



I KNOW YOU ARE ALWAYS WITH ME!



# The Steeple

May 2020

## FROM OUR PASTOR



Your life isn't normal right now. Neither is mine. Neither is the life of the church. The building is by no means deserted, because the virus kicked Neighbors Helping Neighbors into overdrive due to increased food insecurity. But we church folks don't see each other as often as we did. We haven't had committee meetings or choir practice, and some members feel safer staying home on Sunday morning instead of being at the drive-in worship. I can't visit health care facilities or private homes. So I miss being with you all as often as I was before. I want normal. I didn't appreciate how good normal was.

Meanwhile, we all struggle to adjust and hope it won't last much longer. I want to go to Minnesota next month to visit the kids. But right now, I don't know whether that'll be possible. The events we've participated in at a Methodist campground in Minnesota have been canceled.

And in addition to how to stay healthy and sane and when we'll be back to normal, we also struggle with some of the larger questions, such as how to balance the need to suppress the virus with the need to resume economic activities that are on hold.

And some Christians struggle with questions about God: Why did God send this plague? Or: Why did God allow this to happen to us? You may tire of hearing me says this: God doesn't harm people. And God doesn't "allow" harm, either, because that would imply he could step in and stop it right away. That would be to claim that God has total power over everything, and we don't have good evidence for that claim. So when we wonder why the virus happened, the answers aren't to be found in some notion of God's plan, or fate, or the universe. Science can explain the how and the why.

However, it's fair to ask this question: Where's God in all of this? And the answer is: right alongside us, helping us to deal with it, and assuring us that his love extends even beyond death.

So we'll keep on being the church, even in changed circumstances. We're doing some of the same things, though in a different way. I'm relying even more than before on all our willing workers who have shown great flexibility and creativity in keeping us in touch with one another and in bringing you the parking lot worship and the live-streaming on Facebook. We have one funeral on hold (Prescott Grout) and one baptism (Caitlin Anable). Holy Communion will also have to wait. (Nobody liked my suggestion to substitute Tide Pods for bread and hand sanitizer for grape juice. Go figure.) I can distribute *The Upper Room* by bringing it to your door if you ask me to. And you can call me to chat about how things are going. I have time for that, believe me.



## **CELEBRATIONS & CONCERNS**



**Prayer for:** Carol Brunelle, Carol Szulc, Eunice Mittler, Harry Thomas, Beth Dietz, Pauline Kiakis, Samantha Snopek, Adele Reynolds, Bev Pead & Family, Doug & Dee Brooksbank, Frank Hudgik, Dave Fanaras, Tom Deren, Tim O'Donnell, Vinnie Deitner

**Prayers & sympathy** to the family of Barbara Ryan who died on April 25.

**Congratulation** Huong Mia O'Brien and family celebrated the 10th anniversary of her daughter Kim & Manny Welsh on April 2. Manny Welsh retired a US Marine Corps Master Sergeant.

## **CASSEROLES**

Ten casseroles were delivered in April to Kate's Kitchen. Casseroles will be delivered at 9:30 a.m. on May 25. If you need your casserole picked up call Ann 695-1212 or Carol at 575-1491 and make arrangements for your casserole to be picked up curb side.



**THE FOOD PANTRY, Neighbors Helping Neighbors**, is open and is in need of volunteers; contact Mary Lou at [mlguarnera@nhnfoodpantry.org](mailto:mlguarnera@nhnfoodpantry.org) or 413-437-7593.



## **GRADUATES WANTED**

Please be sure to inform the office if there is a new graduate to celebrate. The names will be posted in the June newsletter. Email the church office or call Ann at 695-1212.

## **TIME TO REQUEST A SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION**



It is time for any of our church family who have finished their first year in an accredited institute of higher education are continuing on to apply for the North Main Street Churches Scholarship. Applications for this scholarship will be accepted from May 1 through June 30. You can email or call the church office for an application.

The North Main Street Churches Scholarship Fund is a combination of funds donated for student scholarships from the Falls Congregational Church and the So. Hadley Methodist Church. The Scholarship will be awarded on Rally Day in September after the scholarship committee has reviewed all applications.

## **STEEPLE LIGHTING**

The Steeple is lit during the month of May in honor of all the health care workers and their families and to all who are struggling to survive.

If you would like the steeple lit for one month, the fee is \$25.00. You can call Ann 413 695-1212 or email the church with the information. More than one person/family may participate. You can light the Steeple in celebration, honor or memory of someone.



## A Message From our Bishop

Dear Beloved in Christ:

Greetings in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I am grieving for all those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 and for the millions who have become jobless and hungry as a result of its impact on the economy.

I thank God for the incredible health professionals, essential workers, and volunteers who take tremendous risks daily to care for those who are sick and to provide for our basic needs during this time of sequestering.

I give thanks for the extraordinary leadership of many civic leaders, scientists, and researchers who are working tirelessly to reduce the spread and mitigate the damage from this global pandemic.

During this time of “sheltering in place,” I have taken the opportunity to worship with congregations in different parts of the world. I have been enriched by the music, liturgy, and preaching from a variety of traditions and theological understandings.

I have also been disturbed by painful jokes, prophecies, and misunderstanding of Scripture made in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some perspectives I have heard are rooted in fear, anxiety, and pain; others in pride, arrogance, ignorance, and biblical illiteracy.

How should we witness in a time like this?

In my struggle to find an answer to this question, I was reminded of the lyrics of Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick’s hymn, “God of Grace and God of Glory,” written for the inauguration of the Riverside Church in New York City nearly 90 years ago.

When Fosdick wrote this hymn, Christendom was at its zenith, but people were facing the Great Depression, sandwiched between World War I and World War II, and there was a widespread sense of hopelessness. Though different from our situation, some of the emotions that people are experiencing in the face of COVID-19 are similar.

Fosdick’s lyrics make a great ecumenical and interfaith prayer. In a recent conference call with a governor in the Northeast, I was privileged to meet with leaders from various faiths and denominations. It was heartening to be with representatives of so many faith communities who are praying and working together to aid those adversely affected by the virus.

Fosdick’s prayer is as powerful and relevant for our time as it was for his:

"Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,  
for the facing of this hour ...  
for the living of these days ...  
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal ...  
serving thee whom we adore"

~ UMH #577

Grant us wisdom ... not money, or gifts, or power, but wisdom that comes from placing our lives in God’s loving hands. Grant us courage ... not security, not ease, not freedom from risk, but courage for whatever challenges come our way, trusting that “God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)

May our adoration of the Creator God be manifested in service according to the unique gifts given to each of us. May we face this hour with courage to do what is ours to do and with wisdom to speak the truth about the nature, cause, and cure, of COVID-19. Let us speak up for those who are the most vulnerable and name the reasons, and about God’s present goodness that will sustain us as we seek to end the pandemic and the misery it has inflicted.

I want to thank all of you pastors and volunteers, along with church, camp, and conference leaders and staff for your super ministry in these difficult and challenging times.

Remember, God loves you all and so do I!

In Christ’s love,

Sudarshana Devadhar

## OUR CHURCH WEBSITE

Our church website is [www.thesteepleinthefalls.org](http://www.thesteepleinthefalls.org). You can copy it or type it into your search and you will find: The Daily Prayer under the title Worship; Prayers & Concerns where you can add a prayer request; The Steeple, the church newsletter; and more.



## WORSHIP

Worship with us on Sunday mornings at 10:00 a.m. You can join us in your car in the church parking OR Join us on line. The link to the service is: <https://www.facebook.com/TheSteepleInTheFalls>

### **A Prayer**

Holy One,

awesome creator, beloved Christ, inspiring Spirit,  
All creation acknowledges the gift of this day,  
a time of your own making as spring edges into our  
consciousness.

Love floods our hearts as spring edges into our  
senses, hints of tree buds, jaunty crocuses, birdsong.

Longing for life in all its fullness,  
we look to your steadfast love.

Everywhere, we see and feel the needs of your  
creatures we are hemmed in by danger and distress.

Listening for safety and assurance we hear confusion,

fear, compassion, dedication, ingenuity  
Understandings escape us even as hope floods our  
prayer. Our world constricts even as our prayers  
and efforts widen.

Judge of all nations and of every soul,  
Do not reject us. Be our strength.

All of us in our own way cry for salvation. The  
righteousness that eludes us beckons by your hand.

Here we are, LORD, held in your day,  
captives of your mercy, blessing your name.

*By Rev. Dr. Karen L. Munson, Mid Maine District  
Superintendent  
Psalm 118*



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