

January  
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*
- *Ann Gerow, vice-chair*
- *Nancy Wedge*
- *Vicky Lindsay*
- *Jim Mc Neil, chair*
- *Beth Petty*

## Dates to Remember

Jan. 3  
Virtual Sunday Worship

Jan. 10  
Virtual Sunday Worship

Jan. 11  
**Board Meeting** in  
Fellowship Hall 5:30pm  
Everyone is welcome  
(masks required to enter;  
seated more than 6-feet  
apart)

Jan. 17  
Virtual Sunday Worship

Jan. 24  
Virtual Sunday Worship  
Annual Meeting (*tentative*)

Jan. 31  
Virtual Sunday Worship



## A Word From Our Minister: A Blessed and Merry Christmas

Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case

### From the Pastor



I find this article different from other Christmas Articles because I do want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas but that needs to also realize this Christmas is not like any other we have celebrated. We can give statistics and they can be depressing, over 300,000 of our fellow Americans are dead, not counting the millions more over the world that we dare not forget, and the great deep division in our country. Divisions that are not based on current or historical fact but on wild stories, many created out of thin air. Having said that it doesn't seem to hit the needed notes because we are all aware at some level of the unusual situation we are in.

The question Jesus asks in the gospel is the question we need to ask today and tomorrow and next week. *"Who do you say that I am?"* As my old seminary professor used to ask *"... and what difference does it make in your life."* Two sermons I have given in the past month or so have turned the direction of my faith journey in a challenging and exciting way. As I approach Jesus' crib this Christmas differently than ever before. Paul's admonition to have our minds transformed from the thinking of this world, the Gospel's call to abide in God as God abides in us, the call to have the faith of Christ and to have the mind of Christ. Those are the ideas I am struggling with this Christmas season. It doesn't work to simply say the Christ child is born without asking what that means in our individual and corporate life. The wonderful Christmas hymn *O Little Town of Bethlehem* says it clearly. *"O holy Child of Bethlehem descend to us, we pray"... and ... "enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell. O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel."* Be born in us today! What does that mean?

Our faith is not simply believing in things about Jesus as if that was enough but how does it transform our lives? Are we closer to God or maybe we should say are we more aware of the presence of God as we look at Emmanuel? As Christians if our faith is not rooted in the reality of this world and the graciousness of a life changing God then we are open to all sorts of conspiracy theories and the anger of this world. To understand that we are "all made in the image of God" and there is no "longer Jew nor Greek, male or female" and that it really isn't us against them whoever "them" might be.

So I wish you a Merry Christmas and may the Christ child be born in us today.

Bob

## Recording the Virtual Worship

There is good news on the video front. Several members have commented on how they like the new recording of our worship service. We wish to thank Gordon LeTourneau and Tim LaFleche who have done an excellent job, helping us to pick out, install, and guide us in use of the new system. It has been a pleasure working with them. We have been using the new system the last few weeks. If you have any comment about the quality or presentation of our worship service please let Rev. Case or Kat Tomaszewski know how you feel.

## Virtual Worship Success

There has been a significant increase in Virtual Worship viewing and participation. We are now averaging over 130 views, with the largest being 154. We did have trouble putting it online one week with technical difficulties. The Stand Alone Children's Sermon is averaging around 30 views per week. The difficulty with these figures is that we are not sure who is watching multiple times, which views are families, and who they are exactly. Right now we think we can be very satisfied with the response to our worship services. We plan on keeping virtual presentation even when we go back to in-person worship.



## Covid 19

The Board of Directors and its sub-committee, Jim McNeil, Bill Dempsey, Kat Tomaszewski and Rev. Case, continue to monitor the changing situation. We have tried updating the Facebook and website with the latest information. The sub-committee is updated twice a week on Monday and Thursday. As of the writing of this newsletter we are still rated in the Severe category by the Covid Now website. The good news is that the rating of Alpena that started out as 80<sup>th</sup> out of 83 counties, and went as high as 4<sup>th</sup>, is now trending downward and we are now fourteenth in the state on December 15<sup>th</sup>. Please contact Rev. Case or a subcommittee member, and don't forget to look at Facebook. Also if you have any ideas or comments about the reopening of the church we would like to hear them.

## Annual Meeting

As of the writing of this Newsletter article, the Board has set the annual meeting date as January 24<sup>th</sup>. We are planning on a combination in-person and ZOOM annual meeting. However, the annual meeting can take place anytime within six weeks of the previous year. Please watch and listen for a possible change of plan depending on the situation of Covid in Alpena County.



## Zoom Fellowship Hour

Have you heard about our new Zoom Fellowship Hour? Starting on Sunday, December 20 a few of our church members began checking in, via Zoom, with friends to see how they are doing during this seemingly unending pandemic period. We are now hosting a weekly Zoom meeting on **Sundays at 1 pm** for all and anyone interested in attending.

Hopefully we will be able to return to in person worship somewhat soon. When we start again, for those who do attend service, we may not be able to have Fellowship Hour, instead once again requiring orderly and quick exiting from the sanctuary, without the chance to check in with friends. We know some of our members have not and will not be able to attend Sunday service. And we have our snow birds down in Florida and others elsewhere around the country!

At the Zoom meeting, anyone can see and hear others they have missed seeing after church and at church functions. Attendance would completely be at the option of the individual, to attend whenever they like.

If you are new to Zoom or would like to find out more about Zoom drop an email to either the church or Rev. Case and we will get back to you ASAP.

If you have any interest in attending the Zoom Fellowship Hour, please email your interest to the church office [officeuccalp@gmail.com](mailto:officeuccalp@gmail.com) (using the email address you wish to use to receive the Zoom invitation), and your email address will be put on the weekly invitation list. On Sundays the Zoom invitation will be emailed at approximately 12:30 pm, with the meeting starting at 1:00.

We look forward to Zooming with you!

## Note from Janet Artley

Many of you know that I had an accident a couple of weeks ago. I am home now and getting better every day. Because of all of you, my prognosis is good. So many prayers, cards, phone calls and wonderful meals have been the important part of my healing. Dennis and my family are taking good care of me. I look forward to seeing and worshiping with you soon. Thank you for your blessings and your caring. Love to all my church family. *Janet & Dennis Artley*

## Note from Hope Shores Alliance



Hope Shores Alliance (HSA) is looking to establish partnerships with landlords to assist survivors of domestic and sexual violence to find safe affordable housing. HSA supports survivors in multiple ways based on individual survivors' needs, this could include rental payments for up to 24 months. If you're a landlord and would like help finding tenants, please get in touch via phone 989.356.2560 or email [contactus@hopeshores.org](mailto:contactus@hopeshores.org).



*First Congregational United Church of Christ*  
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*Alpena, MI 49707*

Phone: 989-356-1795 Fax 989-356-8825  
Web Site: <http://uccalpena.org>  
Email: [officeuccalp@gmail.com](mailto:officeuccalp@gmail.com)  
Office Hours: 10:00 am – 2:00 pm Monday – Thursday

**Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m.–**  
**Virtual Only**

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

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## **Birthdays and **Anniversaries** in January**

**1/10 Herbert Knowlton,**

**Max Lindsay**

**1/12 Lillian Banas,**

**Vicky Lindsay,**

**Kathy Thomas**

**1/13 James Park**

**1/17 Bev Olsen**

**1/23 Vernie Nethercut**

***1/26 Joan & Sonny Chrzan***

**1/31 Jennie Morey**

**HAPPY  
NEW  
YEAR**