

**The First Community Church of Southborough  
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**January 3, 2021 – The Second Sunday After Christmas**

*“And now we welcome the New Year, full of things that have never been.”  
Rainer Maria Rilke*

**Blessings, Everyone—and a Happy New Year!**

**Keeping in Touch With Our Church Family**

**Concerns:**

We hold in prayer:

- 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 hungry or food insecure in our own country and even in our own state
- Those who are unemployed and who, in addition to not being able to support their family, have lost their and their family's health insurance
- Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, our President-Elect and Vice President-Elect, and their new administration
- The New Year! Let's hope that it's better than 2020!

**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
- Those who have already turned in their 2021 pledges to the General Fund, and those Friends of the Church 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

I'm sorry that I have to do this, but there are still people out there who are not taking the COVID-19 virus seriously. This includes people in churches. And it includes people who should know better.

Speaking of lessons that we have learned from our individual and collective experience of the year 2020, I have learned to never again take for granted what used to be called general knowledge or even common sense. A case in point is QAnon, a conspiracy theory that was originally set up as a joke, but which has apparently taken on a life of its own in the psyche of many more angry, paranoid, and fascist-embracing individuals than I would have predicted. Once confined to the lunatic fringes of the Internet, QAnon has gone mainstream, with a recently elected Congressional representative from a southern state claiming to be a “believer.”

QAnon basically holds that a wicked “deep state” cabal, set up by Democrats, operates a world-wide child sex-trafficking ring, and that only Donald Trump, despite his personal faults (which many QAnon “believers” admit includes being a sociopathic, narcissistic, misogynistic racist, a pathological liar without a trace of empathy or compassion), can defeat this evil cabal. (One also wonders why he is the darling of Christian Evangelicals, over 80% of which voted for him in the past election—but that’s not the point.) For millions of Americans (actually, tens of millions of Americans), it apparently makes total sense to believe that the coronavirus is a hoax but QAnon is real. Their belief in this internet hoax is undaunted by the fact that the United States has recorded nearly 20 million cases of COVID-19 and more than 345,000 deaths, and that in Massachusetts alone, the death toll from COVID-19 has reached 12,157. As I said, I will never again take a general consensus about facts for granted. Then again, I thought that the flat-earth society was a thing of the past—until a former Boston Celtic, whom I still don’t like, declared himself a believer. He was quoted as saying that when he looks out the window it certainly seems flat to him. Wow!

Even though two vaccines have reached the stage of distribution, a distribution that is happening slower than the predicted rate due to the reluctance of the present administration to take this pandemic seriously, this COVID-19 thing is still serious. According to the journal *Intensive Care Medicine*, Vol. 43, No. 9, 2017, people who have been hospitalized in the ICU, for any reason, are more likely to experience long-term problems with cognition and have an increased risk of anxiety and depression. One pre-COVID-19 study found 20%-40% of ICU patients experienced delirium, with rates climbing to 60%-80% for patients on ventilators. Such complications are thought to be related both to the serious illness that brought them to the hospital and also to the intensive care treatment itself. Robert Stevens, MD, FCCM, of Johns Hopkins Medicine, tells us that some portion of people seriously ill with COVID-19 will likely experience delirium and other neurological side effects simply as a result of being in the ICU.

Think of this when you are reading the daily statistics. Don’t just look at the number of new cases in our state and the number of new deaths attributed to COVID-19, look at the rapidly rising number of hospitalizations. As of this past weekend, there were 2,271 patients with COVID-19 in Massachusetts hospitals alone (did you catch the double *entendre* of the word “alone?”). We hope that being vaccinated will help cut down or hopefully even eliminate the necessity of being hospitalized in the ICU and perhaps being put on a ventilator *for those who have been vaccinated*, but for now—we should not do anything stupid as individuals or as a church that might put any one of us at risk of hospitalization.

If you don't believe me, ask an ICU nurse. One of them recently informed me that she is dumbfounded at people who are so in thrall with unfounded and unsubstantiated conspiracy theories that, even when they have been admitted to her hospital's ICU because of COVID-19, they still believe that this whole COVID-19 thing is a hoax promulgated by the Democrats to undermine Donald Trump's presidency. At times, I think our education system here in American has failed us.

### **Birthdays in January**

Mitch Hansberry	5 <sup>th</sup>
Susan Hansberry	25 <sup>th</sup>
Jennifer Dundin	28 <sup>th</sup>
Michael Larson	31st

### **Audio Weekly Worship Service**

We are offering a weekly Virtual Worship Service. A link to it on our "Pod Site" is posted on the home page of our church website: [www.firstcommunitychurch.com](http://www.firstcommunitychurch.com); and also at the top of the Sermons 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 (PDF) form on our website on the Sermons page.

### **Quote/Thought of the Day**

*"Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering, 'It will be happier.'"*  
Alfred Lord Tennyson

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

*"Patience is a key element of success."*

Bill Gates

### **Attention-Grabbling Church Signs**

*God Expects  
Spiritual Fruit  
Not Religious Nuts!*

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

*This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. White to come forward and lay an egg on the altar."*

### **Interesting "Facts"**

At 12:01 a.m. on January 1, 2021, this was the first time in history that we could look back at the events of the preceding year with 20-20 hindsight. (Get it?)