

May
2020

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena

Board of Directors:

- **Dennis Artley**, treasurer
- **Bill Dempsey**
- **Blair Diamond**
- **Boris Gerber**
- **Ann Gerow**, vice-chair
- **Nancy Wedge**
- **Vicky Lindsay**
- **Jim Mc Neil**, chair
- **Beth Petty**

Dates to Remember

3

"virtual" worship
(see bulletin inside)

10

Mother's Day
"virtual" worship
(see bulletin inside)

17

Sunday worship
in the sanctuary
(we hope!)

19

5:30 pm Board Meeting
in Fellowship Hall
(on a Tuesday)

24

Sunday worship

25

Memorial Day
(office closed)

A Word From Our Minister: Facing "Suffering" Head On.

Rev. Dr. Paul A. Lance III

We enter now our second month of "social distance" precaution against corona-virus contagion. Our Board has again taken the advice of the state health department and **cancelled** all face-to-face gatherings, including Sunday worship, through at least **May 15**. This means we will not hold a "Mother's Day" service in our sanctuary, but most likely we will be back by "Father's Day" in June.

Kat Tomaszewski, Lynn Borke, and I have again coordinated a "virtual" worship service for both **May 3** and **May 10**. We try to capture as much of the front of the sanctuary as possible in the opening and closing video segments because the building itself **feels like "home"** to so many of us regular church goers. In this space we have worshiped and prayed, seen our children baptized & married, sung hymns and offered memorial services for our loved ones. We feel God's presence here in a special way.

My several short video "meditations" have been about staying **calm** and staying **centered** while we "**stay home**". In particular, I hope you have repeatedly watched the 5-minute meditation "A Celtic Blessing" with the waterfall, green scenery, and inspiring words.

My sermons, on the other hand, have challenged us to think not only about **resurrection**, but to confront grief, and death, and doubt. I told stories about a friend's Mother, lingering semi-comatose in a nursing home, and this Sunday I'll share the experience of another friend of mine who was dying of pancreatic cancer. These are not the typical "springtime" and "Alleluia-rejoicing" sermons of Easter-tide! But then, these are **not** typical days... not with the fear of getting sick, the dislocations of economic shut-down, and the interminable social isolation. For many of us this is a scary, lonely time. I think it is relevant to wrestle with "suffering" just now.

I have re-read the two classic books I hold here in my hands: Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' "**On Death and Dying**" and Rabbi Harold Kushner's "**When Bad Things Happen To Good People**".

No, they aren't the kinds of books to lift my spirits or to help me "**escape reality**". To the contrary, they help me **dig more deeply into it** in order to find the "gift" that these experiences may offer to us all. They will help to inform my sermons in the month of May.

Jesus came as "good news" for people who felt **helpless, hopeless, and hapless** – **people who felt trapped in situations** (and systems) of suffering over which they had no control. *That sound's familiar, doesn't it?* In the midst of hard times, confronting many kinds of dire diseases, and even when facing death itself, Jesus inspired a vision of living **a better, more abundant life**. Let's see if we can follow his lead even in this!

Be well, find meaningful things to do at home, and may God bless you!



First Congregational Church's "Monday Mid-day Movies" at 12:00 Noon in the upstairs Conference Room

May 18 — "**Freedom Writers**" (2007, 2 hours). Hilary Swank stars in this gripping true story of inner-city (Long Beach, CA) kids raised on drive-by shootings and hard-core attitude, and the Wilson High School teacher Erin Gruwell, who gives them the one thing they need most: a voice of their own. *Patty Lance is a graduate of Wilson High, and one scene in the film was shot near the Lance's own house.* In a school torn by violence and racial tension, this remarkable teacher battles an uncaring system in a fight to make the classroom matter in her students' lives. A group of supposedly "unteachable" teens will discover the power of tolerance, reclaim their shattered lives, and change their world. Directed by Richard LaGravenese. PG-13. (No movie on Memorial Day)

June 1 — "**The Pursuit of Happyness**" (2006, 2 hours). Will Smith plays Chris Gardner, a struggling single father who dreams of a better life for his son. Finding themselves homeless, he risks everything by embarking on an unpaid internship in a highly competitive stockbroker training program. Filmed in San Francisco, the movie chronicles the true story of Chris Gardner's struggle from the streets of inner-city Milwaukee to the pinnacle of Wall Street investment brokers. This is the first of six films dealing with Wall Street economics and its impact on real life Main Street.

June 8 — "**Wall Street**" (1987, 2 hours). In Oliver Stone's riveting, behind the scenes look at big business in the 1980's, an ambitious young stockbroker (Charlie Sheen) is lured into the illegal, lucrative world of corporate espionage and insider-trading when he is seduced by the status, money, and power of Wall Street legend Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas). This film includes the famous "Greed is good" speech of Wall Street values.

June 15 — "**Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps**" (2010, 133 minutes). Following a lengthy prison term, Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas) finds himself on the outside looking in at a financial world he once commanded. His daughter's fiancé, Jake (Shia LaBeouf), learns the hard way that Gekko is a master manipulator who will stop at nothing to put himself at the top.

June 22 — "**Inside Job**" (2010, 109 minutes, documentary). The global economic crisis of 2008 cost tens of millions of people their savings, their jobs, and their homes. This is how it happened. This documentary exposes the shocking truth behind the global financial meltdown, at a cost of over \$20 trillion, which we now call the "Great Recession". Meet the major financial insiders, politicians, and journalists whose corrosive relationships have corrupted American politics and government regulations, bailed out banks "too big to fail", and are still playing the game.

June 29 — "**The Big Short**" (2015, 130 minutes, docu-drama). When Wall Street banks and investment companies committed the greatest fraud in American history, four outsiders risked it all to take them down. Christian Bale, Steve Carell, Ryan Gosling, and Brad Pitt star in this unbelievable true story. Some of the perpetrators have become members of the Cabinet.

July 6 — "**Capitalism: A Love Story**" (2010, 2 hours, rated R for language). Michael Moore digs up some astonishing dirt through stories of the foreclosed and evicted, food stamp recipients, and fired factory workers. He shrewdly reveals the populist anger that swept USA.

“Main Street & Wall Street: Real World Economics”

Clearly the American (and global) economy is in a financial crisis due to the mandated dislocations related to the coronavirus pandemic. People are acting prudently by staying home (“out of harm’s way”), but some have reacted with fear – panic buying and hoarding of essential household supplies, for example – which has disrupted normal “supply” to consumers. Some store shelves are bare. Bars and restaurants are closed to customers. “Main Street” has taken a severe financial hit even before the virus itself has spread widely.

Basic economics deal with **supply** and **demand** – the production of goods and services (“supply”) for which there is a commercial market (“demand”). Under normal circumstances, the “free market” enables a flow of goods and services from where they are produced to where they are wanted – to “consumers”, who pay a price for them.

The significant shut-down of businesses and services has pulled the Wall Street “Dow Jones Industrial Average” stock portfolios and bond market prices down almost one quarter of their former value just since Feb. 19. In most transactions, when prices are low, people buy more. But the fears of even more losses in market value keep buyers wary and away. Financial worries can paralyze a person. How can we be helpful?

Bill Dempsey, a retired financial advisor, and I will host a series of **discussions** about basic concepts and vocabulary related to the American economy on Tuesdays at 12:00 noon. Bring a sack lunch to the Conference Room (if the group is small) or Fellowship Hall (if attendance is big) where we’ll do two things: (1) discuss implications from the **Monday Midday Movie** shown the day before (see list of films on page 2 of this Newsletter), and (2) explain basic economic concepts and vocabulary.

For example, on our first session (Tuesday, June 2), I will show a PowerPoint about **what is “average”?** When a news commentator or politician says something is “average”, what comes to mind? Often we think it means what is “typical” (modal). But they may be referring to the mid-point among all options (median), or it could be an arithmetic calculation (mean). **Statistics don’t lie**, but liars know how to **use** statistics to their advantage. Averages, relationships, and trends are not always what they seem! These discussions will help **clear the fog about what “economics” is**, the role of profits & losses, the “free market” and prices, regulations and non-market economies, wages & un-earned income, and so forth. **Is greed good?** What is a “consumer” economy? **Who pays tariffs, taxes, and fees?** We’ll talk about the federal budget and “deficit spending”, Treasury notes and the staggering national debt, how money and the banking system work, government functions and finance, etc. **(June 2 until July 7)**

— Rev. Paul Lance

One Great Hour of Sharing Update — Boris Gerber

Due to the virus crisis, our church service was cancelled this year on our One Great Hour of Sharing Sunday, March 22. Unfortunately, we’ll have to wait a year for our delicious Stone Soup luncheon! If you haven’t had the chance, and still would like to make a donation, **the need is still great**. Just send your donation to the church marked “**for OGHS**”. One Great Hour of Sharing is the offering of the United Church of Christ that supports disaster, refugee, and development actions. This offering supports partners in countries with ministries that fund health, education and agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries and both international and domestic disaster response.

Monday Morning Bible Study Starts 6-sessions on “The Prophets” — Confronting Today’s “Pharaohs”

Through a DVD lecture series, our 10:00 am Monday Bible Study will engage “**Embracing the prophets in contemporary culture**” with Old Testament Professor **Walter Brueggemann**, who is considered the UCC’s most renowned scholar and theologian. Each of the six sessions begin with a 10-15 minute presentation by Brueggemann followed by filmed interaction with a diverse small group. Our own small group meeting in the upstairs Conference Room will dialog among ourselves as we respond to the video.

- June 1 – Moses, Pharaoh, the Prophets, and Us
- June 8 – The Prophets as Uncredentialed Purveyors of Covenant
- June 15 – Moral Coherence in a World of Power, Money, & Violence
- June 22 – The Shrill Rhetoric that Breaks Denial
- June 29 – The Grief of Loss as Divine Judgment
- July 5 – The Promissory Language that Breaks Despair

Ladies’ Luncheon

The monthly Ladies’ Luncheon will not meet again until September. Stay well as you stay home. God loves you, and so do we.

A MISSION MOMENT

Thus far, you have donated...

\$307 to “Souper Bowl of Sharing” in Feb.
 \$1,000 to COVID19 relief fund (United Way)
This amount was “matched” by a DTE grant.
 \$1,317 to One Great Hour of Sharing (March)
 ...and we are collecting **now** for Mother’s Day Church World Service Blankets. Thank you!

Thursday 1:00 p.m.

Church History Class Topics

- May 21 “Living Under Norman Rule”
- May 28 “Being Medieval”
- June 4 “Being Poor in the Middle Ages”
- June 11 “Being a Medieval Woman”
- June 18 “Being a Medieval Christian...
or Heretic” (*final class*)

*We will use the big TV on the stage in **Fellowship Hall** for these classes (as well as the Thursday morning lectures on “ecology” described on the next page). With only three chairs on each of eight tables, there will be ample space around each person to maintain “social distance” for all participants. Stay well.*

Rev. Keith Titus wrote a book: “***This I Believe (I think), or “Thus Saith the Lord (if I heard correctly)”***”

We have a few copies at the church if you’d like to read it.. Keith and Ginny will be inviting us into their home on Sunday afternoons in June & July to share wine and bread and *hors d’oeuvres* in order to discuss the content. Start date for the group is not yet certain.

“Earth at the Crossroads: Understanding the Ecology of a Changing Planet”

(10 DVD lectures by Prof. Eric Strauss, Boston College)

Thursday Mornings **10:30 am** to 11:30 am upstairs in Fellowship Hall

With so much concern and emotion being focused on **global climate change**, the spread of **disease** among human societies, and the **impact** that humans have on our planet, Joyce Murphy and I have chosen this “*Great Course*” to educate ourselves (and anyone else in our community) about how our “eco-system” is evolving and affecting our bodies.

The science of **ecology** studies the structure of living communities and how they interact and evolve. We live in a shared habitat on a dynamic planet. The field of ecology has developed “holistic” models that help us understand, protect, and benefit from our environment. Topics as varied as a **volcano** eruption, **deforestation** in Borneo, **methane** production from cattle, to a diamondback **terrapin** colony and **cod-fish** off Cape Cod, we will investigate theories and data of how communities of plants and animals interact. Here are the lecture topics, beginning with a two-part introduction:

- May 28 – An Ecological Diagnosis of the Living Earth (2 lectures)
- June 4 – The Human Shift to an Urban Lifestyle
- June 11 – Human Impacts on Animal Migration
- June 18 -- Cities and the Human Demographic Transition
- June 25 – Co-evolution among Species
- July 2 – The Co-evolution of Human Diseases
- July 9 – Strategies for Reversing Ecosystem Decline
- July 16 – Toward Sustainable Urban Ecosystems
- July 23 – Recovering Ecosystems – Hope for the Future

Professor Strauss is the director of the Environmental Studies Program and teaches biology at Boston College, a Jesuit university. He is the senior author of the textbook “*Biology: The Web of Life*”.

First Congregational United Church of Christ
201 South Second Avenue
Alpena, MI 49707

Phone: 989-356-1795 Fax 989-356-8825
Web Site: <http://uccalpena.org>
Email: officeuccalp@gmail.com
Office Hours: 9:00 am — 1:00 pm Monday — Thursday

Sunday Worship: 10:00 am
(we anticipate resuming on May 17)

Minister: Rev. Dr. Paul A. Lance III
Pastor Emeritus: Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case
Choir Director/Organist: Kat Tomaszewski
Treasurer: Denise Fusina
Secretary: Bri Fastnaught
Custodian: Mike LaMarre

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena

Birthdays and **Anniversaries in May**

5/4 Sharon Rickard

5/5 Ann Gerow

John Briggs

5/11 Rev. Gene & Karen Bacon

- 47 years

5/21 Debra Dempsey

5/22 Steve Bailey

Beverly Bodem

Jack Caplis

5/29 Ray Moore

Peggy DiNegro

5/30 Rev. Bob Case



Vacation Bible School - Cancelled!

ACE Vacation Bible School was scheduled this year for July 6-10. However, the four college youth that come from the Living Waters camp have had their training program cancelled. These youth would have provided the leadership that makes for a quality Vacation Bible School each summer. The ACE-VBS Committee regrets having to cancel Alpena's event. If you have any other ideas for our church children to gather this summer, please contact Beth Petty at (989) 916 - 6931.