

KEEPING IN TOUCH!!

September 2024

The First Community Church of Southborough

137 Southville Road

Southborough, Massachusetts 01772-1937

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

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NOTE!!

This Sunday, our Sunday worship service returns to its regular time at 11:00 a.m. Please stay for coffee, refreshments, and fellowship following the worship service.

Sunday, September 1 is Communion Sunday. In our church, everyone is invited and is welcome to share in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

The Pastor's Message

Greetings!

Here we are once again at the beginning of a new church year! I say “once again” because we in this church have been engaging in this fall ritual for the past 159 years. Most of us, of course, have not been present for Rally Day over this entire period, but we do have a sense that we stand in a time-honored tradition, a tradition in which we are grounded and from which we draw both our unfolding vision of the future and the strength, the deep commitment to make this vision a reality.

The resurrection of what I have dubbed the “Pony Express Ministry” with our sister church across town, Pilgrim Church, worked very well over a ten-week period this summer. Charley Eastman led worship at Pilgrim Church at 9:30 a.m. and drove across town to lead worship at our church at 10:45 for five Sundays, as did I. We also covered for each other in the event of pastoral emergencies.

Having served as pastor of Pilgrim Church from 1969-72, I still know a number of their old-timers. While Charey was away in Europe, I was able to minister to Shari Sanford's family when, two weeks after the initial diagnosis, Shari passed away from stage 4 cancer. Bob and Shari have always been dear friends of Darlene and me. I baptized their daughter, Bobbi, only a few weeks after I came to Pilgrim, and I baptized Jeff the last Sunday I was there, just before I left the parish ministry for chaplaincy in a state mental hospital. It was deeply meaningful for both the family and me that I conduct Shari's burial service; it would not have been the same if the funeral home had just found a minister off the street. I believe that the more activities and ministries we can share with Pilgrim Church in the coming years, the stronger both churches become.

Early in August, our church mourned the passing of Ron Sickles, a long-time member of this church who had moved to New Hampshire about forty years ago. Ron was the son of Tom and Gwen Sickles and the brother of David Sickles and Sharon Sickles Willman. The Sickles family have been more than active in our church for decades; they have been pillars of the church. Our prayers are with Diane and their children: Lori, Kristie, Katie, and Steve.

This summer served as a reminder of what the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus said when he asked us to consider that we can never step twice in the same river. First, the river, though one, is constantly changing. Second, we are not the same people we were even a second ago. We are an endless changing energy field in the midst of a much larger constantly changing energy field. Nothing seems stable, let alone permanent. As we feel swept along by the turbulent tide of life, we grasp for something that will provide us, our families, our church, our nation, and the world with stability. Jesus provides us with another option. He would teach us how to swim.

For those of you who are regular attenders and active members of our church, I look forward to seeing you again now that we are moving back into our regular fall schedule. For those of you who are "Friends of First Community Church," who have taken up residence more toward the margins, I strongly encourage you to move to the center, to support, and to become more involved with a very unusual little church. As we move forward into the future, I have a feeling that we need just what you have to offer, and we have something special to offer you.

As I enter into the twenty-seventh year of my ministry here at First Community, I look forward to what we continue to create together. May God bless us as individuals and as a church in the year to come.

Faithfully yours,
Reverend Paul Sanderson

Interesting (and informative) Quotes

I recently came across the following quote from John O'Donohue, one of my newly discovered favorite spiritual writers. O'Donohue speaks of a theme that I have been trying to address in my Sunday sermons this summer, the matter of heaven, a heaven not only in the afterlife but right here and now, and also the matter of blessing, what it means to be blessed, when he says,

Regardless of how we configure the eternal, the human heart continues to dream of a state of wholeness, a place where everything comes together, where loss will be made good, where blindness will transform into vision, where damage will be made whole, where the clenched question will open in the house of surprise, where the travails of life's journey will enjoy a homecoming. To invoke a blessing is to call some of that wholeness upon a person now.

(from *To Bless the Space Between Us*)

"The most valuable possession you own is an open heart. The most powerful weapon you can be is an instrument of peace." (Carlos Santana)

Let us be the peace that we seek in our nation and the world.

LOOKING AHEAD . . .

Sunday, September 1 – Communion Sunday

**Tuesday, September 10 – Spiritual Study & Growth Group resumes at
2:30 p.m. – Everyone welcome!**

Thursday, September 19 at 6:00 p.m. Church Council (hybrid meeting)

Sunday, September 22 – Diaconate Meeting following worship
Sunday, September 29 – Re-covenanting Sunday

Growing in the Faith!

Our Spiritual Study & Growth Group meets every Tuesday at 2:30 p.m.

We are currently reading a book by the Reverend Peter Stilla entitled *Naturally Miraculous*. This is an excellent (and very readable) introduction and entrance into a deeper understanding and appreciation of the mystical root, the mystical source of Christianity, and the heart of Jesus' teaching. Peter, who is a friend of our Pastor and who serves a Christian Universalist church in western Massachusetts, has offered to meet with our study group. (We are secretly preparing a list of tough questions for him!)

No matter where you are on your faith journey, we can assure you that you belong with us! We are all beginners; we are all seeking to grow in the faith; we have some great discussions, and we love being a part of each other's spiritual growth!

Birthdays in September

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|-----------------|------------------|
| Zachary Webster | 9 th |
| Paul Sanderson | 16 th |
| Marlene Joe | 22 th |
| Joe Gammal | 24 th |
| Carole Jolie | 23 rd |

Anniversaries in September

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| Jim & Cheryl Holmes | September 3 |
| Lou & Jennifer Dundin | September 13 |

Stewardship Moment

Thank you to everyone who is contributing to the United Parishes of Southborough Food Pantry, which is housed at Pilgrim Church. The food pantry presently serves approximately 75 families (161 individuals) from Southborough who are food insecure. Thanks to Jim Holmes, Dianne Simmons, Cheryl Holmes, and Darlene Sanderson, there is a container in our narthex to receive our contributions every week. You should be receiving an email from

Darlene each week letting you know what food or other items (diapers, laundry detergent, etc.) are especially needed.

Thank You!!

A deeply felt thank you to the church for sending a bouquet of beautiful flowers to my family and me and for the many cards I received following the sudden death of my younger brother, Joe.

Thank you to Bob Farmer for organizing and working the bottle-and-can drive that was held in June, and to Jim Holmes, Bob L'Heureux, Jr., and Andrea L'Heureux for helping. This fund-raiser, which we have held for over twenty years, brought in a total of \$447!

Thank you to the daughters of Patricia Grogan, a long-time member of our church, for their generous donation of all the materials needed to install a metal railing to make the walk from our parking lot to the back door a lot safer in the winter. The donation was given by Christine MacConnell, Joanne Dwyer, and Charlene Slocum. Joanne's husband, Tom, will once again be in charge of all the planning and labor.

Reminder--it's not too late for YOU to make your pledge! At present, we continue to draw from our Investment Fund to cover the budget deficit. Whatever you can do to help will be greatly appreciated!

BTW, this past year the members of our church contributed \$4,080 to our twelve mission recipients! That is approximately 15% of what our members pledged to the General Fund. If we did not reach out to those in great need, as we do, we would not be a church.

Prayer Concerns

"The prayer of faith will save the sick; therefore, pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective." (James 5)

Prayer Concerns: Current

Michael V., a good friend of Michael Larson and fellow organist who is struggling with cancer.

Pat, Diane Hagan's sister, who is receiving chemotherapy for breast cancer.

Benny, Darlene's cousin in Florida, who, while recovering from extensive intestinal surgery, has received two balloon stents to open up blood flow to his heart. He will have two more stents put in this coming week.

Pastor Paul, whose younger brother, Joe, passed away August 9.

Cheryl's brother, who is recovering from a kidney transplant.

Emily, who continues to struggle with debilitating hematological problems.

Cathy, who is continuing to receive treatment for post-shingles problems with both eyes.

Judy, Cathy's friend, who is recovering from extensive surgery.

Mike, Meredith, and Sophia. Mike is a psychologist colleague of Paul's. Sophia, their first child, who was born with a birth defect, has been struggling to stay alive, to breathe, and to feed. She is now six months old and is doing better. They live in North Carolina.

The family of Ron Sickles, who passed away August 7: Diane Sickles, his wife; David Sickles and Sharon Willman, Ron's brother and sister; and Ron and Diane's children and grandchildren, many of whom were married or baptized in our church.

Carole Jolie's sister, Thelma, is having a difficult time recovering from COVID and regaining her energy at age 94.

Paul, Don Jolie's niece's husband, who, in addition to serious kidney problems, has recently had extensive heart surgery.

Prayer List: Sustaining

Darcy Hilbert is a resident at Mary Ann Morse--Heritage (Memory Care/Assisted Living Unit) at 747 Water Street, Framingham, MA 01701.

Martha Hubley is a resident at Whitney Place (Unit 317) at 5 Lyman Street, Westborough, MA 01581,

Helen and Dick Varney are residents at Shrewsbury Nursing and Rehab Center, 40 Julio Drive, Shrewsbury, MA 01545. Their telephone is (508) 845-6786.

Carol ("Cricket") Port is residing at 12 Beach Street, Apt. 32A, Westborough, MA 01581. Her phone is (508) 329-1368.

Making Music!

Would you like to make music? Would you like to make special music that touches your soul and contributes to our Sunday morning worship? There is a place for you in our church choir! Rehearsals are held on most Tuesday afternoons at 4:30 p.m. – right after Spiritual Study & Growth Group meets. Make it an afternoon!!

The Church in the World

The ongoing war in the Middle East is troubling. The two “sides” are polarized, which means they each split the world into “good guys” and “bad guys.” A depth psychologist might suspect that each side is projecting its shadow onto the other, accusing the other of acts of terrorism and crimes against humanity that they are perpetrating as well.

As we know, when we project our shadow onto “the other,” whether the other is an individual, a group, a race, a religion, a people, or a nation, our honest self-reflection is radically diminished. We lose touch with a healthy sense of humility; and we forget that we are all children of God. Both sides in this tragic conflict could benefit from entering into an honest and searching prayer of confession.

Jesus tells us to take the beam from our own eye. If we do so, we will have a better chance of helping our brother to remove the speck that is in his eye.

Both the Israelis and Hamas have committed atrocities, crimes against humanity, and both harbor genocidal aspirations as evidenced by both their words and their actions. This makes it difficult for our government and other governments because the two sides do not need the unconditional support they seek; they both need to be restored to their right mind. Even on university campuses, the protests in support of each side are so polarized that participants cannot dialogue with each other, cannot listen to each other, cannot respect each other, cannot understand each other, and cannot work together for peace.

The two sides desperately need to listen to each other, to understand each other, and to work together to create a solution where both sides, both peoples can live in safety, in peace, and can experience the fruits of self-determination.

From what we know of Jesus, we suspect that what is happening to the people of Israel and Gaza doesn't make him happy. He expects more; he expects better of us.

Speaking of peace, we will be sending cards from our church communicating our love and support to the five open and affirming churches in eastern Massachusetts that recently experienced a hate crime in the destruction of their banners welcoming our LGBTQ brothers and sisters to their community of faith. This desecration was by a person or persons who, by his/her/their own description, identify as Christian. This must *really* make Jesus sad!

In our prayers, let us give thanks and express our support for Christ Lutheran Church and First Congregational Church in Natick, First Congregational Church in Norwood, First Congregational Church in Sharon, and St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Framingham for the spirit of inclusion, acceptance, and love in their churches and for taking a stand against these expressions of primitive tribalistic ignorance and hatred.

