



# UNITED CHURCH OF HINESBURG

July 2020, Newsletter

## Pastor's Message

"How long, O Lord?/The Road So Far"

It feels like ages ago when we made the difficult decision to cancel Sunday morning worship services on March 15th. Coronavirus was hardly on my radar just a week earlier, and like many, I couldn't imagine it being a big deal. As of June 30th, the Center for Disease Control reports that the United States has seen over 2.5 million reported cases and 125,484 deaths from the virus. All of us have had to adjust to life closer to home. Many have unleashed their inner "techy" and can now video chat for family visits, work meetings, and doctor's appointments. When we do venture out, we wave to one another from a safe distance, hoping that the masked person was the person we thought they were. Our community has changed. Some folks in our community have had the virus. Some in our congregation have lost loved ones to the virus. Many are still concerned that they might get the virus.

We received over fifty responses to last month's survey that sought your input on how we might move forward (see results page 7). Churches in other states had already reopened, sometimes as early as May 3rd. The CDC and several

denominations had just published guidelines for holding in-person worship services. Given the survey results, we thought it might be possible to hold some form of in-person services in July. Personally, I was excited. I've yet to fully buy-in to developing an online presence and have always preferred in-person interactions and exchanges. And I've missed everyone dearly!

In the last few weeks, however, we realized that our hopes would not be fulfilled just yet. States that reopened earlier than Vermont have since seen an increase in cases and deaths. In the last two weeks, the CDC and news outlets have begun tracing outbreaks of the virus religious gatherings. In a provocatively named NY Times article "Bars, Strip Clubs and Churches: U.S. Virus Outbreaks Enter Unwieldy Phase" authors Sarah Mervosh, Mitch Smith and Lucy Tompkins write:

"Houses of worship, which were once shut down under governors' orders in many states, are now emerging as sources of major clusters. Outbreaks at churches have been reported in states including Alabama, Kansas and West Virginia."

*continued on page 2*



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*Pastor's Message continued*

Since June 24th, when the article was published, outbreaks at churches have been reported in several other states.

As much as we would like to be done with COVID-19, we must continue to keep our guards up and protect one another. This means we will not hold in-person worship services during the summer and possibly into the fall.

All is not lost, though. We are beginning to work on livestream worship services that will launch in the middle of July. These services will allow us to return to worship together at 10:00 AM on Sunday mornings virtually through ZOOM and YouTube Live. We hope to continue livestreaming even after reopening, so folks who can't join us yet will be able to participate. Along with this, we will continue to put out written reflections and the UCH Podcast for those who are looking for devotional time in different formats. Finally, beginning July 22nd, I'll start having office hours under the Scarlet Maple next to the parish house every Wednesday from 10:00 - 11:00 AM. Bring your mask and your own lawn chair, and we can spend time together visiting.

Later in the Newsletter, you'll see the work that we've been able to accomplish during this strange time. I'm proud of all that we are doing to remain faithful during this time and the hard work going into life at UCH after the pandemic. I'm also thankful for all of you who have continued to check in with one another by phone, email, video, letter, text, smoke signals, two cans and a string, and any other means available. Through all of this, we remain a community for faith, guided by hope, in loving relationships with one another.

May God bless you in this time with courage, stamina, resilience, and a little creativity.

Pastor Jared

## Membership Care Committee News

*Dianne Hall & Mary Eddy Stewart, Co-chairs*  
*Members: Alice Cobb, Grace Farley, Bonnie Farrow, Carrie Huestis, Barbara Lyman, Judy Parker, Mary Thompson, Sandy White*

So much has changed since our last newsletter in March, 2020. It seems like a very long time since we've been together as a congregation. In an effort to keep our church family connected, the Membership Care Committee (with the help of some wonderful volunteers) has been reaching out to individuals and families with phone calls and emails. We have also been sending email birthday and anniversary greetings. We hope that along with Pastor Jared's Reflections, the Wednesday check in's and Vesper Service, Weekly updates and the Sunday Podcasts that you feel the love and spirit of our church.

When it is deemed safe to finally resume Sunday services, although we will have to make changes to how we have done things in the past, we will reschedule our New Member Sunday. We look forward to that time with hope and to the joy of being together.



## Name This Newsletter Contest

Welcome to the first edition of the United Church of Hinesburg's new-look newsletter. It's your newsletter and we'd like your help in giving it a name. The mailbox above is there so you can, metaphorically speaking, fill it with your ideas for what to call this publication. Send all your suggestion to [unitedchurch@gmavt.net](mailto:unitedchurch@gmavt.net) with the subject "Newsletter Contest". You may submit as many entries as you wish. All entries must be submitted by July 24, 2020 to be considered. The winner will be selected by the staff and acknowledged in the next issue of the newsletter.

## The Little Free Pantry - Missions and Social Justice Committee



The UCH has supported the Little Free Pantry for several years, though during the COVID-19 pandemic, this mission has taken a more emergent substantive role in addressing food insecurity. The

face of hunger may not be what we think. With unprecedented unemployment since the Great Depression, people in the community have come to rely on this Pantry not simply as "Take what you need, leave what you can" but in many ways, an extension of the local food shelf.

Efforts to shift responsibility for sustaining the pantry within the community has occurred. Appeals to the community to keep the pantry well stocked and financially viable, have been overwhelmingly successful. Monies for the pantry arrive steadily and geographic regions of the town take daily turns to bring foods to the pantry to help ensure that new foods arrive frequently. The pantry is replenished almost daily. The generosity of neighbors over the past three months has been astounding and our young residents are using innovative ways to raise money too: Annalise Wood baked bread and raised \$227, and Rodney Putnam played live music on Facebook and raised \$225.

We also have been able to partner with a local farm to offer gift certificates through the pantry to broaden food choices. Never would this have been possible without contributions. Recipients have shared stories of layoffs, and unexpected financial insecurity specifically due to the public health emergency. Stories from neighbors who have raised money for the pantry from small children donating their allowances, musicians playing for the pantry, bakers making bread by donation to the pantry, those placing their stimulus checks in our care for this purpose, to hand sewing face masks are abound. Some gifters have requested anonymity. But nonetheless, the response of the community has successfully shifted the 'ownership' of the pantry to community. Hand written thank you notes for each and every financial gift have been lovingly prepared.

As we anticipate need to remain strong for months to come, we ask for on-going support as this mission to address food insecurity continues. Thank you to each and everyone for all you have done to address this social justice issue. This immediate response to a health crisis as it unfolds, underscores the love and generosity of this faith community and beyond.



Vermont Pride Theater at Chandler is pleased to announce the lineup for its tenth annual summer pride festival. It includes Jon Gilbert Fox's photo exhibit: *At the Right Place at the Right Time*, available both on-line and in the Main Gallery; a silent auction of books appropriate to this pride celebration and theater arts at Chandler; and three LGBTQ-themed plays, each presented live on-line twice, the eastern premieres of *Cloudburst*, *Immediate Family* and the reprise presentation of *The Homosexuals*.

This is just the latest pride-theater event which the Vermont Conference UCC sponsors to build bridges between Vermont's gay and straight communities. Interaction between audiences and artists is a key component of these events, despite Covid-19. The exhibit openings will include a chance to interact with Mr. Fox, and the performances will be followed by live talkbacks with the directors. For more information, or to purchase tickets, go to [www.chandler-arts.org](http://www.chandler-arts.org). For questions, call (802) 728-9878, ext. 102.

## New Community Project Update

New Community Project (NCP) in Starksboro has made many changes and adjustments to operate safely during the pandemic to serve our neighbors. Here's an update of some of our recent work:

As many of you know, NCP operates a weekly Food Pantry out of the First Baptist Church in Starksboro. Our Food Pantry combines rescued food from grocery stores with food we grow in gardens to serve 120 people a month who come from 14 area towns. To minimize exposure to Covid-19, we transitioned our Food Share program to a curbside pickup model, which is carried out each week by a team of five regular volunteers. For those without transportation or in a very high-risk category, we now deliver food boxes to their homes. Each week we distribute 30 - 50 boxes of food. As the food supply chain was disrupted earlier in the pandemic, we also experienced fluctuations and uncertainty in the amount of food we received to distribute. In response, we reached out to other stores and also were the beneficiary of extra food from the CVU's spring food drive. For the first time since this Food Pantry began in 2014, we also purchased food in order to ensure we would have enough—thankfully, we were able to use donations to purchase produce directly from local farms to meet this need and support our local farmers. And so far we've had just enough food each week to meet the need. Going forward, we envision the need will continue to grow as the full economic impacts of the pandemic become more widespread. Already, we've seen many new faces in the Food Pantry line and we expect to see more.

With schools, colleges, and churches (like UCH) closed and operating remotely, we didn't have our usual volunteer service groups that have been so essential to helping prepare, plant and maintain our Food Justice Gardens. We also learned in April that we would not be able to host our annual summer service interns from the University of La Verne in California. Without a regular crew to support our Food Justice gardens, we're getting creative and enlisting the help of local volunteers. Already we've distributed fresh peas, cilantro, dill,



*First harvest from the garden for the Food Pantry.*



*Sunday Food Pantry crew in masks getting ready for curbside pick up of food boxes.*

lettuce, kale and radishes. If individuals or families would like to find out about one-time or weekly volunteer opportunities in the garden, helping us to keep up with the ongoing tasks of weeding, watering, pest control, and harvesting, please be in touch. We can use some help!

In response to the need to provide food assistance during the week and in a more discreet way, NCP is working with the Town of Starksboro to get approval for a Little Free Pantry that is modeled after the one at the UCH. Even prior to the pandemic, we have been hearing about those in need in our community who are not able, for whatever reason, to come to the Town's Food Shelf or NCP's Food Pantry. The Little Free Pantry would be another way NCP can help meet existing and increasing food insecurity issue in Starksboro and the surrounding areas.

We want to thank the UCH for your continued interest and support of our work. New Community Project (NCP) in Starksboro VT, is a program of the [New Community Project](#), a nonprofit organization committed to the creation of sustainable systems that care for the earth, empower people most marginalized and impoverished, educate and inspire, and build the foundation for a nonviolent lifestyle. We welcome your involvement and support. Contact Pete Antos-Ketcham at (802) 434-2333 or antosketchamncp@gmail.com.

## Finance and Stewardship



The pause in daily operations provided the opportunity to explore and implement systems that will provide efficiencies by streamlining many of our financial and other processes.

Our PowerChurch software, which resided on the office computer, had been used solely for recording contributions to the church. We are now utilizing more of the system's capabilities by:

- Our transition to PowerChurch Online which allows two users to access the system remotely.
- Entering data that currently resides in several systems and spreadsheets, such as contact information and birth dates (month and day), into PowerChurch as our one central database.
- Replacing QuickBooks with the PowerChurch Fund Accounting module.

The PowerChurch system is fully integrated with Vanco, the donation payment processing system we have been using for many years for transferring funds electronically from the bank accounts of members who enroll in the service to the church account. We have expanded our Vanco services to include donations from the church's website, which can be used to make one-time or recurring donations directly from a bank account or charged to a debit or credit card.

We are adding electronic giving options with mobile and text giving, also through Vanco. These changes will expand the ways individuals can donate to the church while, at the same time, minimize the data entry work required of our Financial Secretaries Sandy Milbank and Ellen Dooley.

Thank you for your continued financial support!

As we have noted in the weekly updates, the work of our church continues during the pandemic. If you have been able to continue your offering to the church, either by mailing checks to the church office or signing up for automated giving, we are

extremely grateful. Without our in-person Sunday services our offering for the year has fallen behind prior years. We have done some spending belt-tightening, such as turning down the heat in the sanctuary and the Parish House during the cooler months and putting a hold on discretionary expenses, but we have also incurred unplanned expenses in order for Pastor Jared to provide podcasts and online meetings.

These efforts, while helpful, have not offset the decrease in our weekly income. The Finance Committee, with the support of the Steering Committee, is working on a plan to transition to a July-June fiscal year which will tie our finances to our program year vs. a calendar year. A significant part of that work is projecting the church's financial needs for the upcoming six months and, in collaboration with the Stewardship Committee, identifying strategies for making up the difference. This work will be ongoing for the foreseeable future.

If you have any questions about electronic giving or finances, please contact me, Yvonne Whitaker, by email: [whitaker@gmavt.net](mailto:whitaker@gmavt.net) or phone: 482-4279.

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## Lawn Mowers

Thank you to our faithful mowers for keeping the church grounds beautiful!

July 2 - 8	David Eddy
July 9 - 15	Phil Pouech
July 16 - 22	David Blanck
July 23 - 29	Ellen Dooley



## UHC Steering Committee

The steering committee has been meeting on a regularly (once or twice a month) via GoToMeeting to keep things moving forward during the time of the pandemic. We have not been able to meet in-person since mid-March. The following is a list of items that has been accomplished and/or being worked on over the last couple of months.

- We have moved all our financial and member records from various databases into one: PowerChurch. In conjunction with this work a detailed financial procedures document has been drafted and updated by Yvonne Whitaker.
- We have transitioned the administration of the Outreach Funding to HCRC via a Memorandum of Understanding.
- We changed the job description for the office administrator (formerly Heather's position) based on the efficiencies above and moved the responsibilities to more heavily support communications.
- A committee spearheaded by Marie Eddy, hired Jody Ciano, who started June 1, as our administrative/communications coordinator.
- We stopped in-person worship services mid-March to comply with the VT Stay At Home order and began the following:
  - o Through Easter there was a daily spiritual reflection email sent by Pastor Jared.
  - o Since Easter there have been 1 – 3 daily spiritual reflection emails weekly.
  - o We initiated a Wednesday Evening Vesper evening series
  - o For about 5 weeks we held Sunday morning 10:00 check-in services and moved that to a podcast released on Sunday mornings.
  - o The Membership Care Committee has been doing regular check-ins with congregation members via phone calls and emails and birthday and anniversary cards are still being sent by them.
  - o Just before the Stay At Home order we had planned a new member orientation session and new member service for Palm Sunday. We have several interested new community members interested in joining.
- Our Missions Committee has organized a strong community-wide approach to support stocking the Little Free Pantry. There have been news articles about this in community papers and social media (Facebook).
- The in-person plant sale was moved to an online web based store for perennials (developed by Jared and Leah Hamilton), with a well planned sale pick-up day event meeting the Vermont Health Department safety requirements. Paquette's in Williston donated a portion of the proceeds of the sale of annuals to those that mentioned UCH in their purchase during mid to late May. The total proceeds garnered almost \$6500 – more than we have earned in previous years. There was a great article in the Citizen as a follow-up. The task for cleaning out and organizing the garden shed in support of this event was spearheaded by Jon and Sharonlee Trefry.
- The FunRun was moved from an in-person event to a virtual event. Spearheaded by Meaghan McKenna and supported by many others. The event was tremendously successful and surpassed the initial goal of \$3,000. Our event supports the Vermont Foodbank's Backpack Program; a program which discreetly puts foods in kids backpacks to reduce food insecurity during weekends and school. The Vermont Foodbank is operating at an all-time high during this pandemic. This was another event that garnered newspaper article(s).
- The American Red Cross has used the parish hall to host two community-wide blood drive events in April and May.
- The Hinesburg Youth Program trip planned for June was canceled. Jared and the Hinesburg Youth Program families had a virtual meeting a few weeks ago. Instead of the originally planned out of state trip, Hinesburg Youth Program will be working with New Community Project in Starksboro this summer in some capacity.
- Jared postponed his sabbatical this year (had planned to take July and August off completely) so that he could be here to support our needs throughout this time of

the pandemic, which include connecting and providing worship services in new ways.

- A safety plan has been drafted for when we can get back to in-person worship services. For the time-being the parish hall and sanctuary are both closed to the public. Jared and Jody are using the parish hall offices for their work time.
- A plan has been drafted to develop a Deacon role in the church to support in-person worship Sunday services by completing the physical tasks repeatably required.
- The group wanting to rehab the Vestry is working on various issues related to parking and forming an LLC in the next few months. Once this is complete UCH will transfer ownership of the Vestry to this LLC.
- Property upkeep for the church and parish hall have included regular mowing and gardening, primarily all done by volunteers.
- We have filed an application with the Farm Bureau to conservation funds for the sale of

the Baptist Lot. Estimates have been received as to the value of the land if sold in part of in its entirety. This will be a multi-step and perhaps multi-year process to divest ourselves of this property and use the proceeds to concentrate our property maintenance on the church/parish hall center of the village lot.

- A new Little Free Pantry sign was designed and purchased.
- A proposal has been developed to move the playground from the current location which is vulnerable to flooding. We hope to proceed with volunteer labor and a mini fundraiser to support out of pocket costs.
- A draft design of a green space project for the field behind the parish hall was finalized in early March. The core team working on this project had plans to introduce this to the church council and congregation in meetings and then the pandemic hit. We are working on pricing the various elements of the project and will take it up again in the fall.

## Survey Results

A survey was developed in May and sent out to our members regarding return to church interest. Highlights of the survey responses are as follows:

- 23/45 responses would return with safety precautions
- 32/45 people said they would return to an outdoor service.
- There is support for 2 services but less so for using the parish hall for overflow.
- Social distancing & not shaking hands had broad support, other measures were less certain.
- One person was not comfortable with the return to Sunday School with precautions.
- 88% said they would watch services online
- 93% said coffee hour was a no-go until the quarantine is lifted.
- Comments indicated folks were hesitant to sing because singing spreads the virus more readily.



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