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Something to think about ...

As the restrictions due to Covid-19 begin to ease and we look forward to returning to “normal life,” many of us will first have to define what the new normal is going to look like. “Normal” isn’t a static thing; it is defined as “conforming to a standard” or “what is expected,” and as we know from our last 14 months of the pandemic, the standard and what is expected may change drastically depending on circumstances. What was “normal” before the pandemic was very different from what was “normal” during the pandemic, and we will discover going forward that what is “normal” post-pandemic is different as well. In other words, the pandemic changed the way we think about the world, ourselves, social interactions, and our relationship to institutions and we cannot simply pick up where we left off in March of 2020 as if this last year were only a dream that dissipates upon awakening.

The church is not immune to this reality. The pandemic has permanently changed people’s relationship to the church, both world-wide and locally. In some ways, it has simply accelerated changes that were already afoot: in the church’s 2016 annual report, I wrote, “As technology continues to change, the church needs to find the appropriate balance between being up-to-date and viable for younger generations while still remaining personal and intimate and able to communicate values over 2000 years old.” I noted that though the number of active members in the church has remained relatively stable throughout my ministry, attendance *patterns* have changed. Many of those who used to go every Sunday started to go once a month; those who used to go once a month, began to attend only a few times a year. People were still committed to a spiritual life and to the life of the church but demands on family time, increased travel among retired people, sports obligations, and societal expectations were leading to a more erratic pattern of in-person attendance, not only in our church but in churches everywhere. I had mentioned more than once in the years before the pandemic that in the future, the church would need to find new ways of connecting to people who still wanted to be a part of the life of the church but might not feel the need, or be able to be in the pews every Sunday.

In March of 2020, the pandemic brought the future hurtling into the present. When the country shut down, the hypothetical became reality and we were forced to find new ways of connecting to one another even though we were not able to be in the pews every Sunday (or any Sunday). We adapted with remarkable speed (and, I think, with remarkable grace.) While it has been challenging and there are many things we will be glad to put behind us, there are also many things that people discovered they liked about the new way of doing church. The Board of Elders conducted a survey about what the congregation feels the Post-Covid “normal” should look like

for UUC and the results show a clear embrace of the fusion style of worship we began in September. 2/3 of the congregation say that they plan on participating in church via Zoom at least some of the time even when restrictions are lifted. For those who no longer live in Alfred, or who travel during the year, Zoom has provided them a way to remain connected to the church even when not in town. Parents enjoy the flexibility of being able to access a recorded service when their kids' schedules conflict with Sunday morning worship. A few mentioned that Zoom has made it easier for friends to "try out" our church anonymously or use our recordings to supplement their own spiritual lives.

What was most telling about the results of the survey for me was how important it was for almost all of the respondents to have a feeling of active interaction with the congregation whether people were sitting in the pews or joining via Zoom. We want to hear one another, see one another, share with one another, and pray with each other, and for a majority of people, they feel that that can happen — and has been happening — even when we are not physically sharing space in the sanctuary. It is not bodies in pews that make us a church but the interaction with one another in prayer and worship that makes us a church. Over this past year, I have been constantly reminded of the first century church which was spread across Asia Minor and yet felt united in fellowship through the exchange of letters brought by Christians traveling the Roman road system, the first century equivalent of the internet.

The Board of Elders will present the full results of the survey at our Annual Meeting on May 16th. I invite you to stay after worship that day, either in-person or via Zoom, to discuss our vision for the "new normal" of the Post-Covid church.



Church News & Events



Mission of the Month

Hart Comfort House

Comfort House of Allegany County is our Mission of the Month for May. Comfort House of Allegany County, also known as Hart Comfort House located in Wellsville, NY, is a not for profit corporation providing free hospice care for patients in their last 3 months of life and support for those patients families. Hart Comfort House provides care 24 hours a day 365 days a year for two patients at a time. Money to run Hart Comfort House is entirely generated through community support, grants, and fund raising. Checks should be made out to Union University Church with "Comfort House" written in the memo line. For more information:

<http://comforthouseofalleganycounty.org/>

Finishing Touches

Thanks to Lana Meissner and Laurel Buckwalter for finishing touches for two of the bathrooms in the sanctuary: curtains, flower arrangements and wall decor.

Women's room off the sanctuary foyer



Handicapped bathroom at the front of the sanctuary

Sanctuary Garden Preparations Begin

Pictures and text by Laurel Buckwalter

The two large maples were recently removed from the front of the sanctuary with the blessing of the Randolph family, who planted the trees long ago in memory of Ruth B Randolph, and the SDB church. The trees had outgrown the location. In addition to improving the looks of the building, removing them will save money and labor in reducing professional gutter cleaning and raking a great volume of leaves. New trees and shrubs will be planted soon, with generous financial assistance from the Randolph family. Plans call for deer resistant shrubs such as leucothoe rainbow, Green Mountain boxwood, double play red spirea, and Siberian cypress. The deutzia, fothergilla and forsythia currently there will be renovated and will bloom better with more sun. A Jane magnolia on the right and a royal purple smoke tree on the left will complete the project.



Friday, April 23, 2021 Aaron McGraw de-limbs one of the overgrown red maples.

Church News & Events, cont.

Pentecost—May 23, 2021

Garden Work Continues

Profuse thanks go to eleven members of the AU football team who in short order raked the sanctuary yard and pulled out some shrubs for the planned garden renovation.



Alfred University football teamwork, Saturday, April 24, 2021.



The sanctuary awaits its new gardens.



Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Breathe into me, Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.
Move in me, Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.
Attract my heart, Holy Spirit, that I may love only what is holy.
Strengthen me, Holy Spirit, that I may defend all that is holy.
Protect me, Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy.

St. Augustine

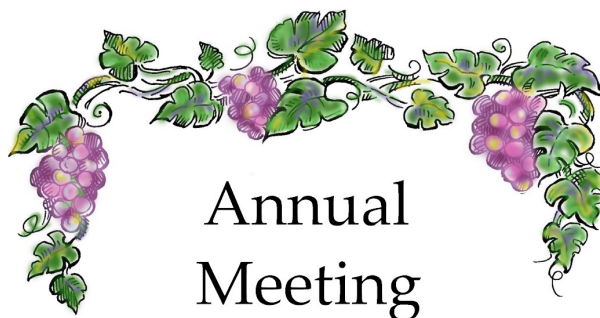


Catherine Chambers, Ding Jiaxi & family, Michelle Garcia Escobar, Clayton Stutzman, Hugh Langelier, Lois Stiles, Sharon & Roger Smith, Wes Bentz, Beverly Snyder's sister (Barbara), 3 yr. old Lowin, Marnie Johnson (Joan Schulze's niece), Sharon Burdick, all those whose families are suffering from Covid-19, Michele Hluchy's father (Rev. Stephen Hluchy), the Jusianic's niece, Avery, Tiersa Watson's great niece (Katharine) & infant (Kinsley) who were in a car accident, the family & friends of Linda Staiger on the death of her husband, Gene, the family & friends of Jan Porter and Judd Stearns & their sister, Linda, on the death of her husband Sam.

May Board Members of the Month

Deacon.....Jan Casey (jancasey1834@gmail.com; 607.382.2773)
Elder.....John Buckwalter (buckwajd@gmail.com; 6507.9658.0540)
BOCE.....None
Fellowship.....Luanne Crosby (fclarke@alfred.edu; 585.260.0026)
Trustee.....Linell Soule (lasoule@frontiernet.net; 607.276.5832)

Who do you call? Flowers or lay leading—call an Elder; greeting or coffee hour—call a Deacon;
Sunday school—call BOCE; building issues—call a Trustee.



**Sunday, May 16, 2021 following worship
In person & via Zoom**

Upcoming Sunday Leaders

If you are not able to serve as scheduled, please switch with someone listed on the charts below and notify the Church Office. If you are unable to find someone to switch with you, please contact either the Elder of the Month or the Deacon of the Month.

Date	Lay Leader	Flowers	Usher
May 2	C. Chambers	Communion	Heineman
May 9	L. Meissner	D. Stephens	Heineman
May 16	J. Buckwalter	R. Burke	Heineman
May 23	L. Crosby	T. Watson	Heineman
May 30	S. Smith	L. Meissner	Heineman
June 6	M. Cartledge	Communion	Heineman
June 13	E. Ordway	C. Tucker	Heineman
June 20	L. Casey	Casey	Heineman
June 27	C. Dewey	L. Buckwalter	Heineman



Mission of the Month

Hart Comfort House

The world's favorite season is the spring. All things seem possible in May.

– Edwin Way Teale

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2 10:30 Worship, Communion	3	4	5 12pm Book Group	6	7	8
9 10:30 Worship, Mother's Day	10	11	12 12pm Book Group	13	14	15
16 10:30 Worship, Annual Mtg.	17	18	19 12pm Book Group	20	21	22
23 10:30 Worship, Pentecost	24	25	26 12pm Book Group	27	28	29
30 10:30 Worship	31 Memorial Day					

Just for Fun

A Priest Walks into a Pub ...

A priest walks into a pub in Donegal and says to the first man he meets ..., "Do you want to go to heaven?"

The man says "I do Father." The priest says "Then stand over there against the wall."

Then the priest asks the second man, "Do you want to go to heaven?"

"Certainly, Father," is the man's reply.

"Then stand over there against the wall," says the priest.

Then Father Murphy walks up to O'Toole and says, "Do you want to go to heaven?"

O'Toole says, "No, I don't Father."

The priest says "I don't believe this. You mean to tell me that when you die you don't want to go to heaven?"

O'Toole says, "Oh, when I die, yes. I thought you were getting a group together to go right now."



Count Your Blessings

On occasion he did moderately well, but it was usually a losing proposition. One day he was there, betting on the ponies and losing his shirt, when he noticed a Catholic priest, attired in the traditional cassock, step out onto the track and bless the forehead of one of the horses lining up for the 4th race. Lo and behold, this horse -- a very long shot -- won the race. Mitch was most interested to see what the priest did the next race.

Sure enough, he watched the priest step out onto the track as the horses for the fifth race lined up, and placed a blessing on the forehead of one of the horses. Mitch made a beeline for the window and placed a small bet on the horse. Again, even though it was another long shot, the horse the priest had blessed won the race. Mitch collected his winnings and anxiously waited to see which horse the priest bestowed his blessing on for the 6th race. The priest showed up, blessed a horse, Mitch bet on it, and it won! He was elated!

As the day went on, the priest continued blessing one horse in each of the races, and it always came in first. Mitch began to pull in some serious money, and by the last race, he knew his wildest dreams were going to come true. He made a quick stop at the ATM, withdrew all of his money from his savings account and awaited the priest's blessing that would tell him which horse to bet all his money on.

True to his pattern, the priest stepped out onto the track before the last race and blessed the forehead, eyes, ears and hooves of one of the horses. Mitchell bet every last cent he had, from his winnings and his savings account money. He watched the race with an inhuman interest, screaming and yelling, only to see the horse he had bet everything on come in dead last.

Mitchell was dumbfounded. He made his way to the track and when he found the priest, he demanded, "Father, what happened? I've watched you all day. All day you blessed horses and they won. That last race, you blessed a horse And he lost. Now I've lost all my savings, and today's winnings, thanks to you!!"

The priest nodded wisely and said, "Well, my son.....that's the problem with you Protestants. You can't tell the difference between a simple blessing and the Last Rites."



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May, 2021 Newsletter