

**The First Community Church of Southborough
137 Southville Road
Southborough, Massachusetts 01772-1937**

The Reverend Paul D. Sanderson, D.Min., Ph.D. – Pastor

www.firstcommunitychurch.com

Church: (508) 485-2607

Pastor: (508) 543-7160

Text: (508) 873-0534

Email: paulsandersonphd@gmail.com

March 14, 2021 – The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Keeping in Touch

A quick update on our dear friend Mattie Cummings. As you may know, Mattie is now living with and caring for her sister, Elizabeth, in Lebanon, Maine. They have found a small church in Biddeford, thirty minutes away. Mattie says their church is so small that they are able to meet in their small fellowship room with masks and social distancing (I think this makes it even smaller than our church!). I suspect they will soon discover what a gift they have in our transplant! As soon as she can, Mattie is planning to start the process of getting her CNA license transferred from Massachusetts to Maine. We wish her well—and we miss her!

Concerns:

We hold in prayer:

- Our country. We stand in need of prayer for healing, for an end to the hatred that has polarized our people around political and social issues. Our tribalistic mentality needs to be replaced with a new, more inclusive, more enlightened vision of who we are as Americans, and we need the patience and dedication to make the true American way of life 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. Most of the problems that the peoples of the world face are solvable, if only we put our minds and our tremendous resources to work on them.
- Nature. Our environment. The world in which we live. Approximately 1,000,000 little and some big animals are in danger of extinction. The melting ice cap. Climate change. Our little planet is in need of healing and tender-loving care.
- The 1 in 10 American children who live in poverty, who are food insecure, under constant threat of eviction, and who may be stressed by the threat of neighborhood violence.
- Those of all ages who have become seriously ill though having contracted COVID-19; families that have lost loved ones to this virus; and all those whose lives have been disrupted in serious ways because of the pandemic restrictions. BTW, being asked to wear a mask and socially distance does not qualify one to receive intercessory prayer.
- The helpers. The front-line workers. The doctors and nurses. Medscape, a resource website for health care professionals, reports that every day, one doctor in the United States dies by suicide. The Emotional PPE Project (which provides free psychotherapy), Project Semicolon (a suicide prevention initiative), and other organizations that are trying to help the helpers.
- Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, our President and Vice President, and their new administration and cabinet. The rebuilding of our government so it can serve the function that is

its charge: increasing the safety, security, and well-being of all our citizens, and being a shining light, a model of true functional democracy to the world.

- Sheila (a colleague of Dianne Simmons), her husband Danny, and their two sons. Danny, who contracted COVID-19 in December and who recently suffered a fall, has been working hard with physical therapy and is now able to stand on his own. However, he still remains on Hospice Care. The family thanks us for remembering them in our prayers.

- Ursula Guenon, who has been released from the hospital but is still in need of healing. Let us keep Bill and Ursula in our prayers.

(If you are in need of prayer or if you know of someone who stands in need of prayer, and you would like to ask us to pray for them/you, please let me know.)

Thank you to:

- 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.

- Sandy McKeen, who has graciously offered to pull together the various and sundry reports into our 2020 Annual Report. *Please send everything to her in electronic form!*

COVID-19 and Sunday Worship as the Gathered Church

The past few weeks, I have been reviewing recently released guidelines for reopening churches for worship issued by the Southeastern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ. However, in light of recent statements by the CDC regarding people who have been fully vaccinated, I believe even these UCC guidelines are outdated. Despite all the frustrating glitches, the vaccination effort is proceeding at a relatively rapid pace. One-third of all Massachusetts residents have received at least one vaccination and, with the implementation of a more efficient way of registering and the opening of several new mass vaccination sites, we now rank in the top ten states for the percentage of citizens vaccinated per capita.

Up to now, I have felt that the burden of proof is on those who would argue for reopening our church sooner rather than later. As I have mentioned time and time again, our decision will be guided by an abundance of caution, care, and compassion. Our son Corey's church, which resumed gathered worship through Advent and Christmas, has gone back to virtual worship due to an uptick in COVID cases in their town. However, with the new CDC guidelines that grandparents who have been fully vaccinated may interact with their fully vaccinated children and unvaccinated (but relatively safe) grandchildren *without masks or social distancing*, I don't see why this type of interaction would not apply to our church as well. Why wouldn't it be possible for our *fully vaccinated* members to gather for worship, and even sing hymns? After all, we rarely have over twenty people present for Sunday worship; in a sanctuary that seats one hundred, we meet the guidelines of a 20% capacity.

This past week I have felt something inside me shift from "why?" to "why not?" If everyone present is fully vaccinated, and if we space ourselves around the sanctuary, why would we need to spend the money to surround the lectern and pulpit with plexiglass? Perhaps I am just tired of a disciplined response to the pandemic, and I am being foolishly optimistic, but I don't see why we can't begin to think about gathering together for Sunday worship and study groups not only outside but possibly also inside the church at least by the beginning of summer.

Let's watch what happens over the next few months. Let's also be sure to be safe, sensible, cautious, and get fully vaccinated. And let's think positive! Let's think forward to when we can resume not only the family gatherings but also the church gatherings that mean so much to us!

Birthdays	
Rowena Robertson	4 th
Dorothy Larson	5 th
Emily Hite	10 th
Walter Hite	11 th
Susan Elias	12 th

Audio Weekly Worship Service

We are offering an abbreviated weekly worship service on our “Pod Cast” site. There is a link to it on the Home page of our church website: www.firstcommunitychurch.com. It can also be accessed from a link at the top of the Sermons page. On the Pod site, 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.

If you would like to have a copy of the audio service/reflection (or this newsletter/reflection) emailed directly to you when it is recorded and printed (usually Saturday night or Sunday morning) rather than when it gets posted on our website (which can be several days later), please send an email to Reverend Sanderson and he can make it happen.

Quote/Thought of the Day on Patience

“Wise to resolve, and patient to perform.” *Homer*

A Second Quote/Thought of the Day

“You can observe a lot by just watching.” *Yogi Berra*

Attention Grabbling Church Signs

*If You Are
Praying For Snow
Please Stop!*

Kids Say the Darndest Things!

“The patron saint of travelers is Saint Francis of Seasick.”

Worship Service Music

The Prelude for this week’s devotional service is a Gregorian Chant: “Hosanna filio David,” which is taken from an Angel recording entitled *Chant*. This antiphonal is chanted by the Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos, an abbey in the village of Santo Domingo de Silos in the southern part of Burgos Province in northern Spain. The monastery is named after the eleventh-century saint Dominic of Silos.