

MVLP Gather Round E-News - Issue #25

July 3, 2020

This is the twenty-fifth 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 and click on the tab at the top of the page.

Rev. Betsy’s Thoughts on the Fourth of July

Our Pilgrim ancestors of the Congregational faith came to this land to seek a new life, to find freedom to worship at they choose, to pursue the Biblical vision of a City Set on a Hill. They brought with them values from Europe and cultivated them here.

But in many ways, the model that the Puritans brought with them to the Massachusetts Bay colony was as oppressive as the one they were escaping. Roger Williams’ thinking was revolutionary and caused him to be driven out of the commonwealth in the dead of winter, in the middle of the night, in a snowstorm. He founded Providence “to hold forth a lively experiment that a most flourishing civil state may stand and best be maintained with full liberty in religious concernments.”

These emerging values shaped the emerging nation and formed the basis of the Declaration of Independence that was signed almost 250 years ago. “We hold these truths to be self-evident,” wrote Thomas Jefferson, “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness has come true for those of us who have a job and sufficient income for a decent place to live, a health care plan when a family member is sick, a quality education and citizenship in the best country in the world.

But life in America is not perfect for everyone – we have unfinished business. It helps to remember, when they adopted the Declaration, that they had unfinished business in 1776, too: Women were not equal, slaves were not free, happiness was realized by relatively few.

Well, we've made progress, of course. We have a middle class that, by and large, in the last 50 years, has found life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, for those of us who are white – although gains made in the 20th century are slipping in the 21st century with our new global economy, computerization of almost every aspect of American life, and legislation that makes it easier for corporations to move jobs overseas – yes, still.

But we have not made gains everywhere: Racism, homophobia, and poverty still dog us as a country, especially with each new wave of immigration. We're not the land of the free for everyone....

Perhaps the founders knew that their words did not describe the current reality – but that the Declaration described the *end result to be pursued*, the *beginning* of the work to create the “City Set on a Hill.”

Frederick Douglas wrote, “Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning.” And William Faulkner reminds us, “We must be free not because we *claim* freedom but because we *practice* it.”

Yes, we have challenges, and today's issues are more complex: than ever. How shall we deal with immigration, violence, racism, pandemics, tax reform, drug overdoses? Yes, we have misdeeds – too many decision-makers act in self-interest, not the public interest. Congress is split along party lines, held hostage by lobbyists. Rhode Island's General Assembly is notorious for making decisions in the middle of the night and adjourning with legislation still on their desks at the personal whim of the Speaker and his political cronies. Yes, we have hate speech in campaigns, on the internet, in print and in the broadcast media which stifles dialogue and polarizes people.

I'm still chuckling over Rabbi Leslie Gutterman's guest editorial in The Providence Journal a few years ago in which he told this story:

“A man was walking along the beach and found a bottle. A genie appeared. The genie said, ‘I am so grateful to get out of that bottle, I'll grant you one wish.’ ‘I

have always wanted to go to Hawaii,’ the man replied. ‘I've never been able to go because I am scared of flying and become claustrophobic on a boat. My wish is for a road to be built from here to Hawaii.’

“The genie replied, ‘No, I can't do that. Just imagine all the pilings and concrete involved.’ The man then told the genie, ‘Okay. There is another possibility. I want to know why this current election cycle is so mean-spirited.’ The genie considered and then said, ‘So do you want two lanes or four?’

Yes, although we have *unfinished business* – and we know we have work to do – we’re still a country to be proud of: The way citizens like us form nonprofit organizations when we see a need to better people’s lives and rise up with contributions of time and money to help in a disaster. The way we abide by the law, most of the time, and can trust our public officials, most of the time. The way we can hold vigils and rallies, and say what we need to say, without fearing repercussions. The way we can count on a full night’s sleep without being dragged out of bed and arrested for some vague crime – at least *most* of us *most* of the time. The way we celebrate the values of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness – even when we don’t always practice them.

Yes, God has blessed America! And we’re blessed to live here and to raise our children and grandchildren here. But scripture reminds us: the greater the blessings, the greater the responsibility. God’s blessings are meant to be shared. We have work to do.

Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder reminds us of this truth when we become nostalgic about our country’s history:

“The work of God is the calling of a people, whether in the Old Covenant or the New. The church is then not simply the bearer of the message of reconciliation, in the way a newspaper or a telephone company can bear any message with which it is entrusted. Nor is the church simply the result of a message, as an alumni association is the product of a school or the crowds in a theater are the product of the reputation of the film. That men and women are called together to a new social wholeness is itself the work of God, which gives meaning to history.”

Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness – for all – that’s the business we’re in. Today, we remember when it all started, and so join me in saying,

“Happy birthday, America!

Pastor Bob’s Remembering and Re-Living the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. --That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

We hold it to be self-evident ... A Continental Congress that argued about everything, did not see a debate about this. It was evident!

That all men are created equal ... Those men who wrote that were not all able to see the irony in those words. Some of them considered only land owning men as equal. Few of them considered women as equal. Most of them considered the natives of this land as less than human – savages. Some of them actually owned other human beings and saw them as property. They were not open to non-Christian believers and, as a society, were not yet aware of sexual preference and gender identity as needing inclusion. Let us now say and mean All People Are Created Equal – keeping in mind the other Creatures of this world that are not people but are also deserving of acknowledgement, care, and protection.

They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. ... We have been given Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness by God, and those gifts cannot be transferred or taken away – they are unalienable! Again, the writers of these words did not see the irony that they had taken or refused these rights to so many. We must say these words. We must mean these words for all people. We must live these words. We must make these words a real and living part of our government and society for all people, because ...

Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

There is no debate ... These rights must be insured by our government and in our society for all people! Let us be about the work of our Creator and obtain these rights for ourselves and insure these rights for all!

E Pluribus Unum ... Out of Many, One!

Moosup Valley Sunday Services

Moosup Valley Church is now holding Sunday Worship by Zoom, at our regular time, 10:30 a.m., from the church. Members of the congregation take part in readings and prayers, and Martha plays the hymns from home – to which we sing along (while muted). This Sunday, July 5, is a Communion Sunday, so please bring a piece of bread or cracker or the rest of your breakfast and a glass of juice or wine or a cup of tea or coffee – the Passover meal story upon which we base our communion service was essentially a congregational supper – to the computer with you. The Order of Worship bulletin is attached here (and will be emailed again on Saturday along with Pastor Bob's bulletins), and will include the words to the hymns, scripture, and prayers, everything all in one PDF document. Click on the Zoom link to join the service, highlighted below:

Topic: Moosup Valley Sunday Morning Worship
Time: July 5, 2020 10:30 AM (Eastern time)

Join Sunday Morning Worship

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4971608531?pwd=cVJIUmw1QndYcmtiakhDVjVmWDA2UT09>

Meeting ID: 497 160 8531

Password: 038040

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

Rice City Outdoor Worship

Rice City has begun worshipping outside at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday Mornings – socially distanced and masked. Order of Worship Bulletin is attached.

Evening Prayer

Moosup Valley has begun holding Evening Prayer, Vespers, on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. (*new time*) 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. If you wish, please bring a candle to light. Let Rev. Betsy know if you would like to sing an evening hymn. The Order of Prayer bulletin is attached, below, so you can see what the service is like. 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=cVJIUmw1QndYcmtiakhDVjVmWDA2UT09>

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.

NEW! Mount Vernon Live Streaming Wednesday Evenings

Mt. Vernon Baptist Church has begun live streaming a Wednesday evening service at 7:00 p.m. The link: <https://www.facebook.com/MVLPspirit/?ref=bookmrks>). The Order of Worship will be emailed on Saturday.

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

- Michelle DiBiasio's brother-in-law, Rick, who is struggling with cancer.
- Joanne and David Newton were at Rice City's service on Sunday, and everyone was so excited to see them!
- Tina Lavalley had surgery on Monday and is doing well, but please keep her in prayer as she goes back for surgery on her thumb on Monday.
- Phyllis Dexter has been able to see her heart doctor, and they will be doing some tests.

- Barbara Cederfield is home following knee replacement surgery, but her son Jeff was hospitalized in Hartford with an infection, now home on antibiotics and fever is down.
- Bev's Aunt Helen, 94, has fallen again – but no broken bones -- in Assisted Living.
- Ann Grenier who is fighting an infection caused by a tick bite.
- Rice City friend Jack Greenleaf is receiving cardiac rehab at home.
- Wayne Carlow is being treated for a health issue at home (non-COVID).
- Richard Lucky is getting new treatment at the VA to help with swallowing.
- Elsie Penta continues to be well at Genesis, and the family looks forward to a visit.
- Please continue your prayers for Jean Salemi who is awaiting back surgery.
- Frances Shippee as she goes for her six-month cancer checkup on Monday.
- Linda Andrew's son, Peter, in Arizona and in need of prayers.

Gather 'Round for Bible Study

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

Mornings: Tuesday & Friday mornings at 10:00 a.m. with Betsy, discussing the lectionary texts on Zoom. Contact her at BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com for the link.

Evening: The Rice City Bible Study is finishing up Paul's letter to the Philippians on Tuesdays (*new day*) 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 add you to the call list.)

Foster Food Pantry Wish List

Carol Mauro writes, the Food Pantry at Foster DHS could use the following items this month: baked beans, pork & beans, box mac'n cheese, mayo, instant potatoes, gravy, canned fruit, cookies/desserts, and cooking oil.

Donation bins are located at Tyler and Foster Public Libraries (outside), the Post Office, Town Hall lobby and DHS office. DHS also accepts grocery store gift cards, checks and cash donations. Checks can be made payable to DHS – Town of Foster, and mailed to 181 Howard Hill Road, Foster, RI 02825. Thank you for your continued support!

Back to School Supplies Needed

Also, the Foster Department of Human Services will be helping over 40 children fill their backpacks for school this year. The following school supplies are needed to complete these backpacks: colored pencils, dry erase markers (black and colored), colored markers (chubby and slim), 1" and 2" 3-ring binders, filler paper, small packs of tissues, small bottles of hand sanitizer and wipes, index cards – small and large, highlighters, pencil boxes/bags, construction paper, drawing pads, hand held pencil sharpeners, glue sticks, erasers, one subject notebooks, pens, crayons, 6 tab dividers for 3-ring binders, scissors, Elmer's glue, pocket folders (okay if has fasteners), composition notebooks, pencils, juice boxes, individually wrapped snacks, ziplock snack and sandwich bags, scotch tape, book covers and post-it notes. (New backpacks are donated by the Salvation Army.)

Donations can be dropped off in the food bins at the Foster libraries, post office and town hall. Don't worry if you don't have time to shop or want to avoid the stores. DHS will be happy to accept monetary donations to support this cause. Just mail your donation to Town of Foster, Dept. of Human Services, 181 Howard Hill Rd. Foster, RI 02825 and write 'school supplies' on the memo line.

Please drop off donations by August 12th so families will have time to pick them up and get anything extra they need before the start of school. Thank you for sharing your bargains and easing the expense of back to school shopping!

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Priscilla and Bob Rotondo

The garden this year is very green, large and so far, it looks pretty darn good. We are experimenting with using clover as green mulch so we don't have to weed so much. We planted the whole garden with clover in the spring and then later planted the vegetables in the clover. We will see if the yields are still good, but we really like it. No weeding! We have planted 20 tomato plants, 12 pepper plants and lots of green beans, zucchini, lettuce, squash and basil. We are watering from the pond so that helps, too. The next challenge will be keeping the bugs away. Always something when you have a garden!

Behind the Scenes

Mt. Vernon live stream worship has been blessed by being able to use Steve Carter's Professional Equipment. But he will called in to work more and more, like he was last week, Pastor Bob writes. To make the ministry ideal, we are in need of a camera and a computer. If you have upgraded (or now use your phone or tablet for a camera) and have one to spare we could use a donation (or a discounted rate) on items with these specifications:

PROSUMER CAMERA - HD in the 16x9 ratio, 720 minimum resolution (1080 preferable) - 4k is great, SDI or HDMI video output connection (composite is not acceptable), audio inputs (XLR preferable) an SD card for video would be ideal.
COMPUTER - either a macOS high sierra or windows 10, processor: i7 quadcore 2.8GHz, Memory: 4-16 GB RAM, Hard Drive: 500GB solid state OS drive, graphics card: intel HD, DirectX 11, Nvidia GeForce or AMD Radeon, 16GB video memory. If you have one or know someone who might, please contact Pastor Bob.

Closing Meditation

By Oriah Mountain Dreamer, Canadian Prose-Poet

This is the reality we live: aspiring to be at our best, longing for and sometimes finding meaning and connection within ourselves and with that which is larger than ourselves, we are undone by messy bathrooms, traffic jams, and burnt toast. I am not interested in spirituality that cannot encompass my humanness. Because beneath the small daily trials are harder paradoxes, things the mind cannot reconcile but the heart must hold if we are to live fully: profound tiredness and radical hope; shattered beliefs and relentless faith; the seemingly contradictory longings for personal freedom and a deep commitment to others, for solitude and intimacy, for the ability to simply be with the world and the need to change what we know is not right about how we are living.

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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