

**The First Community Church of Southborough
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January 10, 2021 – First Sunday After the Epiphany

“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.” (Socrates)

Blessings, Everyone!

Keeping in Touch With Each Other

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. The little animals. 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
- Single mothers and mothers of small children who are faced with a difficult task during the pandemic restrictions and the challenges of virtual learning
- Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, our President-Elect and Vice President-Elect, and their new administration
- The New Year! Let's all work together to make it better than 2020!

Thank you to:

- Jim Holmes and Bob Farmer – 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.
- 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 every week, but there are still people out there who are not taking the COVID-19 virus seriously. This includes people in families who simply would like to be together on the holidays. This includes people in churches who would like to be together in worship. And it includes people who should know better.

According to the Department of Public Health, the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Massachusetts rose by 7,136 this past Thursday, while the seven-day average rose to 4,820, *the highest number for Massachusetts since the beginning of the pandemic*. The new cases brought the state's total to 393,188. The death toll in our state increased by 71 to a total of 12,634. The seven-day average of hospitalized coronavirus patients rose from 2,326 to 2,342.

To date, 141,108 people have received the first dose of the coronavirus vaccine. We obviously have a long way to go in stemming the potentially deadly spread of this virus.

This is not a time to slack off, to assume that since "the end is in sight" (if it is), we can afford to take more chances. It is a time for patience and discipline. It hurts me, once again, to note that a church, in particular GENESIS, a community church in Woburn, held four worship services on Christmas Eve. To date, 44 people who have come down with COVID-19 have traced their infection to one of these services. To be sure, this number pales in comparison with the 178 cases and 7 deaths attributable to a wedding and reception at a church in Millinocket, Maine, and the more than 200 cases that have been traced to events at Crossroads Community Church in Fitchburg. However, every single life is precious! To some extent, the blood of those who die or who are permanently disabled is on our hands when we rebel against sensible public health guidelines and thoughtlessly become carriers & spreaders of this virus.

Dr. Nahid Bhadelia, an infectious disease physician at Boston Medical Center and associate professor of medicine at Boston University, notes that places of worship pose a higher risk for virus transmission because worshippers often stay in the same place during worship. Dr. Bhadelia says, "If you spend enough time next to someone who might have the disease, and there is not the best ventilation in that area, you're more likely to get exposed. Compared to silent worship, singing or doing anything that generates more of that virus into the air poses a greater risk." Dr. Bhadelia notes that indoor spaces tend to be *twenty times* more dangerous for virus transmission than outdoor ones.

Country music legend Charlie Pride died this past December 12 of COVID-19. About a month earlier, the 86-year-old singer attended the Country Music Association Awards, where he received a lifetime achievement award. Unfortunately, because CMA decided to hold their awards ceremony in person and indoors rather than virtually, as did every other awards show, and since most of those in attendance in Nashville did not wear a mask, Charlie's lifetime achievements came to an abrupt end. What were these people, who are producing a music that purports to represent a working-class art form, thinking? Talk about being "tone deaf!"

I think we all know what we should do—and what we should not do. Let our guideline for ourselves and others continue to be "An abundance of caution and an abundance of care." If we just take care of ourselves and do the very best we can, we will get through this.

Birthdays in January

Mitch Hansberry 5th
Susan Hansberry 25th
Jennifer Dundin 28th
Michael Larson 31st

Audio Weekly Worship Service

We are offering a weekly worship service that is posted on the home page of our church website: www.firstcommunitychurch.com; it is in the audio section of the sermon section. 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

"New year—a new chapter, new verse, or just the same old story? Ultimately, we write it. The choice is ours."
(Alex Morritt)

Alex Morritt is a Central American author, poet, lyricist, travel writer and publisher. He writes his poetry and prose in English and Spanish.

A Second Quote/Thought of the Day

"Patience is the companion of wisdom."
(Saint Augustine)

Attention-Grabbling Church Signs

*"Thou Shall Not Lie
Or Use Alternative Facts"
Exodus 20:16*

Taken From (Apparently Unedited) Church Sunday Morning Bulletins

"This afternoon, there will be meetings at both the north and south ends of the church sanctuary. Babies will be baptized at both ends."

Interesting "Facts"

Epiphany, originally a pagan festival to worship the sun god, has ancient origins that trace back to around 2000 BCE. It was celebrated on what we would now call January 6 on what was then believed to be the first day of winter. Christians took over this festival and gave it new meaning as Epiphany, the day that God's revelation in Jesus was made known to the wise men.

Around the fourth century CE, the date of the sun festival, the first day of winter, was determined to actually be on December 25. Christians later took over this festival as well for Christmas, the celebration of Christ's birth. Epiphany, for Christians, remained on January 6. Until this time, when Christians began to celebrate Christmas on December 25, both the birth of Jesus and his baptism were celebrated on Epiphany.

Epiphany is also known as Twelfth Night because it is held on the twelfth day after Christmas.

Missions:

This past week we received the following letter from Pathways for Change (formerly the Rape Crisis Center of Worcester). Pathways for Change, in addition to providing safe housing and therapy for victims of sexual violence, operates a 24-hour hotline at 800-870-5905. Their thank-you begins with a quote from Mother Teresa:

“To keep a lamp burning we have to keep putting oil in it.”

BTW, this is true of the church as well!

Dear Members of First Community Church of Southborough,

We find ourselves, once again, in a debt of gratitude. First Community Church of Southborough’s recent generous donation of \$200 to Pathways for Change continues to help us provide survivors with the “lighted candles” they need to brighten their pathway to healing. Please share our deepest gratitude with your mission committee members, leadership members, congregation, and staff for the outpouring of generosity and support they continue to give.

Your ongoing support truly makes an enormous difference in the important work we do every day and impacts not only survivors but also their significant others, family, and friends, as healing an individual is also about healing a community.

So, when you share this small note of thanks with the First Community Church of Southborough’s Mission Committee’s members, congregation, and staff, we hope they will be reminded about the amazing difference they make.

As always, heartfelt thanks,

Kim L. Dawkins, CEO/President