



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Old Bennington, Vermont

APRIL 2020 LANTERN

FROM THE MINISTER

This space in the April newsletter is usually given to bright Easter greetings. I have something to tell you: **it still is!** Here is Paul writing in the letter to the Romans:

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

That is our faith, our vocation as Christians and our way of life. We let neither the triumphs nor the tragedies of life define who we are. We are defined by our faith in Christ who teaches us to look beyond the transient to the eternal. We are defined by the hope and love we share and the gospel of life which is beyond all claims of time and earth.

Easter is not about the news the world gives us but about the news God gives us. These days, full to buckling under the news of the world, we need to remember God's word for us. We don't, of course, deny the current grim facts. Rather we counter that reality with our own spiritual truth. Here at the church we have acted with the world's wisdom when it comes to the science of infection and the spread of disease. Just so, as you can see in the rest of this newsletter, meetings are cancelled, plans put on hold, gatherings postponed. Even our Easter events have been amended to conform to the realities we face.

It would be a sad thing, however, if all our April newsletter's words for Easter were cancellations and dismal news. So this is the place to tell you there is more: there is God's work still strong among us. In prayers and good wishes for those who are ill or alone, in connecting to each other through our website (www.oldfirstbenn.org), in meetings by phone or computer. In remembering the comforting patterns we have lost in these weeks and the simple joys we take in being together. There has also been so much unseen hard work in these past weeks. I know to those reading this letter it may seem as if the church has ground to a halt without worship. Just the opposite is true. The work of reconfiguring the office to new realities, of creating new kinds of worship and outreach, of responding to financial needs (you can see by the events and activities we have to cancel that there is a real need here...your help, your extra help...is needed and appreciated!)

One important point: though we have attempted to create ways of being in touch with each other, if you find yourself alone or frustrated, please reach out. That is why we are here.

Let's circle back to the start: it is Easter and there is joy. The world cannot change the truth of the resurrection. Perhaps, this year the world will give that truth new meaning. Perhaps we understand that the world is often a succession of Good Fridays with no relief. Now we see why Christians can live in that place of Good Fridays in a loving and compassionate way because of the news of Easter morning. We are not conformed to this world but transformed by the life of Christ and God's love for all creation.

It is Easter and there is joy. Take joy. Look out the window and see some glimmer of days to come, of green and color, of fresh air and open ways. This is an image of the eternal news Easter faith brings; not, surely, a reality in some moments in time but spiritual news which can transform this world and is the substance of our faith. May we encounter this Easter truth and rejoice!

The Rev. Ken Clarke

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Kenneth A. Clarke, Minister

Don Miller, Moderator

NEWS IN BRIEF

AUDIO PODCASTS OF WORSHIP SERVICES:

An audio version of our weekly worship services can be found on the church's website by clicking on the "Worship" tab and selecting "Worship Here and Now" or simply enter the following into your computer's browser: <http://oldfirstchurchbenn.org/worship/worship-here-and-now/>

CHURCH OFFICE:

The church office continues to function by phone, email and mail. If you would like to drop a note or small item off at the Barn, please slide it through the mail slot next to the main door where it will be found when the office is periodically checked. Financial support at this time is very important and you can mail a pledge payment or additional financial support directly to our church treasurer (Pat Ross, 1534 Blue Stone Rd, Bennington, VT 05201)

UPCOMING EVENTS & ACTIVITIES:

Docent Field Trip: The annual Open Church Docent field trip has been delayed and will potentially be canceled for this year.

Open Church: It is difficult to know when our Open Church program will begin. Normal operations would have us start on Memorial Day Weekend and continue weekends only through the month of June. It is too far away to know if our opening will be delayed.

Tag Sale: At this time we have no idea how scheduled church activities will pan out. This much we do know, the June 6th Monumental Tag Sale is not going to happen. We may consider a fall date or we may need to postpone it for this year.

MEETINGS:

- **Deacons:** There will be no meetings until further notice. The Deacons of the Month for April are Bill Gordon and Jeannette Lesser.
- **Trustees:** The Trustees will meet monthly by video conferencing on the **second Tuesday at 5:00 PM**
- **Council:** The Council will meet on **April 21 at 5:00 PM** by video/telephone conferencing. Notice on how to join the meeting will be sent to all council members.
- **Bible Study:** There will be no meetings until further notice.
- **Women's Book Group:** Participants are encouraged to continue reading selected books from our list or books that might pique an interest. We will make plans to gather as soon as it is safe.

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCH FAMILY:

Please keep our dear friend and Open Church docent Paul Capriola in your prayers. Paul's father passed away at the age of 93 in March.

Don and Lynda Swanda are delighted to share the news of the birth of their grandson Ethan who was born on Palm Sunday to their daughter and son-in-law.