



THE SPIRE

THE SECOND CHURCH IN NEWTON
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Sharing life's journey in Christian faith, love, and service.



60 Highland St. West Newton, MA • www.2ndchurch.org • (617) 244-2690

My Bailiwick

It's been a long time since we sent a Spire out to you. When the severity of Covid-19 finally became obvious back in March, I harbored hopes that it would be short-lived, thinking we might be back to worship together by Easter. Now we know that the virus will be around for a long time, that it can be and too often is deadly, and that the only way to stay safe from its ravages is to remain physically apart from one another. What a harsh reality!

We are adapting to this "new normal", as I know you are as well. Our Church Council is doing good work, thinking, talking, praying our way to this different way of being Second Church. We're in the process of appointing two committees: one to look at the ways this pandemic has impacted our congregation's ministry – pastorally, financially, physically, socially, emotionally, spiritually; another to grapple with all the complicated issues involved in reopening our building, whenever that may be. I am so grateful to be doing this hard work with willing and faithful Second Church saints! I am constantly reminded of the poem by James Russell Lowell, "The Present Crisis", which he wrote in 1844 – "new occasions teach new duties". Truer words were never written.

In the meantime, we will continue recording our more formal worship service through June. You can find it on our website (www.2ndchurch.org), or on our Facebook page. Leah and I are working on summer worship ideas for July and August, since it is unlikely we will gather in person. Leah continues to host Dinner Church via Zoom on Wednesdays at 6 PM. I am recording brief poems and essays that are posted on our website. On Friday mornings you may come to church to check out a jigsaw puzzle or a book. The Board of Parish Life is exploring more ways for church members to stay connected to one another. We'd love your ideas!

All of this feels very strange. Some mornings I hop out of bed, ready to be productive and busy. Other mornings I wish I could pull the covers over my head and sleep 'til this is all over. Still, I know these things for sure:

- ◇ until it is safe for all of us to gather together, it isn't safe for any of us;
- ◇ the Church won't die – it is, after all, the Body of Christ. But it's going to look different for a while, maybe forever;
- ◇ more than ever, we have the opportunity to reshape our world into something more in keeping with God's will – more economically compassionate, more environmentally just, less selfish, less tribal;
- ◇ God is and always has been present – with those who are dying alone, in the tears of the bereaved and afraid and worried, in the earth that is catching its breath, in the minds of scientists, and in the hearts of us all.

One more thing – I love you all, Carla

cbailey@2ndchurch.org

JUNE 2020

Stay the Course

On Wednesday, 20 May, 2020, the Church Council of Second Church voted to “continue closure of the church through June 2020, with the intention of reviewing that decision at the end of that month”. This decision is in response to Governor Baker’s pronouncement on Monday, 18 May, that all places of worship could re-open, as long as safety procedures were put into place. (https://www.mma.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Places-of-Worship_Circular-Checklist_Eng.pdf). The Council’s decision is based on sincere concern for the health and safety of the Second Church community.

There are many factors involved in making decisions such as this, not the least of which, that we are landlords to several other organizations which use the church building. After much discussion, it was decided that healthy and safety is the most important factor.

Carla is putting together a small task force to work with her in continuing to evaluate the impact of the virus on the use of our building and to make further decisions as the re-opening of the state unfolds.

Sally Anderson, Co-Moderator

Graduates

On June 10th, we will be ringing our church bell twenty times to honor the graduates from Newton North High School, which this year includes Daniel Carter. Congratulations Daniel! Additionally, we congratulate Will Sylvia, who graduates from Bates College with his BA, and Shiya Yi, who this year received her PhD from Boston College. We will also ring our church bell on June 15th in celebration of the seven Clearway School graduates. May God bless these and all graduates, as they enter their next adventures.



Rev. Dr. Carla Jean Bailey, Senior Minister Barbara Cancellieri, Administrator
Andrus Madsen, Minister of Music Mary Ayotte, Bookkeeper
Rev. Leah Rumsey, Minister of Faith Formation
Sally Anderson and Kathy Lucey, Co-Moderators
Susan Benes, Nursery School Director; Sydney Koo, Faith Formation Assistant
John Ferrera, Communications Coordinator: johnferrerawork@gmail.com
Marion and Gwen Carter, Sunday Sextons
Frank Neal, Property Manager

From Leah Rumsey, Minister of Faith Formation

Dear Second Church,

Trying to write about Coronavirus and its implications is, to put it colloquially, the worst. In every email I write, I feel compelled to somehow acknowledge the near universal experience of anxiety and isolation. Then I want to stop myself because I know there are ways in which this assumption of universality is misleading when low-wage workers and communities of color bear a disproportionate share of health risks. And, at the same time I'm trying to be aware of these broad economic and political trends, I don't want to lose track of the specificity of the person to whom I'm writing, the person who is experiencing fear or isolation or home schooling or cabin fever or illness or death in a completely particular way. And this is me just trying to write the first sentence of my email.

What I'm trying to get at here is the difficulty even of coming up with language to describe our experiences now and our hope for the future. For all the thought I've put into them, most of my words to acknowledge these realities hit me as trite or flat, a perfunctory sentence at the beginning of the email before getting down to the real business (which probably has to do with cancelling something or moving it online). When I've been doing planning with the Board of Faith Formation's various working groups, we keep stumbling for words to describe a time when it will be safe to meet in groups again. "Back to normal" sounds naive, both because we know that this crisis has caused irreparable damage and because of the many ways in which a rather oppressive vision of normalcy has plagued American social and religious life in recent decades. "Post-Corona" sounds worse, overly optimistic about vaccine research and delivery, and drawing perilously close to white supremacist discourses that ceased to understand the Coronavirus as a public health emergency when it became clear that its victims were disproportionately black and brown people and members of the working class. Unhappy with these phrases (and so many others), I've mostly settled on flapping my hand in a forward motion and hoping my conversation partners will understand.

I'm pretty sure many of you are there already, but if not, I'm inviting you to sit with me in my lack of words. To acknowledge that, while discourse about "back to normal" isn't satisfactory, it's hard not having words for the next thing. I'm wondering if there are ways in which the American church might finally have an opportunity to make a clean and decisive break from an imagined past that has become a burden on our future, but I don't have a clear picture of what exactly this will look like. I hope that we will see this together in the future, in that moment for which I don't yet have language but for which I long nonetheless.

I miss seeing you all in person. I miss hugs during the children's story circle. I miss heading into Wednesdays knowing that something delicious is waiting at Dinner Church. I miss eating the Sweet Tomatoes pizza that is our go-to food for Faith and Citizenship Institute and 2030's Bible Study. I can't wait to see you again, in person, in a time for which I don't quite yet have the words.

With all my wishes for your safety, health, curiosity, and hope,

Leah

From Andrus Madsen, Minister of Music

Thoughts from the Madsen Bunker

It has been a little over two months now since we stopped having openly attended Sunday services at Second Church. It has been quite an adventure. Some things have been wonderful, and others have been a struggle. I surveyed my family to see what they enjoyed or hated from this time in their life. All of my children voiced a strong disapproval of school zoom meetings. The first few meetings they had seemed fun and exciting, but by now they despise them. Kelly loves that she is not commuting for the time being, and at the same time struggles with feeling like the work she is doing from home is no longer meeting the standard she set for herself while working on site. For all of us home schooling has been a difficult challenge. There have been a few fleeting moments where we enjoyed some magical learning experience together, but often our household could be described as a paragon of home-school mediocrity.

For me, it has been a real wake-up call to confront the reality that so much of how I see myself, and how I connect to the world is through the experience of sharing music through live, in person, music making. It is not that I miss hearing compliments or applause or anything like that. What I actually miss the very most is the feeling in the air as I am making music, when I can feel an energy, a connection, something stirring in someone else's heart. It is difficult to describe in words the connection that happens, but somehow I can sense when others in the room are engaged and emotionally responding to the music that is being created. I think it is fair to say that feeding that sensation has been at the heart of almost all I do professionally. Certainly at Second Church my highest priority has been to make music, that engaged individuals emotionally and spiritually, whether with soloists, or the choir, or playing solo.

During this period of social distancing, I can only hope that some of the music that we have created for the online services has touched people in some way, however I can say that my experience of sensing that connection has been severed. I can certainly imagine a similar experience for the choir. The choir has been involved in creating congregational hymn singing experiences, and they have sung anthems each contributing their voice through recordings alone in their home. I think that what they have done is beautiful; however, I can imagine that it has also been frustrating and not nearly as fulfilling as singing together.

I cringe knowing that singing will likely be one of the last things we are allowed to do together when we return to meeting together. Sadly singing works best when people are close to each other, and singing creates aerosols that can spread the virus to those that are in close proximity. Meanwhile we will do our best to make music to share through our limited means. But if you get a chance, reach out to a choir member, and thank them for their contributions to the services. I think they have worked hard to keep the choir present in our Sunday services, without enjoying the feeling of connection they would have experienced together with each other and with the congregation.

I look forward to that time in the future when we can safely sing, and relish in each other's company in person

Andrus

From Co-Moderator Sally Anderson

Recently I have been reading [The Splendid and the Vile](#), by Erik Larsen. The book focuses on Winston Churchill and how he engages England in the war against Germany (WWII). The history itself is interesting, but what I have found most engaging are the anecdotal references to "Mass Observation" and the "diarists". Indeed these anecdotes and personal letters seem to be the primary sources for the book.

Apparently in 1937, a UK social research organization decided to record everyday life in Britain, by enlisting volunteer observers to maintain diaries, or respond to questionnaires (called directives). These volunteers were called "diarists". The information gathered through this project, which was originally intended to record events and thoughts revolving around the war, but ended up extending well beyond that time, was then put in an archive for safe keeping.

I was thinking that maybe we could start our own "Mass Observation" project within our church community. People who are so inclined could write down their thoughts, and describe their visual observations, thus becoming "diarists". It would be great to have people from all generations, family structures, genders, etc. participate, as we all are experiencing this crisis through our own lens' and may interpret what we see and think very differently because of that.

Here's what you could do: keep a notebook close by in which you jot down your thoughts and observations about this crisis - daily, weekly, whenever you feel so moved. For those of you who are already "diarists", this would fit right into your daily routine. Others of us would have to build it in. At some point we would try to compile all of the thoughts/observations(anonymously) into some kind of readable documentation.

As an extension of this project, I will be introducing at the next Church Council a motion to form an ad hoc committee to study/evaluate the impact that this crisis has had on the life, work, and community of our church: What is the impact? What steps are we taking to mitigate the impact? What is working/not working? (Our response to the crisis is evolving - we are learning as we go along!) What changes that we have been forced to make might be worth preserving in the future? How can we better prepare ourselves for future crises?

Please let me know what you think about the Mass Observation idea. You can call me or use email: 617-969-1645, sallyjaneanderson@gmail.com.

In the meantime stay strong, safe, and healthy, and, as Carla always reminds us, know that God is with you.

Sally

*The Annual Second Church
Women's Retreat
Rescheduled dates: April 30 - May 2, 2021*

Potluck Dinner Church - Wednesdays at 6 o'clock

"God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature," reflected C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*. "That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it."

It has been many weeks now since we first began to reckon with the Virus and its implications for Dinner Church. The paper plates, gloves and sanitizers were barely unwrapped when they were abruptly left behind. The Pandemic arrived too quickly, and dumped us in a place where time seems to barely move at all. Out there on the dimly perceived horizon we see shadows of things moving past: Good Friday. Easter. And soon to come Pentecost, and the Green promise of Ordinary Time. As if time will ever be ordinary again.

As a community, Dinner Church works to be present to this time. We gather on Zoom and struggle not only with the Gospel message but messages mediated by mute buttons and bandwidth. We are mindful of those who are not with us, who lack the technology or the inclination or the confidence that the comfort of community can be found at such remove. We are with you.

And we are still here – for each other, and for you. Leah now distributes the Scripture passage in advance of Wednesday's Dinner Church, so people will have ample time to reflect on it, and perhaps bring their questions and comments to our Zoom gathering. If you have not been a regular Dinner Church attendee, please ask that you be added to this mailing list. All members of the Congregation – indeed, all members of God's family – are invited to the table.

And so we still read, reflect and pray. But we are also mindful, as Lewis observed, that God invented eating. We do not know when we will be able to gather in Fellowship Hall again, and nourish each other physically as well as spiritually. Each week we will be also sending a few simple recipes, requiring limited ingredients that we hope are available to you. If you make them, we hope you will be reminded of the fellowship we share.

We are also aware that simple recipes may include simple ingredients that are not always so simple to come by, so we have prepared a Pandemic Pantry List, which may be useful as you try to match your own recipes to ingredients you have on hand. We hope that making-do will not be just another occasion for getting by, but an opportunity for creativity, and laughter. And if you know of any we pantry hacks have missed, please let us know—we'll be happy to add them on!

Blessings,
Margaret Doris



Second Church in Newton Fuller Scholarship Candidates for 2020

Presentation to Church Council

All the candidates proposed from the two Newton High Schools demonstrated high academic achievement and strong financial need. We looked for community service, whether through the high schools themselves, through churches or religious organizations, or through other organizations. Several of the candidates were relatively recent immigrants to the U.S. and many achieved academic success in AP, Honors, or College Prep classes while also receiving ELL assistance. This year, we decided to award five scholarships of \$1600 each. The five students who will be awarded Fuller Scholarships for 2020 are

Newton North

- Li Chen: Li, who goes by Emily, received accolades from her Honors Chemistry teacher as someone who received for working extremely hard, achieving academic success, and also helping others in her class. She immigrated from China in 2016 and has been working hard to learn the language and adjust culturally. She was selected for the Mayor's Youth Internship run by the City of Newton.
- Carmen Chu: According to her written evaluation, Carmen is very committed to preparing for college, participating in both the Calculus Project, including becoming a teacher's assistant at the end of her tenure, and the Transitioning Together program, Newton North's mentoring program which supports first-generation college-bound students. She plans to major in Secondary Education for Mathematics to become a high school teacher.
- Jenny Huang: Jenny has a very strong academic record, and also is a talented art student, according to her student evaluation. Her junior year Art teacher wrote, "Jenny is a student who is always fully present. She is invaluable to any classroom due to her alert hard work and creative thought process." Jenny also has studied with the Boston Ballet School for more than thirteen years, and plans to pursue dance studies in college.

Newton South

- Aleyah Dorismond
- Wilmeyah Dorismond

Aleyah and Wilmeyah Dorismond are twin sisters who applied individually for scholarships. Their parents are from Haiti, and they speak Haitian Creole at home. Their financial need is very strong, but we evaluated them separately before determining that they both are qualified candidates. They have high academic achievement with many AP and Honors classes, are active in the Black Student Union at Newton South, and participate in the Legacy Scholars and Calculus Project. They are both members of Eliot Church and work as peer tutors through the church. Aleyah would like to become a pharmacist or a nurse after college. Wilmeyah would like to get a "good paying job" to become independent.

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The Second Church in Newton is an inclusive community of curious and creative spiritual seekers, committed to learning, teaching, social justice and embodying a progressive practice of Christianity through loving kindness, engagement and joyful worship.

