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Minister's Message

It seems like ages ago when we had several sessions with John Laster as he helped us determine the feasibility of a capital campaign. The feasibility report was encouraging; we had wide-spread participation and were about to begin the next phase. Then—COVID-19.

Like so many programs and activities, we must postpone the capital campaign, but there are portions that are still moving ahead. Our Trustees will still be working to fine-tune our plans and projected costs of various projects (and we may have some encouraging news about the roof!). Rev. Ben and I have been meeting with John Laster weekly to help us navigate this pandemic wilderness. I am confident when we reach the other side of this crisis we will be poised for new dimensions of ministry rather than playing “catch up.”

When the time is right—and that may be next year—we plan to move forward with the capital campaign. Our plans have certainly been disrupted, but all the elements of church vitality, resources and faithfulness remain.

During this time of such uncertainty, I remain grateful for the work of God’s Spirit among us and for the hope that is ours in the Risen Christ.

With Great Hope,
 Rev. Nathan Miller

Dear Families,

It has certainly been a time of adjustment as we’ve been discovering ways to go about our home, school, work, family, and leisure lives in the midst of uncertain change. First Congregational Church seeks to continue to offer ways for our community to stay connected. We have opportunities each week for our kids and youth to gather over Zoom: our Sunday faith formation check-ins with our children are happening on Sunday mornings, and our youth meet on Sunday and Wednesday evenings for youth group.



This summer, our outdoor ministry camps, normally held at La Foret, will see a hybrid model—combining a “camp-in-a-box” format, paired with live, online interactions with peers and staff. This is a model similar to what we will adapt for our own Vacation Bible School experience this summer as well! Our team is very excited about this, as it will allow the program to be an intergenerational one—our kids will get to engage in the activities with their families as well as their friends from church—all right from home. We also hope this model will allow for a wider scope of who we might be able to serve. Take a look at the announcement in this edition for more info about VBS.

We look forward to “seeing” you this summer!
 Robbie

Vacation Bible School - July 13-17, 2020

This year, we’re bringing Vacation Bible School to YOU! We’ll offer a hybrid experience for VBS this summer, which will combine a take-home “VBS Kit” and live (online) interactions with all your friends! More information to come. In the meantime, **please register for VBS now** so that we know to send you a kit.

Register at www.firstconggreeley.com/vbs.



Revised Head of Staff Voting Process

We are in extraordinary times! As such, some changes will need to be made to our Search & Call process. You will find those changes outlined here. We have reviewed these plans with the Rocky Mountain Conference Office, who supports moving forward in this way. Questions should be directed to Church Moderator Doran Azari: doranazari@icloud.com or 970-351-8664.

Process Approved

At its April meeting, Cabinet outlined a new process for voting on Rev. Ben Konecny as Head of Staff, in which a congregational meeting and vote have been delayed. They will allow for absentee voting by mail-in ballots, which are not currently permitted by our bylaws. The Cabinet has instructed the Profile Team to complete the Profile for the Head of Programs position.

Profile Completed

The Church Profile will be completed by the Profile Team searching for a new Head of Programs. It will be reviewed by Cabinet and made available digitally or by mail to church members for comments. Approval is required from Cabinet before being submitted and circulated according to Rocky Mountain Conference guidelines.

Absentee Ballots Mailed

In mid August, absentee ballots will be mailed to the congregation. Ballots can be returned by mail or dropped off at the church. In accordance with our bylaws, absentee ballots are not binding votes but are considered advisory votes, and the results will be counted, published, and considered at the congregational meeting.

Congregational Meeting & Vote

On September 13, 2020, we will host a congregational meeting to vote to call Rev. Ben Konecny as Head of Staff, effective January 1, 2021. The results of absentee advisory ballots will be discussed and considered, but in accordance with our bylaws, only those present will hold binding votes.



Our Profile Team has been working diligently the last few months to produce a nearly 50-page document that describes our church community in great detail. This instrument will be used to advertise the position of

Minister - Head of Programs to prospective candidates this summer.

Thanks to Laura Gurney, Jon Billheimer, Judy Smith, Julie Garbus, Kay Fisher and Heather Schulte for the hours and hours of research, meeting, and writing. Our church's Profile will be ready for publication mid-June. It must be approved by the Cabinet and our Rocky Mountain Conference leadership before being distributed. It will also be made available to everyone in our congregation. We prefer to share it digitally, but if you would like us to mail you a copy, please let Carol Thompson know at the church office.

The Cabinet has named the following people to serve on the Selection Committee: Ashlyn Friend, Sandy Magnuson, Laura Gurney, Ron Heil, Michelle Heiny, Christian Schulte, Keith Thompson, Whitney Janzen-Pankratz and another member to be named. Ex-officio members are Rev. Ben Konecny and Kim Pace. They will begin their work this month.



Senior Congratulations "Drive-Thru"

THANK YOU to everyone who "drove in" to the church parking lot on Pentecost Sunday to help celebrate Aali Hubert-Combs and Josh Huntley, graduating seniors this year. Aali is graduating from Union Colony Preparatory School and will begin her engineering studies at the Colorado School of Mines in the fall. Josh is graduating from Greeley West High School and will start his summer job search while contemplating what's ahead for the future. Congratulations to ALL of our 2020 graduates!

Thoughts on Protest, Unrest, and Cries for Justice

by Rev. Ben Konecny

It's hard to believe that anything could push coverage of COVID-19 to the second page of the news. But in recent days we have watched as the killing of George Floyd by a white Minneapolis police officer has struck a deep nerve in our society and has once again exposed the pathos of racism affecting our country.

Many of us probably feel like we have little bandwidth left to process another crisis of historic proportions, but it seems we have little choice. Commentaries about the unfolding response to the death of another unarmed black man at the hands of a white police officer differ widely. However, I feel this is a moment when white Christians in America must have the humility and honesty to admit that our understanding of this situation can not be formed solely from our own limited feelings or perspective.

The Apostle Paul writes, "Mourn with those who mourn." But for hundreds of years, when black and brown citizens of our country have mourned the fact that their life clearly matters less in society than the lives of whites, white Christians in our country have not mourned. We have been quick to dismiss, deny, or even demonize those voices calling for friends who take their lived reality seriously and who will stand with them in their call for justice.

As I've watched the protests continue to grow, I have found myself having a variety of feelings. While many protests have been peaceful, we know others have led to the destruction of property. And while these are not actions I condone, I also know there have been moments in my life when I have slammed my hand against the wall in response to the emotion that welled up within me due to a relatively minor grievance.

I have found these words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to be particularly instructive for me over the past week: *"It is as necessary for me to be as vigorous in condemning the conditions which cause persons to feel that they must engage in riotous activities as it is for me to condemn riots. I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard....Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention."*

We of course should not just listen to prophetic voices from the past to give us deeper insight and understanding into the events of the present moment. There are many people today trying to help us better understand the mourning that is being expressed in scenes across our country. But we will only be able to realize that if we have ears to hear.

Last week I received an email from Rev. Tracey Perry, Senior Pastor at Faith UCC in Windsor. Here is an excerpt of what she wrote:

There are no words that can define the hurt, horror, anger, fear, shame and feelings of disbelief and anguish for other African Americans and myself, at seeing another one of our Black men murdered. Any human being should have been outraged and horrified...You will not know the reality of our existence as Black people nor the horror and anxiety we as Black mothers feel when our sons and daughters leave us to go to the store or merely leave our presence for a period of time. Here is our reality - we are terrified that they may Never Return!! Imagine the audacity of trying to get our sons and our daughters to believe that their lives do matter and that they are beautiful creations of God with their beautiful different shades of skin and curly, natural hair...As the UCC Church - a denomination that proclaims Social Justice - what is the church doing? More importantly what are we going to do? Are you willing to Protest and if not, Why? If so - when and how? I can wait no longer. As Black people, we can wait no longer.

I was inspired by this powerful message from my friend Rev. Tracey and grateful that she was willing to share so honestly about her experience right now. It's also important for me to acknowledge that if I am completely honest, speaking about the reality of racism in our society can make me feel uncomfortable. But I need to recognize that being able to remain comfortable at a time like this is a privilege of my whiteness. And it is important for me to remember that it was discomfort, not disagreement, that kept the majority of white Christians from actively supporting the Civil Rights Movement, and subsequent movements for racial justice. My hope is that through the presence and power of God's spirit, we will find the empathy to mourn with those who mourn and courage to stand with those who demand that injustice be exposed and uprooted in our society.