

**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

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The Second Sunday of Easter

Keeping in Touch

Concerns:

A colleague and friend, a former Dominican nun, once told me that a Jesuit priest who was teaching a course on prayer told them that when they pray, they should hold something in each hand. In one hand, they should hold the Bible; in the other, a current newspaper. I think the Old Testament prophets as well as recent “saints” who champion the cause of justice would agree!

Our Nation, the World, our Planet

We hold in prayer:

- Our country. We stand in need of prayer for healing, for an end to the fear that has polarized our people around political and social issues. Our tribalistic mentality, especially our white nationalism, 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 we put our minds and our tremendous resources to work on them. If we have learned one thing from this pandemic it is how interconnected, how interrelated we all are.
- 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. The rising seas. The effects of climate change on weather patterns and the intensity of storms, droughts, forest fires, etc. 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 from their homes, and who may be stressed by the threat of neighborhood violence. For example, before the pandemic, the Salvation Army in Lynn helped about 80 visitors a day at its site in the parking lot of Manning Field; last March this number exploded to over 700 families a day. At the present time, they are still feeding about 250 families a day, four days a week. A lot of people, a lot of families, a lot of children need help.

BTW, according to American Leprosy Missions, approximately fifty-two children are diagnosed with leprosy or related diseases *every day* around the world. ALM, a Christian organization, provides antibiotics for children who live in undeveloped countries whose health systems cannot cope with diseases like leprosy.

- 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 as a serious disruption in one's life and does not entitle 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 cope with burnout.

- 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.

- Asian Americans that are the latest target of racial/ethnic hatred stoked by our former president and white nationalists like Stephen Miller. Violence against this community is not new—see the Chinese Exclusion Act and Japanese internment camps. Well before the recent murders of Asian-American women in Georgia, attacks that probably were directed as much toward women in general as Asian women in particular, Asians have been the object of verbal and physical assault. Just this past week an Asian woman was badly beaten out in the open on a street in NYC and nobody intervened.

- Women. We note that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently pulled Turkey out of the Istanbul Convention, an international agreement aimed at preventing violence against women. Erdogan's decision to withdraw by decree from this Council of Europe pact is a blow to the country's women's rights movement and, sadly, coincides with a rise in domestic violence and femicide. The reason given for the withdrawal is that the Istanbul Convention was being used to protect LGBT rights, which Erdogan said is incompatible with Turkey's social and family values. President Biden and the European Union have strongly condemned Erdogan's action.

Personal Prayer Requests

We hold in prayer:

- Sheila (a colleague of Dianne Simmons), her husband Danny, and their two sons. Danny, who contracted COVID-19 in December, has been on Hospice care from it, and who recently suffered a fall, has been working hard with physical therapy and is finally able to stand on his own. This past week the doctor was "shocked" by how good Danny looked and how he could do multiple repetitions of stand-up sit-down! The family thanks us for holding them in our prayers.

- Ursula Guenon is in need of open-heart surgery to repair a second mitral valve. The surgery is scheduled for this coming Monday, April 12. Bill and Ursula really need our prayers!
- Darlene asks us to keep Marilyn Page, one of her dearest friends, now living in Seattle, in our prayers. Marilyn is undergoing intensive treatment for multiple myeloma.
- Paul and Darlene's daughter-in-law, Ann-Marie, is still struggling with the aftermath of her bout of COVID-19. Please keep her in your prayers.
- Evelyn Till's son, Eddy, who lives in South Carolina, is still recovering from a recent stroke. His speech is improving, and they have located the source of the blood clot. Let us keep both Evelyn and Eddy in our prayers.
- We were saddened to learn of the death of Jim Urban, a genuinely nice human being, a dear friend of Dianne Simmons and a regular attender (and generous tipper) at the D&D dinners, who recently died of COVID.
- Last week Linda Hubley, a lifelong Southborough resident, succumbed to brain cancer after a courageous nine-month battle. She passed away at home with her husband, Skip, and their children, Tanya and Matt at her side. Skip is a nephew of Martha and the late Bud Hubley. Our prayers are with Linda's family.
- Our dear friend and former choir member Joannie Brunelle and her daughter, Lee, recently moved to Florida where Joannie will be able to "walk right outside into the sunshine." From all reports she loves her new digs! Her new address is as follows:
2560 62nd Avenue – North
Lot #304
St. Petersburg, FL 33702
Her cell phone is (508) 615-4203.

(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.
- Many thanks to Sandy McKeen and Beverly Lees who are responsible for organizing and printing our 2000 Annual Report. You can pick up your copy at the church. If you are one of the few members of our church that do not have a key to our church, please let me know and we will find a way to get you a copy.
- Bob Farmer for staying on top of things that need attention (like the telephones) while we are not meeting. Verizon recently installed two new digital phones, one in the pastor's office and the other in the kitchen. The challenge for your technologically challenged pastor is to not only record a new message for callers, but also to retrieve messages from "the cloud."
- Darlene Sanderson for putting the spring wreaths up next to our front door.

- Bill Guenon for changing the sign in front of the church every week.
- Bob Farmer, Bill Guenon, and Beth Hook for all their hard work on the very successful Bottle and Can Drive.

A Special Celebration!!

This past Monday, the Lay Council of the United Parishes of Southborough presented Bob L'Heureux, our Deacon Emeritus, with a certificate of appreciation for his many years of faithful service to the United Parishes through the Lay Council. In addition to the certificate, they also presented him with a gift card to the Wayside Inn, a special place to Bob and Sarah and where they often celebrated their anniversaries.

We join the Lay Council, Bob, in expressing our appreciation for all you have done for our church through the years as well as what you have done for the United Parishes of Southborough as a representative from our church. You have truly been a gift to all of us!

COVID-19 and Sunday Worship as the Gathered Church

I confess that I am still confused about where we stand in relation to the possibility of meeting together again for worship.

The way I understand the guidelines issued at the beginning of March by the Southeastern Conference of the United Church of Christ we need to take several factors into consideration.

1. If we are meeting inside, we need to limit participants to 10 people per 1,000 sq. ft.
2. The overall number of people in our state and probably in our section of the state who have the coronavirus and who could spread it must be taken into consideration.
3. The number of people who have been fully vaccinated; whether or not we have reached herd immunity.
4. Apparently, we have the right to refuse participation to anyone who refuses to wear a mask. It is not clear to me whether we have the right to refuse participation to anyone who has not been fully vaccinated, though it seems to me that having all participants vaccinated would help ensure that we neither contract nor spread the coronavirus.
5. We will probably still have to surround at least the pulpit with plexiglass, especially if I do not wear a mask when I lead worship and preach.
6. If we are inside and wearing masks, it is probably not a good idea to sing hymns or participate in responsive readings. If we are outside and wearing masks—I'm not sure.
7. We won't be able to share the Sacrament of Holy Communion with each other.
8. If we are inside, we may have to have the sanctuary and the downstairs bathroom professionally cleaned following the worship service. I have no idea how much this would cost and whether we have the funds in our budget to do it.

Note: In light of recent CDC Guidelines, I am even less sure that we need to surround the pulpit with plexiglass, refrain from sharing in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and have the church professionally cleaned following each use. The CDC now believes it is highly unlikely that any variant of the coronavirus can be spread by contact.

The way I understand it, even if we are fully vaccinated it is still possible for us to contract and even spread the coronavirus. The odds are strongly against it (about 90-95% will not contract it) and for those that do, the exposure will be brief (but we don't know for how long). Vaccination seems to be primarily a strong (100%?) protection against serious symptoms, hospitalization, and death. However, it apparently does not prevent the virus from briefly entering our system. It seems that there is no way that we will be absolutely safe—perhaps ever again; it more a matter of how much risk we are willing to tolerate. I suspect that you, like I, have feelings about this.

That said, I still do not have a clear reading of how many fully vaccinated people have, after their vaccination, contracted the coronavirus and spread it. I suspect the number is very, very small.

Let's watch what happens over the next few months, especially the reported efficacy of the vaccines for those who are fully vaccinated with the South African, British, and Brazilian variants. Let's 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	
Lou Dundin	1 st
Ron Sickles	7 th
Skip Willman	17 th
Gloria Sadler	30 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 same 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

"Patience is not simply the ability to wait, it's how we behave while we're waiting." Joyce Meyer

A Second Quote/Thought of the Day

"Today I want you to think about all that you are instead of all that you are not." Anonymous

A Third Quote/Thought of the Day

“If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world on fire!”
Catherine of Siena

Attention-Grabbling Church Signs

“Our church is prayer conditioned!”

Worship Service Music

The Prelude for today’s devotional service is “Take My Hand, Precious Lord,” which was recorded in 1957 by Elvis Presley. The Postlude is “Bridge Over Troubled Waters,” which was written by Paul Simon of Simon and Garfunkel fame and was recorded by Elvis in 1974.

Both of these gospel hymns are from the recording *He Touched Me—the Gospel Music of Elvis Presley*.

BTW, if you would like me to send you a copy of the audio worship service as soon as I record it every week, please email me and I would be happy to do so.