

MVLP Gather Round E-News - Issue #22

June 12, 2020

This is the twenty-second 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 "Gather 'Round" E-news are available on the Moosup Valley Church website, thanks to our webmaster, Pat Safstrom. Go to [moosupvalley.church](https://www.moosupvalley.church) and click on the tab at the top of the page.

Mt. Vernon Streams Sunday Service

Worship Sunday, June 14, will be on the MVLP Facebook Live page, streaming from the Moosup Valley Church at **9:00 a.m.** The theme is "I Am a Child of God." The Order of Worship is attached. The link: <https://www.facebook.com/MVLPspirit/?ref=bookmrks>).

Mt. Vernon Hymn Sing

Sunday, June 14 at 3:00 pm. We are not ready to get together yet, but Doug Tourgee is going to play some of our favorites so that we can sing along at home. You can join us on the Mount Vernon Larger Parish Page. Pastor Bob and Doug will go live on facebook live at 3:00 pm. These are some of the songs we will sing: "In The Garden," "How Great Thou Art," "Amazing Grace," "The Old Rugged Cross," "To God Be The Glory," "Blessed Assurance," "What A Friend We Have In Jesus," "It is Well With My Soul," "God Bless America," and "I'll Fly Away."

Evening Prayer

We have begun holding Evening Prayer, Vespers, on Wednesday at 7:15 p.m. by Zoom, a brief (20 minute) time of scripture, song, meditation and prayer, a time to give thanks for the day just past and praise to God. Please let Rev. Betsy know if you are willing to read or sing. We will join in ancient beloved prayers. It will be acceptable to come in your PJs! Here is the Zoom link:

Join Evening Prayer Zoom

Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4971608531?pwd=cVJlUmw1QndYcmthDVjVZWDA2UT09>

Meeting ID: 497 160 8531

Password: 038040

Telephone if you need it: 1-929-205-6099

Also, if you would like to hear the Evening Prayer service, we could include you by telephone, even if you do not have a computer. In addition to Pastor Bob's Sunday bulletin, I am attaching the Evening Prayer Order of Service so you can follow along.

NEW! Moosup Valley Sunday Services

Moosup Valley Church will begin holding Sunday Worship by Zoom, beginning on Sunday, June 21, Fathers' Day, at 10:30 a.m. Congregational participation will be sought for readings, scriptures, and responses. Martha Safstrom will play from home, and words to the hymns will be shared so participants can sing along (while muted). The Zoom link will be inserted in the newsletter next week.

Moosup Valley Congregational Christian Church, UCC

Stand outside our small white church on Moosup Valley Road on Sunday mornings and hear some of the same hymns played when the church was new, 152 years ago – although now interspersed with newer hymns and melodies for the twenty-first century.

Step up on the hand-hewn granite steps which were dragged up Moosup Valley Road by oxen over two days and walk through one of its two original front doors. See the sun shine through the simple glass windows. Sit on one of the wooden benches, plain and sturdy, and notice the well-used Bible. Look up at the stern face of our first pastor, Elder George W. Kennedy, who performed 164 weddings and served his small rural parish for 30 years. Notice the wooden collection box made by Bradford Battey, the hymn board made by Skip Pendegraph, and the child-sized table and red chairs which many Foster residents sat in as children.

The church was built as a meeting house for community lectures and religious services. Until that time, Moosup Valley families traveled to Rice City, Foster Center, or the old Dorrance School on Kennedy Road for worship. Others attended services and Sunday School in the Moosup Valley School, called the Vestry School, now moved across the road and part of the library.

But Ira Brown changed that when he leased a plot of land to the Moosup Valley Association of Foster for 99 years. Sixty-five people pledged their money, materials and labor. A Mrs. Brayton of Moosup Valley wrote in a letter on August 25, 1864, "The Meeting House is to be put up this afternoon." It was finished in 1865.

In one of its first actions, the Moosup Valley Association set up a schedule that allowed the Christian denomination to use the meeting house two Sundays a month. The Association left the two remaining Sundays open for lectures or worship by other denominations. The Christians probably got the extra attention because Rice City, just south of Moosup Valley, was the center of a strong local Christian Church movement. At one point the Rice City Church listed 450 members.

For the Christians, Christ was the only head of the church, and the Bible was a sufficient rule for faith and practice. Each person had the right of private judgment and liberty of conscience, and character was the only requirement for church membership. The Christian movement was appealing and Moosup Valley grew, and on March 19, 1868, just three years after the meeting house was built, families formed the Moosup Valley Christian Church and unanimously chose George Kennedy, who had been traveling to Rice City to preach, as its first pastor. A year later, the church register listed 50 members and reached a high of nearly 100 by 1879.

These were busy times. Sterry Foster, who lived on Potter Road, was Sunday School superintendent. Classes in the Vestry School were filled not only with children but also adults. Old journals record the names of each pupil. There were Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor meetings in the 1890s, other youth groups, picnics and croquet games, prayer meetings and church suppers. Box Socials and apron-necktie suppers brought young people together.

Even so, Moosup Valley couldn't maintain a large, strong congregation and so shared its minister with other congregations. In 1890, there were "union" services with the Line, which meant that two churches shared a pastor or they held joint services. In 1928, a similar arrangement was made with Rice City and Clayville. These and other informal unions eventually led to the formation of the Mt. Vernon Larger Parish, an organization of small Baptist and Congregational churches in the area, which provided a partial salary for the pastor while allowing the church to be autonomous.

There were denominational changes in 1931 when the Christian Church merged with the Congregational Church and again in 1961, when Moosup Valley voted unanimously to join the United Church of Christ with its roots in the Christian, Congregational, Evangelical and Reform movements. Since then, church membership has waxed and waned as children have grown up and moved away and generations have passed on and new people have moved in, seeking a church community.

The Living Crèche pageant, started by the Rev. Joy Utter 30 years ago, continues to be an annual highlight. The Christmas Tree Lighting and the Concert in the Valley have been expanded to monthly live music events under the leadership of Laurie Murphy. When it's too cold to be outside, the meeting house is turned into a warm and cozy coffee house with punch and cookies, and the pulpit is moved to make room for area musicians. In warm weather, neighbors visit with each other around the campfire built by Jake McCormack.

Many of the families listed in the old records have descendants who are active members today, and new people continue to come, some because of the timely website maintained by Pat Safstrom, some drawn by the restored garden along the stone wall and the plantings, paving stones, and window box under the front window. Under the leadership

of Moderator Carl Safstrom, a permanent stage is being built on the lawn and plans have been designed for an addition to accommodate a new furnace and meeting and storage space.

Small churches are important in the country. They bring neighbors together around shared values, create networks of people who care for one another, and witness to the birthing and passing of generations. They also welcome new people into a community and offer friendship and hospitality and support – “no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey.”

Moosup Valley Church, 152 years old this year, stands as a beacon on a well-traveled country road and invites those who are intrigued by its history, yet looking for a vibrant faith suitable for this new age, to step across its threshold.

Note: This history is based on research by Margery I. Matthews, a member of Moosup Valley Church, together with Virginia I. Benson and Arthur E. Wilson, found in *Churches of Foster: A History of Religious Life in Rural Rhode Island*, published in 1978.

Thanks for the Memories

From Laila: In the Valley, as we Valley girls called it, there was a group of us that hung out together. This included me, Susan, Eileen Luther Butler, her sisters and the Hawes girls, also my sister. Sometimes we let the boys tag along -- Steven Norden and Fred Salisbury. We used to meet at the Norden’s house and play baseball in their field. If we got tired of that, we would go over to the grange supper shed and play 1, 2, 3 Red Light. The summers were the best times. We all got together almost daily, and our parents didn’t worry about us because we were always together.

From Susan: When I was a little girl, in the summer I would sit on the stone wall at our house and listen to Grandma Kennedy playing the organ and singing at church. I would also watch Aunt Vivian walk down the road when it was communion with the silver holder with glasses filled with grape juice. I couldn’t wait to see Grandma come out the door, and I would run to meet her. I loved her so very much. My mom, Priscilla Norden, started playing organ at the church at age six.

From Sonja: My mother, Sylvia Bassett, was very active at Moosup Valley. She went to church regularly and was very involved in the Women's Fellowship, the philanthropic arm of the church. The group met at different members' homes, and they would often meet at our house. Mrs. Byron O. Waterman was President, and I can still remember some of the women who were members: Bertha Bennis, Grace Dunbar, Christine Saltinstall, Elsie Kivisto, Ruth Salisbury, and there were others, I am sure. Pat Safstrom joined the group, but that was after I had gone to college. I remember that one of their fundraisers was a bake sale held on Labor Day when the grange had their clam bake. My mother always made a number of loaves of "pulla," Finnish coffee cake, which sold fast.

The fact that the library (which is now attached to what was Moosup Valley School) stood beside the church is well known. I attended only first grade in that school, and there were two of us. When Laila Renvall (the other first grader) moved to Finland, and I was destined to be the lone second grader, my parents tuitioned me to the newly built Western Coventry Elementary School. Moosup Valley School closed when Captain Isaac Paine School opened.

From Cheryl: The one thing I remember most about going to Sunday School and Church is that often Mrs. Harrington would bring in a load of violets and give each child a violet upon leaving...I remember her being busy about the church – organizing and making sure everything was in its proper place. It is funny that I cannot remember her speaking to us much except when it was about plants – usually violets.

And how can we talk about the church without talking about the Valley?

From Cheryl: My sister, Brenda, and I would often go for horseback rides early in the day and get home before dark with our dog, Friskie, tagging along with us wherever we went. We rode all the dirt roads around Moosup Valley. One of our favorite places to ride was Johnson Road before it was tarred. Once it became tarred, they left a strip unpaved in front of Alton Bassett's place (across from where Sonja lives now – the house she grew up in) – it was the best place because it was a nice stretch, and we could race each other there, and we loved to do that until they paved that area too. Brenda and I used to go to the Ginny B Campground on Saturday nights because they had a live band playing there and it was usually guys from Ponagansett that had formed a band. Alton invited the kids in Moosup Valley to attend because, quite frankly, there was nothing else to do. So many a Saturday night you could find a few of us at the Ginny B listening to older classmates playing the latest songs with the kids from the campground.

The grange used to hold square dances on Saturday nights that I went to with some of my older Moosup Valley friends. I would play lookout for a couple of my older girlfriends because their fathers did not like the boys that they were seeing, so I became the official lookout. There were two other events that the grange put on and I loved them both: Every year the grange put on a minstrel, and when I was old enough I got to be in it the chorus and sang the old standby songs that my parents sang all the time when we were riding in the car, such as “Bicycle Built for Two” and “Sweet Rosie O’Grady.”

The other event, when I got old enough, was to work the annual Labor Day Clam Bake. It seemed everyone turned out to help get the bake going, and then mostly the girls would wait on the tables: it was a hot, long, gruesome day, but oh so much fun! Also the grange use to put on a fair that my family loved to go to; we would see all our friends there – they had the old time things – such as catching the greased pig, that was something to watch. I remember if you had to use the bathroom, then you had to use the

old outhouse in back of the grange, and whenever you used it, someone always seemed to scare you by banging on the walls of the outhouse whenever we would go in.

One of my most favorite things to do was to walk to the Tyler Free Library (which was next to the church then) and get new books for the next two weeks...I read a lot of the books they had. Our neighbor was Jessie Bennis, the librarian, and as much as she liked me, she used to get mad at me every other Saturday for taking out too many books...I can hear her to this day saying, "Cheryl Hawes, why do you take so many books, you will never read them all before they are due back," and I used to say to her, "Yes, I will Mrs. Bennis, honest I will," and I did.

My father used to get fireworks almost every 4th of July and our neighbors and dear friends, the Luthers, who lived two houses away but on a little hill, used to sit on their roof and watch the fireworks from their house, and we could hear them cheer...why they didn't come to the house to watch, I don't remember. Growing up in the Valley was a wonderful way to grow up. We had two farms up the road from us, both of which were Dexter's: We were really friendly with Hebert Dexter and his family, the one closest to us, and we were in and out of their house and barn whenever we felt like it, like they were family to us.

There used to be baseball games at Moosup Valley Ball Field. I don't remember the names of the teams, but our Dad played and Mr. Luther (Ed) played as well. So all of us kids would be there playing in the field beside the ball field – sometimes watching the games, but not so much. Dad and Ed were both hotheads from time to time. I remember one time my father looking up at Ed – he was pretty tall – and Ed looking down at my Dad. It was almost like they were nose to nose arguing about some call, and all of us kids thinking they were going to get into a fist fight, but nothing ever came of it except a lot of yelling. After the game, it was all back to being friends again.

Obviously, as I sit here thinking, I could go on and on and on. I know that the Nordens, Luthers, Luthers (two sets of Luthers), and Salisburys were at most of these events together. We were like a little community within a community if you know what I mean.

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

➤ Michelle DiBiasio's brother-in-law, Rick, who is struggling with cancer. Her daughter, Ayla, is recovering from surgery and doing well.

➤ Joanne Newton, now recuperating at home. The family asks us not to call because they are afraid she will stumble, running for the phone. Cards are welcome, however. Send to 51 Victory Highway, Greene, RI 02827.

➤ Barbara Cederfield had knee replacement surgery on Wednesday, which went really well. She is going to Woodpecker Hill for rehabilitation. Pray for a quick recovery and healing. She has been enjoying her mini-vacation!

- Pastor Doug Tourgee's sister and brother-in-law are both now at home and doing well.
- Our nation following the tragic death of George Floyd and so many other people of color, and that God may teach us how best to be agents of compassion, strength, witness, and justice.

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 the lectionary texts and selected psalms on Zoom. Contact her for the link at BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com.

Philippians: The Rice City Bible Study is focusing on Paul's letter to the Philippians on Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. They have discovered that an old fashioned teleconference works just as well for them. (Send Bob your phone number, and he will call you.)

Enrich your Spiritual Life with a Mystic

Michele DiBiasio has an extra copy of "Julian of Norwich, Selections from Revelations of Divine Love – Annotated and Explained" that she would be happy to give to anyone interested. She writes, "I am really enjoying this book and learning a lot. I was hoping someone was interested, and I could send or drop off my extra copy. New, hardcover. Great read!"

Prayer for Peace

Dermot Donnelly in "How to Survive the Rest of Your Life: A Practical Users' Guide"
Submitted by Michelle DiBiasio

Lord,
You are the God of all peace.
I present to you
all places of conflict
in our world.

As there is no ideology,
political thought,
culture or particular
way of life greater than
the life of the humblest person.

I pray for peace.
In Jesus' name. Amen

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).

Mt. Vernon Larger Parish to Scott Knox (150 Foster Ctr. Rd., 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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