

MVLP Gather 'Round E-News - Issue #15

May 6, 2020

This is the fifteenth issue of our E-newsletter, "Gather 'Round," to call us together through the internet to share news and needs and stories with each other. If you have a tale to tell or a perspective to share, please send it on for the next issue!

The Buildings Are Closed; The Church Is Open!

Back issues of this "Gather 'Round" E-news are available on the Moosup Valley Church website, thanks to our webmaster, Pat Safstrom. Go to moosupvalley.church and click on the tab at the top of the page.

Sunday is Mothers' Day: Make It Personal!

Sunday is Mother's Day and, while we can't gather to celebrate in person, we still can remember our mothers and share what they mean/meant to us in the next issue of "Gather 'Round." Send a simple memory or *very* brief story to

BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com. Finish the statement, "I remember Momma when _____." Or, "I could always count

on my mother to _____." Or, "When I was happy/sad/hurt/scared, she would

_____." Or, "No matter how tired she was _____." Or, tell us if she liked to sing or raise flowers, cook or sew, worked outside the home to put food on the table, taught Sunday School, ran church events or PTA or Grange. You get the idea! They don't have to be happy thoughts. Not everyone's home was happy, and if your childhood was traumatic, we will grieve with you. Email (or phone me) your contribution by Friday noon! (I won't publish your name unless you ask me to.)

Rev. Betsy Reflects: When Did We See You Sick?

Read Matthew 25:31-46

The world is in turmoil. Nations spar with nations. The sea rises and storms intensify. Refugees flee violence and children die of hunger. And in the midst of it all, a virus lurks, unseen, ready to invade our cells and make us sick, or worse!

While we are busy tending to our own lives and all the inconveniences and fears and troubles (and, yes, griefs) that COVID-19 has foisted upon us, some of us are suffering more than others. In "Gather 'Round" issue #13, I summarized four new "classes" of people emerging from this pandemic: The Remotes, The Essentials, The Unpaid, and The Forgotten. The virus is affecting us disproportionately.

Some of us are "Remotes," those of us who are professional "white collar workers," who, aside from having cabin fever and the complications of working from home, are more likely to be white and middle class. But we are able to stay out of harm's way by sheltering in place, going out only for groceries and pickups at the pharmacy drive-through window.

Those of us who are “Essentials,” those of us who are hands-on “blue collar workers,” especially health care employees, are more likely to be black and brown – and we are getting sicker and dying at a greater rate. We cannot stay safe when we are caring for others in hospitals and nursing homes, staffing our emergency services, gathering our orders from shelves in warehouses. We are exposed more often and, on top of that, we are exhausted!

On April 3, the American Medical Association, representing some 250,000 doctors, implored the Department of Health and Human Services to release coronavirus data by race. “It is well documented that social and health inequities are longstanding and systemic disturbances to the wellness of marginalized, minoritized and medically underserved communities,” the doctors wrote. And further, “While COVID-19 has not created the circumstances that have brought about health inequities, it has and will continue to severely exacerbate existing and alarming social inequities along racial and ethnic lines.”

Not only has Governor Raimondo and Health Department Director Doctor Alexander-Scott noticed, but also the United Church of Christ. Our Southern New England UCC staff, including Rev. Marilyn Kendrix whom we know well, writes “While this medical and economic emergency is having a severe impact on everyone in America, this impact pales when compared to what is being experienced by our African American communities and other communities of color.”

And in the midst of this pandemic, where in the world is Jesus? This was a big question for the first followers of Jesus. He was not in the tomb, but where *was* he? They did not remember that he had told them exactly where he would be – wherever someone feeds the hungry or gives drink to the thirsty, welcomes the stranger, gives clothing to the naked, *cares for the sick* and visits those in prison. Where in the world is Jesus? He is where *we* are when we care for God’s people. Regardless of what “new class” the virus has put us in, this concerns us! We are called to pay attention and to speak up. I have attached our leaders’ “Pastoral Letter on the Disparate Impact of COVID-19 on Communities of Color,” for more information.

Coloring Pages – *Not Just for Kids!*

Sandra Moore of the United Methodist Federal Credit Union and a friend and colleague, has created three coloring pages – “Faith,” “Hope,” and “Thank You” – which you can color in with crayons or markers and then send to essential service workers and anyone who could use a boost of appreciation. I have attached all three below (in one PDF file, 8 ½ x 11, end-to-end) for you to download. It will do *your* heart good as well.

Medical Debt

Medical debt in this country is a huge problem, causing the poorest among us to cut back on some of the most important necessities, including food and clothing, while simultaneously putting them at risk of having needed health care services refused. Not only has the UCC nationally raised money to help, but also it is one of the first justice actions the new Southern New England Conference is working on in our region.

This is a problem that can be addressed. With every \$100 raised, we can eliminate \$10,000 in medical debt in some of the neediest Southern New England communities, including Springfield, Bridgeport, Hartford, and Providence. How? By working with the nonprofit, [RIP Medical Debt](#), the same organization that worked with Chicago area churches to erase \$5.3 million in debt

and with St. Louis area churches to erase \$12.9 million there. This is a very good deal – a small investment with a huge payout!

I have already made a contribution in my own name because I have seen in my own family how crippling medical debt can be. But it would be good if our churches stepped up as well. Please consider sending a check to Pat, Moosup Valley Church treasurer (see below), and which church she should credit. And I will make another contribution to match yours! (But do it soon; the deadline is May 18th!)

Tracey's Adventure!

Nature is a wonderful thing. I love to be outside working, enjoying the sun. Even in the cold of the winter, I love the snow and the crisp clean feel of the air – as long as there isn't too much wind. I'm not a wind lover; I stay inside hiding from it.

Karen and I are planting a garden this year. We've talked about it for many years but couldn't decide on a spot. We have one now. On the weekend we erected a 5x5 prefab green house. Karen planted some seeds in little pots, and we put them in there. Well, yesterday, the wind blew it over. I was talking on the phone; one minute it was fine, and the next time I looked, it was on its side. I stood it back up, weighted it down with rocks, picked up the pots. Some were fine, others need some work or a complete overhaul.

I am not really the gardener; Karen is – from a long line of planters. Being from Ireland, her father always had a garden and gave us more vegetables than we could ever eat or give away. So Karen aspires to be a robust gardener, too. Last year she started lots of little pots which we took in and out of the house every day. My job was to move the containers, dig the land, carry the dirt, move the rocks, ready the space.

Last year, the little pots started to sprout. Still we were taking them in and out because it was chilly in the mornings and overnight. When some of the veggies were about two inches tall or so, I came out one evening to bring them in. I looked, and looked again, and was surprised to see that all the little sprouts were gone. Something had snacked on them. Everything was gone. Now the worst to come, I have to tell Karen that something happened to her little plants. Hence, this year a green house.

So yesterday when I saw the greenhouse on its side, I again had to tell her the news. She was sad to go out to the yard and see the greenhouse on the side, the plant pots astray inside. Today she went out and straightened up the little pots, committed to trying again. This year we will have a Victory Garden!

Special Prayers: Please hold in your heart and prayers...

Everyone in the Sroka family, struggling with COVID-19, better now with Ronnie's incredible care that kept them out of the hospital and alive, even while ill himself. Fevers are down and they are getting stronger.

Rose's relatives, the Pierre family, who have lost four members to COVID-19, including her cousin's wife, a nurse practitioner and mother of three little ones.

Joanne is home, still very tired from the surgery, but being well taken care of by David and Viana. She appreciates our prayers and expression of love.

Claire's son, Jim, who continues to recover from COVID-19.

Gather 'Round for Bible Study

Both Rev. Betsy and Pastor Bob are leading Bible Study. Here's how to participate:

Psalms: Tuesday & Friday mornings at 10:00 a.m. with Betsy, reading and discussing selected psalms and the Easter scriptures by Zoom. Contact BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com.

Gospel of John: Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. with Bob by telephone. (Send Bob your phone number, and he will call you.) Tonight he continues in the Gospel of John, chapter 20.

Mt. Vernon Streams Sunday Service

Worship Sunday, May 10, will be on Facebook Live on the Mount Vernon Larger Parish page at 12:30 p.m. – <https://www.facebook.com/MVLPspirit/?ref=bookmrks>).

The Day Will Surely Come...

In anticipating our being able to return to our churches (with fewer than 20 people and modifications), hopefully soon, we will need gloves, masks, sanitizer, and wipes. Pastor Bob has bought masks to supplement the ones you have made. If you have leads on other supplies, please let me or Pastor Bob know. We may never be back to "normal," but the day will surely come when we will be back in our pews.

Weekly Offerings may be mailed for:

Mt. Vernon to Ron Allen (116 Barbs Hill Road, Greene, RI 02827),

Moosup Valley to Pat Safstrom (76 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825),

Rice City to Phyllis Dexter (53 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825).

Reverend Betsy can be reached at BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com or 401-463-8697.

Pastor Bob can be reached at revbobh@gmail.com or 401-440-7831.

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