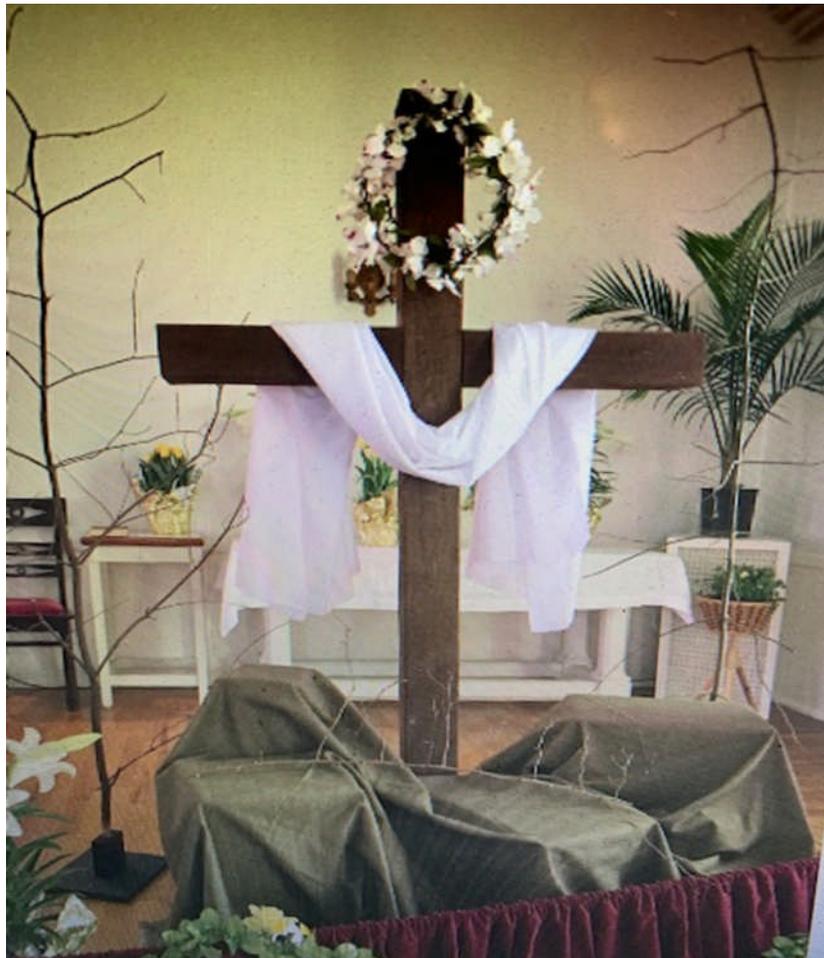


**The First Community Church of Southborough
137 Southville Road
Southborough, Massachusetts 01772-1937**

**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**

**April 25, 2021
The Fourth Sunday of Easter**



(Photo credit—Darlene Sanderson, Easter season 2019)

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 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. We also need to stop killing each other.
- 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. 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. The animals that 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. A lot of people, a lot of families, a lot of children need our help.
- Income inequality. I suppose we should celebrate the fact that, during this past year, when so many people in our country suffered from the ravages of the pandemic, when 3.4 million people filed for unemployment, 56 new billionaires were created in the United States—an average of a little over one a week. America’s 660 billionaires now account for 4.1 trillion dollars of accumulated wealth annually, an increase of 38.6% over the year before. Aren’t you glad that at least someone is doing well during this difficult time? Or do you think there is something wrong with the system? BTW, 55 big businesses paid no US income tax on more than \$40 billion in profits last year; in fact, they received a combined federal rebate of more than \$3 billion, for an effective tax rate of approximately *negative* 9%. How much did you pay last year?
- The families and friends of the more than 560,000 in our country and the more than 3,500,000 around the world who have died from COVID-19; for those who have suffered from this disease, especially those with symptoms that linger; and 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. We should also pray for a vaccine against stupidity to be immediately put into service for those who have decided not to be vaccinated because they are convinced that the coronavirus is not real, it is a hoax.

- The month of April is proving to be the darkest to date in Brazil's struggle with the pandemic, a struggle not helped by President Jair Bolsonaro's arrogant strategy of denial, a political tactic employed by our own former president with similar results. The P.1 variant, which has left Brazil's hospitals overwhelmed, is responsible for 375,000 of the world's 3.5 million virus deaths, second only to the United States.
- The helpers. The front-line workers. The doctors and nurses.
- The victims and their families of the 125 mass shootings that have already occurred in our country in 2021. Let us pray that the will of the vast majority of people in both parties, the conviction that sensible restrictions on gun ownership and the types of guns that can be purchased are in the best interest of everyone (except the NRA, gun manufacturers, and "patriotic" militias) be reflected in our representatives in Congress. This is not about taking rifles away from hunters.
- The members of the trans community who are currently under assault from Republican anti-trans legislation (see North Carolina, Mississippi, Arkansas, Kansas, Idaho), legislation which is essentially an assault on children, denying them the right to be who they are. So far this year, at least 12 trans or gender nonconforming people have been killed nationwide, including a 16-year-old trans boy and his 22-year-old nonbinary sibling, who were killed by their mother. How, in God's name, did white heterosexuals become the "victims" of the LGBTQ community, a community that has suffered from stigmatization and prejudice even within their own families and their own churches, an abhorrence of who they are that, when internalized, has led LGBTQ youth to disproportional rates of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and actual suicide?!
- 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 a xenophobia that is inconsistent with the core beliefs and values of a nation that, from the beginning, was celebrated as the world's greatest example of a melting-pot society.
- Women. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently pulled Turkey out of 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 in Turkey.
- People who are asserting their right to have their country governed by democratic principles. This battle is being fought in our country and around the world. The military in Myanmar, which recently overthrew the democratically elected government of Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi, both of whom have been detained, to date have killed over 750 peaceful protesters. Russia has recently arrested over 1,500 protesters against Vladimir Putin's reign and his poisoning and imprisonment of Vladimir Navalny, Putin's most vocal critic. In our country, the GOP has recently introduced 351 pieces of legislation designed to disenfranchise our citizens, to limit the ability of certain demographics, specifically members of minority groups, to vote.

Personal Prayer Requests

We hold in prayer:

- Marilyn Page, one of Darlene's dearest friends, now living in Seattle. Marilyn is undergoing intensive treatment for multiple myeloma.
- Paul and Darlene's daughter-in-law, Ann-Marie, who is still struggling with the aftermath of her bout of COVID-19.
- Evelyn Till's son, Eddy, who is still recovering from a recent stroke.
- We were saddened to learn of the recent 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.
- Linda Hubley's family and friends. Linda, a lifelong Southborough resident, recently succumbed to brain cancer after a courageous nine-month battle. Skip is a nephew of Martha and the late Bud Hubley.
- Last week we were shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Ursula Guenon from complications following heart surgery. Bill and Ursula have been active members of our church for a little over five years. Our prayers are with Bill, their children Bill and Lisa, and their grandchildren Dylan, Devan, and Violet. This past Thursday Reverend Sanderson officiated at Ursula's funeral service at the Dolan Funeral Home in Milton and her burial in the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne.

Please check the guidelines for attending funerals listed below.

(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. We now have two new 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."

Celebrations

There is a special anniversary that we as a church need to celebrate! This past week, a certain young man who became affiliated with our church approximately eight years ago celebrated the 6th anniversary of his becoming clean and sober. This young man is now working in human resources with a specialty in addressing drug and alcohol problems/addictions and will be going back to school to finish his education and prepare for a career as a social worker. He should be very proud of what he has done, how he has turned his life around, and we wish him the very best!

	
<i>Birthdays</i>	
Lou Dundin	1 st
Ron Sickles	7 th
Roy Pinnock	13 th
Skip Willman	17 th
Gloria Sadler	30 th

COVID-19 and Sunday Worship as the Gathered Church

According to the guidelines issued at the beginning of March by the Southeastern Conference of the United Church of Christ, whether we will be meeting inside or outside, we will need to take several factors into consideration.

1. The number of people attending. If we are meeting inside, we need to limit participants to 10 people per 1,000 sq. ft. Whether inside or outside, we need to observe social distancing guidelines.
2. The overall number of people in our state and especially in our community who have the coronavirus and who could spread. I believe that the total number of cases in our state should certainly be under one thousand.
3. The number of people attending who have been fully vaccinated.
4. 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.
5. 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 believe we can do this.
6. We won't be able to share the Sacrament of Holy Communion, at least the way we customarily do, with each other.

Note: In light of recent CDC Guidelines, it appears that we do not need to 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.

State Guidelines for Worship, Funerals, and Other Gatherings – Issued March 22, 2021

On March 22, 2021 Massachusetts Governor Charles Baker announced reopening Massachusetts into “**Phase IV: Step 1.**” Under step 1, places of worship and funeral homes continue to remain open to services *at a limited capacity.* In keeping with Governor Baker’s directive there will still be certain limits as they relate to conducting services.

People with fever, flu, cough, sore throat or other flu like symptoms are not permitted to attend. All visitors will be required to *wear face coverings at all times and practice social distancing (six feet or more).* Persons of the same household are not required to distance. At funerals, *practice social distancing when greeting the family.* Do not hug, kiss, or shake hands. Pay your respects and exit the funeral home to allow other guests to enter.

The Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association strongly encourage you to share your condolences online by signing online guest books or, if you prefer a private message, you can send a personalized sympathy card via the website.

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

A quote or thought on patience is included in this newsletter every week because I think it is not only important for us in weathering this pandemic; it is one of the most important personality characteristics/qualities/gifts that we can have in life.

There is a new television series entitled *Kung Fu*—check it out. It is modeled after the 1970’s series (which I loved) starring David Carradine, except the protagonist in this series is a young woman. The third episode, which is worth watching, contains a profound lesson about patience.

*“Who is there who can make muddy waters clear?
but if allowed to remain still,
it will gradually clear itself.”*

Lao Tzu

A Second Quote/Thought of the Day

*“Allow yourself to be proud of yourself and all the progress you’ve made.
Especially the progress no one else can see.”* Contemplative Monk

A Third Quote/Thought of the Day

“Love follows knowledge.” Catherine of Siena

Attention-Grabbling Church Signs

*“With All This Rain
We Need An Ark.
Fear Not!
Wait For It . . .
We Noah Guy!”*

Worship Service Music

The Prelude for today’s devotional service is a bluegrass gospel rendition of “My Lord’s Been A Walkin” by the Spinney Brothers.

The Postlude, also sung by the Spinney Brothers, is “Sunday Drive.” Both are taken from The Spinney Brothers’ cd *Here at the Cross*.

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. Also, if you have difficulty making out the words on any of the preludes or postludes, please let me know and I will find a way to get them to you and the rest of our mailing list.