

July
2021

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena

Board of Directors:

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

Dates to Remember

July 4
In person & Virtual
Worship

July 4
Independence Day

July 5
Church Closed

July 11
In person & Virtual
Worship
along with 50 Year
member recognition

July 12
Board Meeting at 5:30pm
If not vaccinated, Covid
guidelines to follow

July 18
In person & Virtual
Worship with
Rev. Gene Bacon

July 25
In person and & Virtual
Worship



A Word From Our Minister:

Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case

A Message from the Transitional Minister

One of the tasks of a transitional minister is to help the congregation understand who they are as a member of the United Church of Christ. It is not to do long term planning, but to help the congregation understand what their responsibilities are as a member of the UCC.

The Preamble of the Constitution sets out the general purpose of the denomination. It is "to express more fully the oneness in Christ of the churches composing it, to make more effective their common witness in Him, and to serve His kingdom in the world."

After laying out the general purpose of the UCC the second paragraph of the preamble states: "The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole Head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior. It acknowledges as kindred in Christ all who share in this confession. It looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world."

I would like to think about this second section today. I often hear "in the UCC each congregation can do what it wants to do, and no one can tell it what to do". At one level this is correct, but at a deeper level I believe it is incorrect. It is more helpful to say each congregation can reflect its understanding of how to faithfully follow Christ in this time and place. The issue is not what does the congregation want to do, but how does it faithfully follow Jesus the Christ as disciples.

When I taught ethics at Alpena Community College, one of the issues we talked about was how ethics was not very helpful if it always agreed with what you wanted to do. The same is true in the UCC. If God's will is always what you want to do then God would simply reflect what you want. However, we know this is not true. Following Jesus can be difficult as we are called to love our enemies, do good to those that persecute us and to forgive those who have wronged us. Which of us has not been called to act above and beyond what we wanted to do?

The question is how do we find out how to faithfully follow Jesus? I would love to write a long paper on this, but in a short newsletter article we must make do with some hints. Reflect on the Lord's Prayer and "Thy Kingdom come, and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Every Sunday we pray to be open to God's will.

Listen to **Micah 6:8** "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Do our lives and decisions reflect these three values?

What would Jesus do or better yet, what would a disciple of Jesus do? How do we act faithfully to being a disciple of the Risen Lord? Yes, Jesus is the head of the church rather than the congregation, so every decision should seek to be faithful to Jesus the Christ. Before every decision, spend time in prayer seeking that God's will should be done. Even Jesus prayed "Not my will but Thine be done." We should empty ourselves seeking God's Spirit to help us rise above our desires and to seek God's desire. Jesus said we would be known by reflecting God's love. When people inside and outside the church see us, do they say "see how they love one another"?

Conversation is critical. We believe that God works through the church, not just through individuals and in honest open discussion we can all reach a better resolution than each of us standing alone. We believe the congregation is better at reflecting God's will than any Bishop, Pastor or someone or thing outside the local situations. Truly listening and expressing our understanding is critical to seeking the Spirit's guidance.

Finally in this short attempt to understand to whom we are responsible, ask the question I try always to ask; "Am I truly seeking to express God's will or am I only reflecting my own desires and comfort?"

I hope this helps you understand a little bit better who we are as a member of the United Church of Christ.

Grace and Peace, Bob, Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case
Transitional Minister

Welcoming Task Force Created!

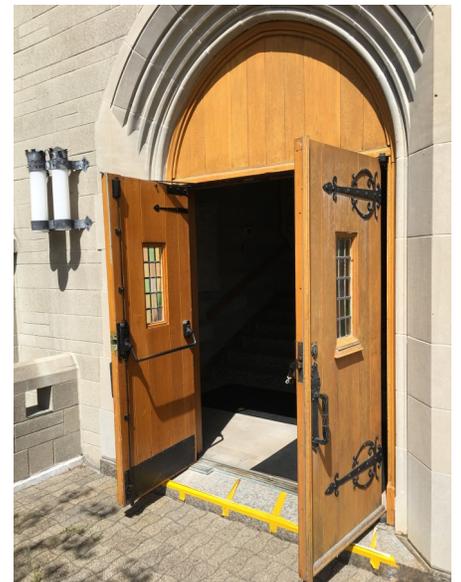
At the June 14 Board Meeting, responding to the desire of 30 of our members, the Board of Directors officially recognized a new committee, passing this motion: We propose that an exploratory committee of interested persons be formed to review resources and design an Open & Affirming study/discussion process, to be undertaken in the current year. The study and discussion activities will be open to all opinions, each individual viewpoint will be heard and respected. This process could lead to a congregational decision at some future date.

Here are a few of the comments Dr. Aten presented at the Board Meeting: **Open and Affirming Presentation**

I speak as a member of a group of interested members who wish to explore a Welcoming process, that could lead to the affirmation of the Alpena UCC congregation as Open and Affirming in our relationship to our LGBTQ members, and the wider community. I think we can all agree that our congregation has served as leaders, time and again, in our mission for our community. Examples are everywhere, and proudly displayed on our website. It seems fitting that once again the Congregational Church of Alpena should be the leaders in inclusiveness and hospitality for all. Our ad hoc group has thought and prayed about what we really mean, when we say “no matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here”. LGBTQ people in communities bear fear and suspicion of institutions (legal, political, religious, medical, educational), and need to know where they will be safe and valued. Studies of congregations who have completed a Welcoming Process demonstrate that they are more likely to remain intact, engage in other justice issues, experience low levels of conflict, broaden their membership, and clarify their theology, missions, and shared faith experiences. The Welcoming Process follows a time frame that allows for all members to study their beliefs in open and respectful dialogue. After formation of an official committee, there is a period of learning, discovery, and discussion, with free sharing of thoughts, beliefs, anxieties, and experiences, often in dialogue with persons or allies of the LGBTQ community. A Welcoming Statement is then drafted, when consensus has occurred. If strong support is indicated by anonymous congregational polling, a congregational meeting and decision may take place. I see this as an opportunity for us all to discuss and assimilate new ways of growth and change, and search our hearts for a deeper understanding and stronger relationship to people who identify as LGBTQ. Each month, as we share communion, we invite all to “build us a table, and tear down the walls, with Christ as our host, there is room for us all”.

-Respectfully, Avery J Aten MD

Our process of study and discernment will begin soon, look for upcoming opportunities for discussion and sharing of thoughts. For more information, or interest in joining the committee, please speak to any of the following: Marcia and Dr. Avery Aten, Terry Bell, Edith and Boris Gerber, Marilyn and Jay Kettler, and Beth Petty.



June 14th Board Meeting Summarization:

*Dr. Avery Aten gave a presentation before the board asking for support to explore a Welcoming process that could lead to an Open and Affirming congregation. This is basically a four step process. After much discussion, “We propose that an exploratory committee of interested persons be formed to review resources and design and Open and Affirming study/discussion process to be undertaken in the current year. “ This process could lead to a congregational decision at a future date.

*Financial reports are good as our costs have been down due to no full time minister.

*Covid response- The state will be opening as of July 1. Alpena County is moving in the right direction regarding the infection rate and positive test rate. The church is to open fully on July 1 as well. This would mean, removing ropes from pews, open to outside groups, and even putting the hymnals back in the pews. We still plan on holding off on passing the offering plates and we will still use prepackaged water cups for now.

*Elevator proposal- The board thought it would be best to wait until winter and make sure the elevator does not sit at the lower level. It was also brought up that it would be financially appropriate to start an elevator fund.

*Property committee presented a quote from Meridian Contracting to refinish the exterior doors. Some were not pleased with the work done before. A board member will look around for other companies that perform this type of work. To be continued next month.

*Rev. Case and Jim McNeil will compose a letter to the congregation informing what the fully reopening of the church will look like. Gene Bacon has agreed to preach every 3rd Sunday of the month as the search process continues.

*50 year members’ recognition will be held July 11th. More information closer to that date.

Food Pantry needs:

Au Gratin & Scallop box potatoes
 4 packs of Jell-O &/or Pudding Cups
 Hamburger, Tuna, Chicken helper - box
 Spaghetti Sauce – prefer canned
 Suddenly Salad in a box or pouch

****Food will be delivered at the end of the month***

Sunday Fellowship Hour- Hostess Scheduling –

As we go forward in “returning to normal” church activities, we want to set-up our Sunday Fellowship Hour Hostess Schedule. For the balance of this year, we are in need of Hostess help for several remaining months. A Hostess sign-up sheet is located on the sign-up table in the back hallway, different months are listed where Hostess help is needed. We welcome new people to join our Hostess group. We’re most willing to train folks not acquainted with the kitchen and set-up for Fellowship Hour service. We try to assign two persons/couples each month to share the Hostess duties. I will contact each Hostess for final selected month assignment. Our Fellowship Hour has been a real “Social ministry” for our congregation. We’re most anxious to get started, so please sign-up.

Thanks, Bill Haase

Hostesses needed for July, August, October and November. Sign up sheet in hallway!

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: 10:00 am – 2:00 pm Monday – Thursday

Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m.–
In person and Virtual

Transitional Minister: Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case
Choir Director/Organist:: Kat Tomaszewski
Treasurer: Denise Fusina
Secretary: Kristi Blackaby
Custodian: Mike LaMarre

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena

Birthdays and Anniversaries in July

Birthdays:

Allison Modrzynski	7/9
Charlotte Wilson	7/12
John Caplis	7/13
Wendy Lewis	7/16
Boris Gerber	7/20
Esther Donald-Briggs	7/25
Edith Gerber	7/26
Dennis Bodem	7/27

Anniversaries:

Dennis & Janet Artley	61 years
Jeffrey & Ann Gerow	38 years
Paul & Patty Lance	43 years
John & Laura Caplis	18 years
Esther Donald-Briggs & John Briggs	21 years

