

May
2022

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena

Board of Directors

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- Bill Dempsey
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Dates to Remember

Sunday, May 1
Worship Service

Sunday, May 8
Worship Service
and
Happy Mothers Day!

Monday, May 9
Board of Directors
Meeting

Sunday, May 15
Worship Service

Sunday, May 22
Worship Service

Sunday, May 29
Worship Service

Monday, May 30
Office Closed
Happy Memorial
Day!



Christ the Lord Is Risen Today!

Reverend Dr. H. Robert Case

Christ the Lord is Risen today! I know I have shared with many of you what one of my professors in seminary would say: “*So what? What difference does it make in the way we live?*” This is a question I still ask myself often and especially during the week following Easter. Christ the Lord is Risen Today!! I believe one place we can start is by thinking about the message in this poem by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I pray you find as much meaning in this as I do.

This poem is haunting, beautiful and more than a little challenging. It was written from Bonhoeffer’s prison cell as he awaited his execution by the Nazi’s in Hitler’s Germany. He was one of a few Christian pastors and teachers who stood up to the anger, hatred and destruction of Hitler’s Germany. As we hear neo-Nazis making claims of white supremacy, and the division and anger in our nation it might help us if we read and listened to people like Bonhoeffer. Who are we called to be, and to whom do we belong? His book “Cost of Discipleship” may be one of the best manuals for living a Christian life today.

Who Am I?

By Dietrich Bonhoeffer in “Letters & Papers from Prison”

*Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell’s confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a Squire from his country house.*

*Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.*

*Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
Equably, smilingly, proudly,
Like one accustomed to win.*

*Am I then really that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat,
Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
Tossing in expectation of great events,*

(“Who Am I?” continued on Page 2)

("Who Am I?" continued from page 1)

*Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all.*

Who am I? This or the Other?

Am I one person to-day and to-morrow another?

Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,

And before myself a contemptible woebegone weakling?

Or is something within me still like a beaten army

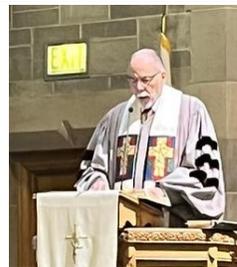
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.

Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!

Easter Celebrations

Nearly 40 people braved the frigid, windy, refreshing weather to attend our 6:30am Easter Sunrise Service at the Boat Harbor.



10am Easter Sunday Worship Service

Many thanks to all who so graciously gave of your time and talents to help make our Holy Week journey meaningful and our Easter celebrations joyous!

Ministers in Motion

Judy Suszek, Office Administrator



Our transitional ministers, Reverend Bob Case and Reverend Gene Bacon continue to alternate months of service. Reverend Bacon is ministering during the month of May. He will perform all weekly worship services and any additional services, funerals, weddings, baptisms, visits/calls that occur during the month. As always, to reach Reverend Bacon you may call the church office at 989-356-1795, call him directly at 989-340-0358, or email him at alpucppastor@gmail.com.

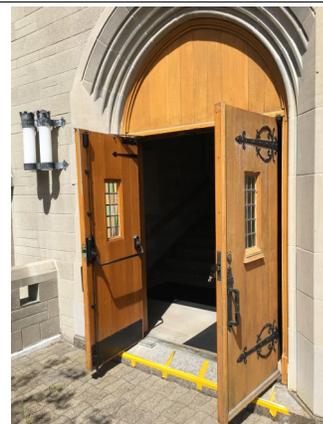


Congregational Conversations

Avery Aten, Chair, Welcoming Committee

The Welcoming Committee invites one and all to attend small group discussions. We'll sit around a table in Fellowship Hall and share thoughts and experiences on topics such as:

- What do we mean when we say "whoever you are, and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here"? Do you think some people fear rejection due to age, poverty, substance abuse, race, ethnicity, LGBTQ identity, and won't come "through our doors" to find out that we are truly welcoming?
- How can we let people who are not attending our church know they are welcome here?
- Does anyone here have family or friends who are LGBTQ?
- What does "Open & Affirming" mean to you? Do you have anxiety or concerns about our church changing if we become Open & Affirming?
- What is your understanding of our church's role in the community?
- How do you envision our church 5 years from now?



These will be open discussions, just the sharing of thoughts, with about 8-10 participants per session. Our first two sessions (more to be scheduled later) will be held in May:

- After Fellowship Hour on Sunday, May 15 (a light lunch will be served).
- On Friday May 20 at 7 pm (a light supper will be served).

A sign-up list to attend one of these sessions is located on the table in the Narthex, or call the church office at 989-356-1795. With questions or for more information, please contact a member of the Welcoming Committee: Avery & Marcia Aten, Terry Bell, Bill Dempsey, Bill & Dottie Haase, Boris & Edith Gerber, Jay & Marilyn Kettler, Beth Petty. To help us schedule future sessions, please let us know if other meeting dates or times are preferable, we'll schedule additional sessions to accommodate everyone. Please come, we want and need to hear the thoughts of all our members and friends.

Just for giggles...

*The prospective father-in-law asked, "Young man, can you support a family?"
The surprised groom-to-be replied, "Well, no. I was just planning to support your daughter; the rest of you will have to fend for yourselves!"*

Blanket Appeal

Boris Gerber, Mission Committee

Church World Service Blanket Appeal - Mother's Day, May 8



On Sundays May 1 and May 8, you have the opportunity to give the gift of a blanket to someone in need. Church World Service blankets provide comfort as well as protection from harsh weather for refugees, the homeless, and victims of national disasters throughout the world. The simple gesture of giving a blanket to someone in need is an act of compassion with enormous significance. Each person wrapped in a blanket is enveloped in a sense of warmth, safety and love. It's a priceless feeling – just like a mother's touch!

Mother's Day Blanket Gift Cards are available to acknowledge your gifts. In addition, for each \$10 blanket purchased, you may fill out a "honor heart" with the name of an important woman in your life (mother, grandmother, wife, daughter, granddaughter, sister, ...). The hearts are pinned on our blanket in the sanctuary. By Mother's Day help us completely cover the blanket with love!

If you are not able to attend a "live" church service, and wish to purchase blankets, just send your check (made out to First Congregational Church, with note "for blankets") to the church office, with a note listing the names of the important women (or men!) in your life that you wish to honor, and "honor hearts" will be prepared and pinned to our sanctuary blanket. Donations will be accepted any-time in May.

When difficult times happen, a kind and loving response can make all the difference. CWS Blankets give a kind, loving and tangible response to someone facing a difficult time, reminding them that they are not alone, helping our most vulnerable neighbors around the world feel safe and keep warm. When our neighbors are in need, the gift of a blanket goes a long way!

What Will Be the Design on this Year's "Honor Heart" Blanket Banner?



Thank You



A note of thanks...

Extending our sincere gratitude to your congregation for your continued support of our food pantry. May God continue to bless you.

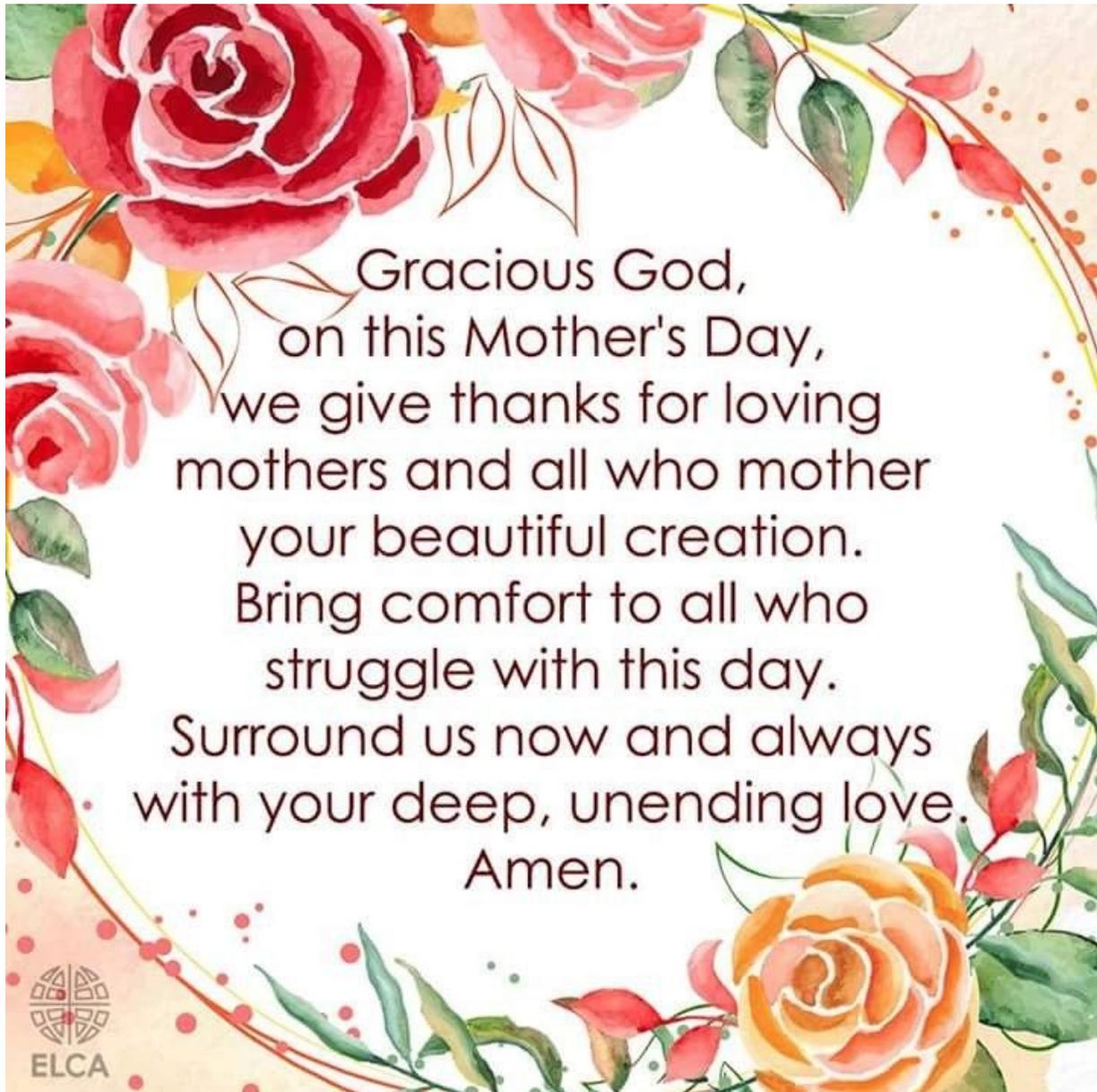
~Cathy Ceci, The Salvation Army Food Pantry

A friendly reminder...

Fellowship Hour hosting help is needed for June, July, and August. See sign-up sheet on table behind sanctuary. For questions or concerns, please contact Bill Haase at 989-916-4104 or dsbhaase@live.com.



A PRAYER FOR MOTHERS AND THOSE WHO ARE MOTHER FIGURES AND ALL WOMEN WHO GIVE SO MUCH TO SO MANY



Gracious God,
on this Mother's Day,
we give thanks for loving
mothers and all who mother
your beautiful creation.
Bring comfort to all who
struggle with this day.
Surround us now and always
with your deep, unending love.
Amen.



First Congregational United Church of Christ
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Web Site: <http://uccalpena.org>
Email: officeuccalp@gmail.com
Office Hours: 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Monday – Thursday

Sunday Worship: 10:00 a.m.
In person and Online

Transitional Pastors: Rev. Dr. H. Robert Case
and Rev. Eugene Bacon

Organist/Choir Director: Kat Tomaszewski

Treasurer: Denise Fusina

Office Administrator: Judy Suszek

Custodian: Mike LaMarre

Still Speaking

Newsletter of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Alpena

May Celebrations

Birthdays

Sharon Rickard	May 4	Jack Caplis	May 22
John Briggs	May 5	Ray Moore	May 29
Ann Gerow	May 5	James Standen	May 29
Debra Dempsey	May 21	Reverend Bob Case	May 30
Steve Bailey	May 22		



Anniversary

Reverend Gene and Karen Bacon May 11 49 Years



Wishing you a fun and safe
Memorial Day Weekend!

Choir Corner

Kat Tomaszewski, Choir Director and Organist

GOD IS ALWAYS ONE STEP AHEAD

Sunday's worship service started like any other. The choir arrived, we practiced and warmed up, I laid my hymnals out, and the livestream team began setting up the microphones. Marilyn Kettler asked a fellow actor from the current play she is in, Lilies of the Field at the Alpena Civic Theater, to come and sing "Let There Be Peace on Earth" for our prelude this week. Music is very important to this church, and to me, and I was really excited to bring in a new person to be a part of our worship service.

Nate arrived at the end of choir rehearsal and Jay and Marilyn were helping him get set up. As I was walking back to the sound room, Bill Dempsey pulled me aside. He had no idea who Nate was or why he was at our church – yet.

Bill asked me if we could start to incorporate some contemporary Christian music into our services. I agreed with him and briefly discussed some ideas, but our conversation was short.

It's now 13 minutes till the service and I go to open our livestream software and each time I try to open the software, the program crashes. Again and again and again. In this moment of panic, I heard Nate warming up, playing the guitar and singing some contemporary worship tunes, just as Bill and I had discussed moments before.

I was able to quickly determine why and what the solution was with our software, but it was going to take some time to fix the issue and get the stream going. When we have 60 people viewing from home and 60 people in the church, we have a responsibility to make sure our stream is always working. I explained what was going on to Lynn Borke and asked her to find Nate and bring him to me. She did, and I asked him if he could play some worship tunes while I fixed our livestream. He was surprised but willing to step up and help!

Here's what I learned:

God knows our needs better than anyone. He knew what was going to happen on Sunday. He knew that Nate's presence would be necessary. He told Nate what to warm up on so it would plant the seed in my mind to ask him to help us fill the space in our service while I fixed our software and stream.

God tells us to trust in him and to find our strength in him. When we first discovered the program bugs, our team could have reacted in many different ways. We could have been stressed, feeling frustrated, flustered and let it affect us. But, we didn't. With God by our side, we can face any challenge. The team leapt into action, bringing all the little pieces together to mend the program as quickly as possible.

Our church is amazing. Nate showed up with the intention of singing one song during the prelude and then leaving to go to his own church. As a new person, he was concerned if he would be welcomed at our church. We showed him love and kindness. After he sang his first few songs while our livestream team fixed the streaming program, I asked the church if they would mind Nate singing one more song, the song he came to sing. He was greeted with excitement and applause, encouraging another song.

We cannot control things sometimes, no matter how hard we try. It's important to recognize the God moments, the God winks, when they happen. Find peace in the unexpected because sometimes the unexpected blessings are so much more than we could ever plan or prepare for.

In my mind, it is in these moments where God shows us he is always with us - in the good times AND the most stressful times. I think it's important to look back and see that and to train ourselves to see it in the moment.

Thank you for your kindness and flexibility shown on Sunday!

God
IS IN
control
(AND)
His Timing
IS PERFECT