

THE TIMES NEWSLETTER

*A publication of the First Congregational Church
of Scarborough, Maine 04074*

JULY 2024



PASTOR'S MESSAGE

Summer Praise

I knew a very religious man many years ago, who had memorized the book of psalms. I thought this was quite impressive. He knew them all - all 150 of them! He said they were very special to him and they were an important part of his spiritual practice. At the time I was quite humbled, for I thought I was doing good in memorizing just the 23rd psalm. The psalms are a treasure, aren't they...

It seems that every time summer rolls around, I think more about the psalms. I feel a renewed interest in reading and praying through them. Perhaps it is because of the mysterious beauty of the earth all around me. Praying through the psalms I notice new spiritual rhythms. In fact, I even find it liberating to place my prayer life under the leading of the psalms and their greater movement of lament, thanksgiving, and praise.



It gives me a sense of renewal to join the ongoing prayer of the saints of the past for it opens me up to get to know them as people of faith like me. Allowing them to guide me and lead me with the yearnings of their souls gives me a chance for new discoveries. It is really quite preferable to being stuck within my own limitations of what I'm most comfortable praying to God about.

Of course our life of prayer first comes from our own felt experiences, and we know God meets us where we are. Thanks be to God for this! But regularly saying praise with the psalms, whether or not I feel like praising God, brings a fresh dynamic to prayer. Meeting God in prayer through the psalms, rather than picking and choosing based on what I want to say helps me to put the matter of praise into God's hands. What's better than that?

God's glory and God's grace stand side by side in the psalms. Rejoicing and lamenting are regular conversation partners in the psalms. And thanksgiving and frustration tell of human and divine relationship. I find "psalms of praise" especially moving, with their beautiful descriptions of God's wonderful attributes, amazing characteristics, and awesome name. They stir the imagination and reorient me at the deepest level.

I don't think I will ever memorize the psalms as my friend did, but I agree with him in their importance to our spiritual lives. This summer if you are wondering how to pray, I invite you to spend time praying with the psalms. If you do you will likely notice something extraordinary. You will notice that one of the most common phrases in the psalms is "*His steadfast love endures forever.*" His steadfast love endures forever! We know it is true that good times and bad times don't last forever, but there is something that apparently does. It is God's greatness and love that lasts forever. I think this is something to give thanks and praise to God for. Maybe you do too.

May God bless you with warm summer days!

I am Yours in Christ's Service,

Rev. Linda Hey



Greetings from the Transitional Steering Team!

We continue to be grateful for the participation of our members and friends in our church's work of transformation! As we have already reported, our 1st Congregational Conversation which was held after church on Sunday April 28th had over forty-five participants. Those who attended shared their feelings on what they were worried about concerning the church, and what they like about the church. We have compiled the information we received on that day and are including it with this article to keep you informed of our progress.

Our 2nd Congregational Conversation was held on Sunday May 19th. Thirty-four members and friends joined the task of exploring our "church identity." Together we brainstormed facts about our ministries, and asked hard questions about what is working, and what is not working. We will share a summary of this meeting with you in the near future.

Our next time together will be on Sunday July 14th. As you may know, our church has an interesting connection to the United Church of Christ denomination. We are a "Schedule 2" church of the denomination, which means we belong to the Cumberland Association of the UCC, but we are not a "covenanted" UCC church.

During our transition meetings and from conversations with others, we have discovered there is much confusion about what the UCC is, and what it is not; as well as confusion about our relationship to the denomination. In response, the Transitional Steering Team has created space in our schedule to learn more about the UCC. We handed out small blue introductory booklets "About the UCC" to attendees of our May 19th meeting; and we have also invited Rev. Marisa Laviola, UCC Maine Conference Minister to preach on July 14th, which will be followed by a Q and A in the Vestry after the church service. We hope you will take advantage of this time to learn more about the denomination. Please pick up a booklet at the office or in the Narthex of the church if you have not received one, and come with your joys and your questions on July 14th.

We are Your Servants in Christ,

The Transitional Steering Team Members

Herb Hughes

Sue Whitten

Sue Hilton

Elaine Sederlund

Terri Brown

Rev. Linda Hey

(See report on following pages)

First Congregational Conversation, April 28, 2024

Participant's Responses

1st Focus Question: What are you worried/anxious about for the future of the church?

Aging congregation

Lose Interim pastor (Linda) before we find a settled pastor

Want the new pastor to know the Word of God and put it into practice

Declining membership, not attracting new members

Not having enough folks to serve on committees

Funding operation of church to make it attractive to folks.

Facility upgrades needed (thought to be an impediment to attracting new members)

As we grow older, we become more isolated from the community. Not out and about in outside activities. We lose our openness to new ideas.

Taking away worries – reasoning for UCC connection

How do we grow. How to implement it. We have a common intention and we can't figure out how to get back out there to do what we want to do.

Don't try to be a church for the wrong reason. Be biblical, not what others have (trampolines); babysitters.

Not having what it takes to attract young families. (music, activities, youth programs)

Don't lose sight of who we are now.

Outreach and stewardship committee have too much to do.

We do not understand the younger generations.

Discussions led to ideas that participants shared – (below). While this did not directly address the focus questions, we wanted to make sure they were noted.

Do advertising campaign to talk about the congregation/church – tell them about who we are

Make more use of the organ (concerts, etc)

Have mission trips, which are opportunities to invite/collaborate with people outside community – can bring energy and excitement.

Separate Outreach and Stewardship into two committees

Merge with Blue Point Congregational Church UCC

Put together a plan to stabilize financial picture – with goal to balance income and expenses; sell annex; sell lot; build offices in parish hall.

Would like to see the church become a UCC covenanted church (3 people affirmed this) and Open and Affirming



2nd Focus Question: What do you like about the church?

Loving the church, community services, relationship with the UCC

How Interim pastor (Linda) handles difficult topics without getting political – done very well, is respectful and thoughtful.

Our joy

Our members are very dedicated and this gives a lot of hope and anchors the church.

Music (3 people affirmed this) and the direction we're going in with our Minister of Music (Wendy)

Wonderful, welcoming people. Great with kids when they're here.

Great community, strong faith.

Celebrate who we are now

Growth in collaboration and cooperation between the ministries.

Kindest, most gentle, most loving community

Love the organ music

Loved the special music event – the Cantata (Dec. 2023) This was a reach outside our walls to collaborate with the Brunswick church.

Music can reach people and change lives

Live streaming of services

Love the history of the food pantry based in the church

We open our doors to the community – past and present

Proud of outreach in the past

Celebrate the congregation's generosity.

Coming in the Fall

The Ministry of Outreach and Stewardship has been working on finding a way to discuss Planned Giving. And we think we may have found something that will work for you as a congregation of First Congregational Church and even something for the community.

On October 2nd, a Wednesday, at 1:30 PM we will be offering an Estate Planning Workshop. Presenters will include an attorney, representatives of a retirement planning firm, a funeral home, a senior advisory firm and the First Congregational Church. There will be material available for your information. Nothing will be offered for sale, this is strictly an informational meeting.

We thought we would let you know now so you can keep it on your radar for yourselves and/or your families. You are all invited to attend, and we would like this meeting to be open to the public. You will see more about this in the September Newsletter.

Quarters and More Quarters And Thank you!!



Greetings on behalf of the Ministry of Outreach and Stewardship. We'd just like to report on the value of those quarters making the ringing sound in the offering plate. For those who might not know about this, last fall Vicki Flynn and Gail Dobriko restarted a challenge to the congregation to give a bit extra each Sunday. As it turned out we asked for two bits more, \$.50 in quarters, each Sunday. It seems such an easy, light hearted way of increasing our offering. We mixed a few analogies by suggesting that the clink you hear is an angel getting it's wings. Smiles are seen as the offering plate moves among us.

The last report was in January reflecting the quarters of the first month or so. This report reflects the collection from January 1 to June 9, 2024. During this period we've received 917 quarters for a total of \$229.25 added to the churches income.

Thank you to all who have remembered to bring their extra quarters. Your extra help is much appreciated.

From the Ministry of Outreach and Stewardship 2024-2025

Gail Dobriko, co-chair
Pam Joy, co-chair
Lynn Roberge
Sandra Elder
Liane Giambalvo

Catching up with Outreach and Stewardship

Our Ministry of Outreach and Stewardship meets monthly except July and August to disperse money to missions, and to plan stewardship activities. You've heard about quarters, and an up coming fall workshop. This past month we discussed the results of our survey, which provided a snapshot of what a relatively small number of people in the congregation consider important to them in how we should disperse church monies to charity. The areas listed all are important, and the top 5 or 6 were very close in the numbers of you who felt they were most important. This ministry will be discussing this further and working out how we want to share all this information with you. If you have particular concerns or information about a charity you feel is important let us know.

Our Special Easter Offering to the Dempsey Center totaled \$685. May saw us give, on your behalf, \$900 to Pilgrim Lodge and \$900 to Camp Susan Curtis. We made no distributions in June.

Our active Stewardship Campaign has come to a close with a total of 67 pledges, nine of which are new, but some from last year have not pledged. This happens when folks enter nursing homes, move or become seriously ill, or pass away. Our total for the Pledge Campaign is \$150,626 or 108% of our goal of \$140,000. This a success for us. We don't cover the budget, there are other pieces to the income puzzle, but it's a step in the right direction. Check your Annual Reports for complete financial information. Please continue to remember to pay your pledges, or make your contributions throughout the summer month. The church continues to be here for you all year around. Thank you notes have gone out to our pledgers and we thank all who contribute to the work of the church.

Please keep in mind, too, our Food Pantry which loves to receive fresh food should you or your neighbors have a surplus. Food donations are always welcome. Kids are out of school, and eat more at home.





Annex Grounds Spring Clean-Up

On Saturday June 8, a group of church volunteers met at the Annex for the annual grounds “Clean-Up”. Weeds were pulled, planting beds were spruced up, tree branches and sticks downed by fall and winter storms were hauled off, shrubs were trimmed, overgrown ground growth and dead branches were removed, and fresh mulch spread along the front of the church.

Many thanks to the 10 or so workers that were able to participate, donating their morning time and talents and giving the office and meeting facility of the church a huge ‘face-lift’ and more pleasant working environment for our staff. Special thanks to Dick Grotton and Kathy Ross for the use of their trailer and truck respectively for debris removal.

You can see the pictures of the fruits of our efforts on the facing page.

Church Lighting Improvements

The church Sanctuary and Kitchen received new efficient, brighter LED light bulbs courtesy of Don Mitchell. The bulbs in the Sanctuary hanging lights were swapped out along with the upper bulbs at the top side of the hanging lights which have not been functioning for some time. These upper bulbs provide “splash lighting” highlighting the beautiful woodwork on the ceiling. In addition, Rob Wiley donated and replaced the wall Sconce bulbs with LED decorative versions that are compatible with the dimmer switch.

Finally, a 16FT step ladder was required to reach the Sanctuary hanging lights which Don brought with him and donated to the church for future use and maintenance of our facilities.

OFFICE E-MAIL ADDRESS:	fcchurch@fccscarborough.com
Church mailing address	161 Black Point Rd, Scarborough ME 04074
Church Website	www.fccscarborough.com
Church Telephone #	(207) 883-2342
Pastor: Rev. Linda Hey	rlindahey2@gmail.com
Office Hours:	9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Monday through Friday
	(Office is closed on Fridays during July and August)

NEWS FROM THE WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

Our last IHOP breakfast/coffee before summer break will be June 19, 2024 at 9:30 a.m. Please feel free to join us at the IHOP in South Portland. We will be starting again in the fall.



The Craft & Fellowship group will be taking the summer off. We will be starting again in the fall.

The Women's Fellowship will be having a "Snack Shack" (in the library) at the yard sale on June 29th from 8:30 to 1:00. We have volunteers to work the tables and some folks have already offered to make cookies, bars, snack mix, etc. - but we can always use more. Those bargain hunters can get hungry while making a good deal! Food items will need to be bagged before bringing them to be sold. They will need to be at the Parish Hall by Friday afternoon for us to price and set up a display. Please contact Roberta Brown at 883-6093 or rmbrown128@yahoo.com if you are able to make food items.



Summer is here and fruits and vegetables will be in all the gardens. We know it's early to think about this, but when you make jams, jellies, pickles, etc. for yourself, please consider making some additional jars for the Yuletide Fair. People love these homemade items and they fly off the table.

Just a reminder that the Women's Fellowship will start regular meetings again in the fall. Our first meeting will be September 24, 2024. I hope you all can join us! Stay tuned for more information as the date gets closer.

Roberta Brown

President

Sing to the Lord, all the earth!

Happy early summer. What a beautiful spring has led into it. The new life of budding and blossoming plants and the chirping of the birds these past few weeks has been uplifting for sure. I'm delighted that our choir members will get a break, with this lovely weather, as we shift into special music for summer.

We already have a nice lineup for a few of the Sundays, with Jean Showalter sharing her expertise at the organ, and Ray and Brenda and friends planning to sing August 25th; thanks in advance! Of course I will sing many of the Sundays, and please feel free to share names and numbers of folks you think might like to sing for a service for a small honorarium.



Have a great summer all, whether you are sitting in the pews, reading scripture, or singing in a small group for special music. We are so blessed to share this incredible church and our devoted members in fellowship. Thanks for a great year. We love hearing you sing from the pews!

Yours in music,

Wendy

Summer Schedule

Pastor

Rev. Hey will be on vacation from June 24th through July 7; and August 7th through August 18th. The Ministry of Worship and Spiritual Care has arranged for pulpit supply for the Sundays she is away. If you have a pastoral emergency during that time, please contact the church office (207-883-2342), Rev. Allison Curry, or Terri Brown (Ministry of Worship and Spiritual Care chairperson) for assistance.

Church Office

The office will have the following reduced summer hours through July and August: Monday through Thursday 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

The office will be closed August 6th through August 9th for vacation. Phone messages will be checked daily. If you have a matter that is urgent, please contact Terri Brown (207-883-6093).

INDOOR YARD SALE ON JUNE 29 FROM 8:30 AM TIL 1:00 PM,

The Ministry of Members, Friends and Church Life will conduct a Yard Sale in the Parish Hall oon Saturday, June 29.

DONATIONS: We will accept new and gently used items such as kitchen and housewares, decorations, sporting goods, toys, tools, handbags, gardening supplies, books, art, craft supplies and small furniture.

You may bring your donations to the Parish Hall starting on Sunday, June 16. Please call the office in advance if you need us to unlock the doors or to arrange a pick-up. All donations go upstairs so as not to interfere with our Food Pantry operations.

The Women's Fellowship will be having a Snack Shack in the Library during the sale.

We hope you will participate in some way: as a worker, donor or shopper. The Yard Sale affords a great opportunity to clear out your basement or garage, raise funds for the church, and interact with our church neighbors and bargain hunters.. Please direct your questions, comments and suggestions to the church office. (883-2342)

THANK YOU!

NEWS FROM THE FOOD PANTRY:

A local resident dropped off food donations in the breezeway and left this note, that read, in part:

I respect your organization and customers served.

P.S. I was a Girl Scout meeting in your church and later leader as an adult. Great memories!



