was instructive for me to hear how well you all sing on the hymns. I'm usually hearing your voices reflected around the room, so hearing you more directly was fun for me. As I write, I am looking forward to having most of the organ working on the first September Sunday. Everything should be ready to go for the 10th. So far, what I am hearing of the organ as it is coming back is very exciting!

Here are a few pictures from the refurbishment of the organ to let you in on this interesting process:



Interesting wooden pipes



Some reed pipes



Removing pipes



Pipes carefully laid in trays

