

**The First Community Church of Southborough**  
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### **December 13, 2020 – The Third Sunday of Advent**

*“Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born, if he’s not born in thee, thy soul is still forlorn.”*  
Angelus Silesius (12<sup>th</sup> century mystic)

### **Blessings, Everyone!**

#### **Keeping in Touch With Our Church Family**

##### **Concerns:**

We hold in prayer:

- Skip Willman and his family on the passing of Skip’s mother, Ida (Foskett) Willman on December 1, 2020 at the age of 100. Skip and Sharon’s address is 43 Technology Drive, Unit 218 Bedford, New Hampshire 03110
- Our country. We stand in need of prayer for healing and a new, more inclusive, more enlightened vision of who we are, and the patience and dedication to make this a reality for all people.
- Our world. We stand in need of a vision of world community, a world where people care about each other and where we know deep down that we are all in this together.
- Nature. Our environment. The world in which we live. Our little planet is in need of healing and tender-loving care.
- Those who are food insecure in our own country and even in our own state
- Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, our President-Elect and Vice President-Elect, and their new administration

As we hold people in our prayers, there are several groups of people who stand in special need of prayer and also organized, compassionate medical and psychological support.

Emergency rooms in Massachusetts are currently reporting that the number of children and teens who present with psychological problems coming through their doors has quadrupled since the pandemic began. Children and teens are not only experiencing anxiety, depression, and thoughts of self-harm, they are overwhelmed by these feelings, especially if they have some sort of pre-existing vulnerability. Psychiatric beds in general hospitals for children and teens in crisis, already in short supply before the pandemic, are now practically impossible to find.

According to the CDC, one in six children in the United States has a diagnosed or diagnosable mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder. One in thirteen high school students has

attempted suicide. At least half of the children/teens with a diagnosable mental illness don't receive any treatment at all.

Children are resilient. Given the right treatment and the right circumstances, they can bounce back from even serious trauma without manifesting lifelong effects. However, they need help from their parents and, at times, professional caregivers.

Many years ago, when people lived in fear of a nuclear holocaust and when only one in four high school students believed that they would die of old age, I attended a workshop on resilience in children. One of the speakers said that, in her opinion, one factor stands out in relation to how children weather not only personal and family but also social, national, and international crises. She said that children need to know that the adults are in charge and that they can handle the situation. When they don't have the sense of security that comes from the knowledge that the adults in their lives, in their community, in their nation, and in the world are capable of solving the problem, their anxiety skyrockets.

When our children look at us, do they have a sense that we are facing the coronavirus crisis in a responsible manner, and that we will be able to resolve it? When they look at the way the adults in charge are handling this and other crises, do they even have a sense that the adults are acting like adults? Our children look to us; they cue off of us when they are confronted with family and social problems that are beyond their ability to understand, let alone solve. When they look at us, what do they see?

**Thank you to:**

- Jim Holmes – for faithfully ringing the church bell at 11:00 a.m. every Sunday morning to remind our neighbors and the world that we are still here, and for sending us pictures of the church and church grounds so we remember what they look like
- Cathy Ambler—for providing the two beautiful Christmas wreaths that adorn our front doors
- Those who have already turned in their yearly pledges to the General Fund, and those members of our larger church family who have either already sent or pledged a special gift to support us financially in the year to come

**COVID-19 and Sunday Worship as the Gathered Church**

The coronavirus pandemic, with its attendant restrictions, has exposed some of the irrational thinking, magical beliefs, and blatant social irresponsibility of certain strains of organized religion. At times, it seems that we are back in the Middle Ages where science and scientific thinking were seen as opposed to religion and to religious faith.

The coronavirus has dealt a serious blow to the Greek Orthodox Church, with the disease spreading swiftly through its ranks. Although the church's leader, Archbishop Ieronymos, has been consistent in his calls for the faithful to "restrict yourselves, discipline yourselves, and follow the rules," he has been opposed and defied by Orthodox hard-liners. A complicating factor is the central place of the Sacrament of Holy Communion in worship, where worshippers consume sacramental bread soaked in wine *from a common spoon*. (I don't think Dr. Fauci would approve!)

Some Orthodox clergy are telling their parishioners that faith in the sacrament can shield them from the virus. This is an interesting statement because it can't be either proved or disproved. In the philosophical "school" of positivism, a statement is only meaningful if it can be empirically proved or disproved. For example, "The moon is made of green cheese" is a meaningful statement; there is a way of empirically proving or disproving it. All we have to do is send a rocket ship to the moon, gather some of the surface soil, bring it back to earth and have

it analyzed. If it is, indeed, green cheese, then the statement is true; if it is just dirt, the statement is false. So, according to the guideline of positivism, the statement that the moon is made of green cheese is, indeed, a meaningful statement. But what about the statement that, if you take communion with a true and sincere faith, you will not contract the coronavirus?

This statement can neither be proved nor disproved. If you take communion and do not contract the virus, this “means” that you have a true and sincere faith. If you take communion and you get sick or die from the coronavirus, it simply means that you didn’t have enough faith. This, of course, adds a measure of guilt to the other burdens that the afflicted person is carrying. Giorgos Vasileiou, head of the synod’s press office, became a super-spreader of this bizarre doctrine when he said, “If you don’t believe and see it as bread and wine, you are not protected. I see it as the body of Christ, so I am.” This is not faith; this is magical thinking, and it is dangerous magical thinking! I confess to a small degree of Schadenfreude (ok, a relatively large degree) when people who say stupid things like this come down with the virus.

Officials in the mainstream Orthodox church are doing their best to fight the religiously based denial of the existence of the coronavirus and its devastating effects. One bishop, Anthimos of Alexandroupolis, condemned those who, with what he called “criminal sermons,” have urged Greeks to ignore public health restrictions. As he put it, “Pious Egotism Kills!”

Once again, the institutional church, instead of being part of the solution, has become part of the problem. The re-enactment of Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples has become a super-spreader. I think this must make Jesus weep.

#### Birthdays in December

Gilbert Joe	Dec. 2
Nancy Hite	Dec. 3
Betty Tebbetts	Dec. 12
Tanner Willman.	Dec. 13
Bayley Willman	Dec. 18
Darcy Hilbert	Dec. 20
Stacey Willman.	Dec. 21
Dick Varney	Dec. 24
Justin Elias	Dec. 27

#### Anniversaries in December

Michael & Kristen (Sanderson) Springer	Dec. 16
Scott & Lynn (Lees) Webster	Dec. 23
Michael & Dorothy Larson	Dec. 24

#### **Missions:**

Our mission outreach for the month of December is the Salvation Army. Every December, those members of our church family who donate to the Salvation Army through our church’s special offering will have their names appear on a Christmas card that we send to everyone. This card takes the place of sending out individual Christmas cards to people in our church family, and the money that would have gone to the purchase of cards and postage provide goods and services for people in need. If you would like your name to appear on the card, please send your donation to the church Collector, Jim Holmes, by December 20.

#### **Audio Weekly Worship Service**

We are offering a weekly worship service with a link to it on the home page of our church website: [www.firstcommunitychurch.com](http://www.firstcommunitychurch.com); there is also a link on the Sermon page. Each service is listed by date. The reflection/homily is the reflection that is sent to those on our expanded church contact list, a list that is comprised of church members, members of our larger church family, and friends of the church who have asked to be put on our contact list. The pastor’s reflection is also accessible in printed form on our website in the sermon section.

**Quote/Thought of the Day**

*Friends can help each other. A true friend is someone who lets you have total freedom to be yourself—and especially, to feel. Or not feel. Whatever you happen to be feeling at the moment is fine with them. That's what real love amounts to—letting a person be what he/she really is.*

Jim Morrison

**A Second Quote/Thought of the Day**

We all need to experience/access/practice patience if we are to reverse the upward trend of this coronavirus pandemic and return life and our economy to not only normal but also healthy.

There is a Zen saying that I like. It speaks to those times when we need to be patient, trusting that there is something (or Someone) behind the scenes that is unfolding life for us.

*Sitting quietly, doing nothing,  
Spring comes,  
And the grass grows all by itself.*

**Attention-Grabbling Church Signs**

*A Gay Christian is Not an Oxymoron  
A Hateful Christian Most Certainly Is*

**Taken From (Apparently Unedited) Church Sunday Morning Bulletins**

*"The Peacemaking Meeting scheduled for today has been canceled due to conflict."*