

The First Presbyterian Church

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PRESBYTERIAN POST



SUMMER 2020

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

~ Philippians 4:6-7 ~

From the Desk of the Pastor



“I read in a book once that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but I've never been able to believe it. I don't believe a rose WOULD be as nice if it was called a thistle or a skunk cabbage.”.

~ Anne of Green Gables ~



What is in a Name?

Many of you know that as a youth, my family summered on a little island in Casco Bay, Maine. The first 18 summers of my life was spent in a sort of family quarantine, as we were the island's only human inhabitants. My Dad even wrote a little book about it, *Once Upon a Maine Island*.

As I reflect on the delightful rhythms of island living, I am reminded of the use of the word *Yankee*. It is a peculiar word that means something very different depending on your perspective. For much of the world, *Yankee* is synonymous with being an American. Here in the United States, a *Yankee* is probably associated with New England. But in New England, it is associated with the coastal Maine, *Downeast*. For those of us who lived in coastal Maine, *Yankee* meant a lobsterman or someone similar. But to the Maine lobsterman, *Yankee* meant the lobstermen of old who would row their dories even in the winter and hauled traps by hand. How differently the word is understood, depending on your perspective.

I think this is true for a lot of words, including the word *Christian*. In many parts of the world, the word *Christian* is synonymous with Western or European culture. To Westerners and Europeans, the word *Christian* is more closely associated with those who would put that information on an identification form. Still, many may think that Christians are those who attend church. And within the population of church attenders, the word *Christian* is probably associated with those who have a salvational (salvific) faith in Jesus Christ.

Because *Christian* has such a broad range of meanings, I became rather dissatisfied with the term a few decades ago. At that time, it was popular to use *Christian* as an adjective to modify all sorts of things: *Christian* barbershop; *Christian* bakery; etc. As none of these are biblical expressions, it just seemed like a fad. I believe time has shown that it was.

For decades, I had been intentional in identifying myself as a *Christ-follower*. I liked that expression because it captures a commitment to living out a response to whom Christ is. Whereas *Christian* has no universal meaning, being a *Christ-follower* seems to be understood more narrowly and correctly. Whereas *Christian* seems to convey a possible status of being, *Christ-following* conveys a commitment of responding. Also, *Christ-following* points to a singular morale authority for my life. It's not church culture, it's not family culture, and it is not me. It is Christ.

Recently, my spirit has become unsettled with the expression of being a *Christ-follower*. For the last few months, I have been using the language of being a *Christ-enthusiast*. No one has asked me about it. I wonder if anyone noticed. Or perhaps the meaning of being a *Christ-enthusiast* is so abundantly clear that no one needs to ask. But just in case it isn't clear, let me explain.

I became dissatisfied with the expression of being a *Christ-follower* when it donned on me that I follow a lot of things for which I have very little regard. I follow the speed limit, because it is the law and not because I recognize the merit of each particular speed limit. I follow the tax laws even when I think some of them are illogical and wrongly designed. The list of possible examples of rules I follow but think unnecessary or foolish could go on and on. But the point is, I am not a *Christ-follower* in the same way that I am a tax-law-follower. I never think Christ is capricious, wrong or counter-productive. I do not follow Christ out of sense of compulsion. That is when I realized that I am a *Christ-enthusiast*.

Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.

~ 2 Corinthians 8:11 ~

We all know enthusiasts and we all know what it means. If someone were a motorcycle enthusiast, you know that they would love to ride; they probably own a bike; they love to talk about bikes and probably know a lot about them. Something similar could be said about baking enthusiasts, photography enthusiasts, musical enthusiasts, etc. Enthusiasts are driven and energized by their passion. You find evidence of their enthusiasm in how they spend their money, in how they spend their time, and in how they invest their creative energy.

I am a *Christ-enthusiast* in the same way anyone is an enthusiast about anything. And, I desire to be ever more enthusiastic about Christ every day. I encourage each of you to

consider what it is that captures your enthusiasm. If you are unhappy about your level of enthusiasm for Christ, may I encourage you to ask the Holy Spirit to help infuse you with renewed interest, delight, and vitality for thinking about and talking with Christ. I would be happy to help you pray for this blessing, if you contact me and let me know.

So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. Now as the ark of the Lord came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the Lord...

~ 2 Samuel 6:15-16a ~

Final Thought

A final thought for this article comes from Dr. Richard J. Krejcir . *Enthusiasm plays a big part in our personal spiritual growth; without it, we are not motivated to read our Bible or spend time in prayer. We exercise our spiritual disciplines out of obligation, we become dry, and become unable to absorb what we are to learn. Or, we give it up and use all kinds of excuses, such as lack of time or fatigue. When our spiritual lives suffer, so does our ability to relate our Christian experience to others, and we become ineffective leaders and partakers in the building of the Kingdom of God.*

[Jesus speaking] *“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”*

~ Matthew 10:37-38 ~

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AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

AUGUST 2 Todd Haines
AUGUST 5 David Gates
AUGUST 6 Edith Piatt
AUGUST 9 Diane Kendall
AUGUST 16 Audrey Whiteman
AUGUST 17 Duffy Elsenheimer
AUGUST 19 Noritta Smith
AUGUST 30 Linda Schroeder

EARLY SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

SEPT. 6 Barbara Elsenheimer
SEPT. 7 Jim Robords

LETTER FROM PRESBYTERY OF GENEVA

Included in this edition of the Newsletter is a letter from the Presbytery of Geneva detailing how our Presbytery and churches in our region have been operating during the pandemic. In my opinion, it is well worth reading.



AUGUST ANNIVERSARIES

AUGUST 25 Todd and Esther Haines

MISSION COMMITTEE REPORT

Last month our Mission Committee made a donation to the Vincent House in Wayland. If you have an organization that you feel is in need and would like this committee to make a donation to, please let Lorraine Glidden know and she will take it to the Mission Committee for consideration.

NEWS AND NOTES

ABUNDANT BLESSINGS

Our church has been abundantly blessed on many levels during this pandemic. Most recently we have been blessed to be able to hold our worship services outside during the month of July. We have been blessed with sunny Sundays during this past month and pray the weather cooperates so that we can continue to be outside for the month of August. A huge thank you to Pastor Bruce for all the extra hours he puts in to make these outside services possible.





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July 29, 2020

Dear Friends in our Presbytery,

As has been typical of 2020, it has certainly been an interesting summer. In this region, we're certainly enjoying some nice weather, and I hope you're able to enjoy God's natural world at this time. While we haven't had a traditional camping season, we hear that Camp Recreate and other programs through Camp Whitman are going very well, and we give thanks.

The Leadership Team of the Presbytery has been monitoring how the pandemic and other events are going. In consultation with the intended host congregations, we'll be recommending to the General Council that our remaining Presbytery meetings of 2020 be conducted via Zoom. Meeting this way will allow our members and congregations to be comfortable in social distancing, while also making it possible for staff and special denominational guests (such as Rev. Dr. Diane Moffett, Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, in November) to be present with us. We are finding that digital meetings can be meaningful, productive, and uplifting -- and we have even seen a significant increase in attendance! Upon Council's approval, please watch for future communications about the times and specific information for these meetings.

Our region remains in Phase IV, and while there have still been sporadic COVID-19 cases locally, we continue to do well as a region at controlling the infection rate. Much of this has been due to the care and success our communities have shown each other by socially distancing and masking. As a physician, I urge everyone to continue showing care and courtesy to everyone. Regionally, some congregations have chosen to reopen with carefully crafted social distancing plans, while others have not yet reopened their buildings; many continue to meet virtually and support each other in other ways. To any congregation that is considering reopening their buildings, I recommend studying the [resources posted on our website](#).

As our region is somewhat reopened but also socially distanced, people must still exercise their own personal judgment and avoid those things they consider to be a risk. This is beneficial, as it has helped to reduce our infection rate in the area. Some people feel more comfortable with social situations (including in-person worship) than others do -- even with social distancing measures in place. This is why we have continued to promote having a virtual option for worship for congregations that have reopened. The question of whether or not someone feels safe in these situations does not just apply to parishioners: it also applies to our pastors. There can be questions about the role of pastoral leaders if they express discomfort with a plan for reopening. In addition, they often face questions about officiating additional services, such as funerals or weddings. These can be especially tricky, because unlike congregational worship services, the pastoral leaders may know only a small number of the attendees, and thus may not know how the gathering will manage or respect social distancing recommendations. We have heard many pastoral leaders feeling conflicted. They have devoted their lives to God and to their flock, but also have concerns that they might be putting themselves, their family members, or the attendees at risk of a potentially dangerous infection. There are also concerns that they could be viewed as avoiding their duties if they express their discomfort and say no.

Fortunately, we have clear guidance from our Book of Order:

“God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.” (F-3.0101)

“That, while under the conviction of the above principle we think it necessary to make effectual provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, we also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.” (F-3.0105)

We must remember that “God alone is Lord of the conscience”. Neither those that participate nor those that refuse to participate in in-person worship or other gatherings are to be judged. Each Session can decide how and if they will provide facilities for in-person gatherings. Both individual members and pastoral leaders must be allowed to choose whether to participate in person or not based upon their personal needs and comfort. Every Session should make reasonable accommodation for pastoral voices that excuse themselves from participating in-person for in-person worship. The Leadership Team of the Presbytery of Geneva encourages all with differing viewpoints to support each other with love and grace. In 1 Corinthians 12:26, the Apostle Paul reminds us: “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.” We have all suffered during this time of pandemic, and many are continuing to suffer, in several different ways. Let us show each other honor and concern, thinking about how we can minister to each other in love.

The Leadership Team is closely monitoring the status of the pandemic in our region. We will continue to meet and provide updates and guidance as things change. May God watch over us, and may we feel the hopeful presence of the Spirit as we serve with Christ’s love and mercy.

For the Living of These Days,
Rob Anderson MD, Chair, General Council

Members of the Presbytery Leadership Team

Rev. Glenn Kennedy, Moderator
Elder Virginia Champlin, Vice Moderator
Elder Rob Anderson, Chair of General Council
Rev. Amy Loving Austin, Stated Clerk
Elder Tom Bailey, Treasurer
Elder Susan Orr, Presbytery Leader