

News and
Stories from
the people
of FCC of
Anchorage

The Northern Light

May 2020

First Congregational Church of Anchorage

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Minister's Message

Congregation Support Fund

There are so many parts of our lives that we have lost some control over recently. Mostly we have chosen this as an act of communal solidarity and caring for more vulnerable populations and caregivers. But that doesn't make it any less disruptive.

Yet with all of that, we still remain connected and united as a congregation. One way that we are doing this is by recognizing that there are people within our congregation and broader social connections who are facing serious disruptions and hardship. In response to this the Stewardship Ministry has created a process for members to help each other.

We are inviting people who have received a federal stimulus payment, or who have other monetary resources they would like to share, to consider contributing a portion to the Congregation Support Fund at FCC. You can do that with a check to the church office or make an online donation on the church website. Make sure to write **Support Fund** in the memo line.

Once these funds are received, Rev. Jacob (myself), Erin Binek (Deacon), and Sharon Higgins (Chair of Stewardship) will work together under the oversight of the Church Council to distribute these

funds to individuals and families who have need.

The funds will focus on the needs of people directly connected to FCC, but they are also available to people within our broader social networks.

If you or someone you know is having difficulty buying groceries or supporting other financial needs of yourself or family, please contact me. As we receive requests for support, the three of us will make determinations on a case-by-case basis depending upon the available resources and the need shared. It may also be the case that we can connect people with other community resources or help advocate with people in other ways.

Disruption is upon us, and we know some of us will experience it more profoundly than others. This is the exact moment when we as Christians must help carry burdens with each other and with our neighbors. Releasing the resources we have received in times of need is what justice looks like. It is what love looks like. It is what being a community looks like. It is what a life of resurrection looks like.

Happy Eastertide!
Rev. Jacob Poindexter



Message from the Moderator



“What
might
emerge from
asking,
‘What if...?’”

Beginnings. What if...?

It may sound rather trite, but we are of course always beginning something, for example, each day as we wake up. We begin jobs, classes, relationships, living in new places, and on and on, each of us beginning many parts of our lives at times separate from the beginnings by other people. Whether we notice a beginning, call something a beginning or make our beginnings be a time of change is often arbitrary. But beginnings do happen, over and over again.

For FCC, our new year, with newly elected Ministry members and officers, began for all of us at the same time at our April 19th Congregational meeting. Beginning my term as the newly elected moderator, I am now asking each Ministry, as well as the Council, to begin each meeting by considering the question of “What if...?” as it relates to that group. Maybe there is something new, a new beginning of some kind, that is just waiting to be unearthed at/by FCC.

Especially at this hunker-down time, when we cannot proceed exactly how we have always proceeded, and when we have to make novel efforts to even get to see each other and work together, it may be a good idea to make our beginnings more intentional than we might otherwise have done. Maybe Quarantide gives us an excuse to think outside the box when we do this. We can ask ourselves and each other, “What if we...did _____, changed _____, started _____, stopped _____....” (you fill in the blanks).

I want to encourage each of you, whether you are on a Ministry or not, to be creative, to dream a bit. Let’s each be intentional about

this and then as the year goes along, we can share our ideas, thoughts, hesitations and yearnings with each other. We can chat at FCC teatime (currently on Zoom at 3:00 on Wednesdays and Fridays), at FCC Friday Food and Fun events (to be scheduled by the Fellowship Ministry), before and after Sunday services, at Ministry meetings (open to all), by phone, by email or by text. I would like us to think about what we have always done (remembering that even good things can end if their time has passed or they may merit changing), what we would like to see happen at FCC, what new FCC actions or events would bring us joy, and what new things we would like to see our church be involved in.

As part of this “what if” process, imagine that we have an FCC suggestion box (which may actually happen on our web site sometime). What would you like to suggest? Specific topics that might guide you in your cogitations include whether you have an idea or thought about any of the following: 1) the Sunday worship service; 2) youth and adult education; 3) fellowship activities FCC might have (on Zoom or whenever we can actually meet in person); 4) outreach ideas for what FCC might do beyond our usual church activities; 5) FCC financial expenditures or fundraising; or 6) absolutely anything else you might think is, or could be, related to FCC.

While this hunker down Quarantide time can be stressful or worse for some of us, maybe it also can bring joy, revitalization and excitement. I am definitely looking forward to what might emerge from asking “what if”.

-Lynn Barber, Moderator

Fellowship Ministry



A New Adventure – Family Game Night in Zoom!

The Fellowship Ministry meetings lately have been mostly focused on how we can keep connected while we're staying physically distanced. On Friday, April 24, a few hardy souls met for a virtual Friday Food and Fun at 1:00 pm. The idea was that folks would order from a res-

taurant (we suggested Sweet Caribou for this one) to pick up or be delivered. Some came on in to the Zoom room without food to eat, others ate something they cooked up themselves, but the conversation and lighthearted banter was the same as when we've been together in a physical location. So we'll try this again in June if we're still feeling too cautious about coronavirus exposure to risk an in-person rendezvous.

For this month's fellowship gathering, we're inviting everyone to join us in the Fellowship Zoom Room at 6:00 pm

on Friday, May 9 for Family Game Night. We're doing research on various games that lend themselves to being played online, so we'll have two or three available to try either as a whole group or in smaller breakout rooms. If you've played a game in a Zoom room that worked well, please email the Fellowship Ministry through the Church (office@fccak.org). We hope spending a bit of time in lighthearted play gives all of us a much-needed breather from the pandemic blues.

-Kate O'Dell, Chair

Stewardship Ministry

The installation of one pair of furnaces was completed the last week of April. Humidifiers were not installed at that time. It is an agenda item for the May Stewardship meeting. If anyone has any input on the subject, please email the church office or contact Sharon Higgins. At a short meeting following the Semi Annual meeting, it was decided to continue holding the meetings

on the 2nd Tuesday at 3:30 pm. There are 2 vacancies at this time; a vice treasurer and a member at large. We will continue to hold the meetings via zoom until we can safely meet in person. Until then, think of a sunflower garden with blue birds and butterflies.

-Sharon Higgins, Chair

Live every moment
Cherish every day
Embrace every possibility



Worship Ministry

We are having beautiful sunny days and signs of spring beginning to show through the soil. Even though we don't get out much our work goes on in the church.

The Worship Ministry met briefly after the Semi-Annual meeting . This is a list of new members: Sue Hanas, Kathy Means, Amana Mbise, Erin Binek, Claudia Kniefel, Paul Wasko, Sally Janis, Dave Barber and Louise Smith , Chair. We still have one space open. Please give me a call if you are willing to serve.

We will have a Zoom meeting May 21 at 6:00 pm. I will also see that all members have training material before the meeting.

Life is different these days due to the virus but we can set goals for the remainder of the year at a distance.

We are now realizing how friends fill our lives with joy, your souls with sunshine and our hearts with love. Keep in touch and call a member, wear your mask, stay your distance and pray that life will get better.

-Louise Smith, Worship Chair

Outreach Ministry

The principal at Shungnak School is looking forward to receiving more books for the students. We will probably start collecting them in August. We have not yet heard back from the Pan-American Institute yet as to what their plans are for the fall when we hope to sponsor a new student. The Grandfamilies Brunch is on hold until it is safe for a large group of people to come together. We plan to collect winter clothes again for the patrons of Bean's Cafe but will do that earlier in the late fall. Comfort caps and scarves for the NICU unit and cancer patients will start up again during this winter. Bean's Cafe has extended their program to include providing food to families, 4 days a week. We plan to continue to support their project to feed children.

- Chris Walker, Chair

Dancing Owls Learning Center



The cake made for the Community Brainstorming event by one of our own, Reagan Binek!

I'm writing to bring everyone at First Congregational Church up to date on an exciting new partnership, The Dancing Owls Learning Center. The Mission Statement describes this collaboration.

The Dancing Owls Learning Center is an educational partnership between First Congregational Church of Anchorage and the UAA Multicultural Center that supports UAA students by providing a safe and respectful after-school learning center for their dependent children between the ages of 7 and 13. The learning center is designed for the transition time between the end of the children's school day and their evenings at home. At the Dancing Owls Learning Center, children engage in self-directed activities, hands-on learning, and collaborative play designed to foster their development in all domains: cognitive, linguistic, affective, physical, social-emotional, and spiritual.

A recent letter to our community partners explains the current status and plans for the future.

Dear Community Partner,

On behalf of the Dancing Owls Learning Center (DOLC), we want to thank you for participating in our community brainstorming session on March 6, 2020. There was a total of 15 participants at our session! Your input and suggestions have greatly enriched our planning process. For those who signed our "Count Me/Us In" forms, thank you! Our appreciation also goes out to the UAA Center for Community Engagement and Learning (CCEL) for the mini-grant that enabled us to implement this important initiative in our community. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have had to alter our planning and development approach, including not holding the parents' and children's brainstorming sessions. We are now looking at the connections that emerged from the first brainstorming session, reviewing curriculum resources, and developing ideas for how to design the proposed Dancing Owls Learning Center space. In the meantime, stay tuned for what is to come as we remain focused on opening the Center in the fall. You can follow updates on the website at:

<https://rth.digication.com/dance-owls-the-first-dance/about-us>

If you wish to share anything with our team, please do not hesitate to reach us through the contacts below.

Stay safe and healthy!

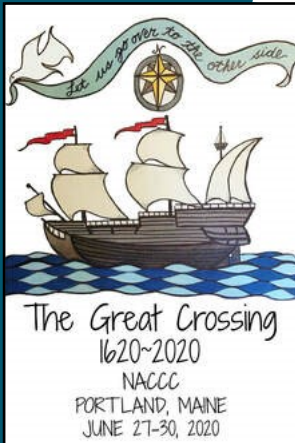
Planning committee: Amana Mbise (co-chair) Rev. Jacob Poindexter (co-chair)

If you would like to see Amana's video about the Dancing Owls Learning Center, complete with a backdrop of Reagan Binek's amazing cake, go to

<https://alaska.digication.com/CEForum2020/2019-2020-mini-grant-award-winners>

Meanwhile, if you have questions or comments, you can chat with Amana Mbise, Rev. Jacob Poindexter, Deb Stauffer, Lynn Barber, Paul Wasko, or me (Kate O'Dell).

-Kate O'Dell



NACCC UPDATE

VIRTUAL ANNUAL MEETING & CONFERENCE

June 27, 2020

THE GREAT CROSSING

400th Anniversary of the Pilgrims' arrival at Plymouth in New England.

"Jesus said to them, *Let us go across to the other side.*" Mark 4:35

THE 2020 NACCC ANNUAL MEETING & CONFERENCE
scheduled to be held in Portland, Maine
has been canceled.

SAVE THE DATE - JUNE 27, 2020

We are planning to hold a virtual NACCC Annual Meeting on Saturday, June 27, 2020, at 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time, 2:00 p.m. Central Time, 1:00 p.m. Mountain Time, 12:00 p.m. Pacific Time, and 11:00 a.m. Alaska Time. The agenda for this business meeting is in the process of being assembled. A task team is also reviewing options for how this virtual meeting will be conducted and votes tabulated.

We will keep you apprised as we finalize plans for the virtual annual meeting and ask that you to pray for all our NACCC churches, our country and world during this difficult time.

2020 is a year to be remembered!

-Sharon Higgins, Year Round Delegate

“Why Zoom is Terrible” by Kate Murphy

I found this article very helpful because it explains why we’re finding our Zoom rooms an unsatisfying substitute for being together physically. Murphy also gives us suggestions for ameliorating the negative effects of the issues she identifies. You can find the article at

<https://nyti.ms/35hnfN7>

- Kate O'Dell

Last month, global downloads of the apps Zoom, Houseparty and Skype increased more than 100 percent as video conferencing and chats replaced the face-to-face encounters we are all so sorely missing. Their faces arranged in a grid reminiscent of the game show “Hollywood Squares,” people are attending virtual happy hours and birthday parties, holding virtual business meetings, learning in virtual classrooms and having virtual psychotherapy.

But there are reasons to be wary of the technology, beyond the widely reported security and privacy concerns. Psychologists, computer scientists and neuroscientists say the distortions and delays inherent in video communication can end up making you feel isolated, anxious and disconnected (or more than you were already). You might be better off just talking on the phone.

The problem is that the way the video images are digitally encoded and decoded, altered and adjusted, patched and synthesized introduces all kinds of artifacts: blocking, freezing, blurring, jerkiness and out-of-sync audio. These disruptions, some below our conscious awareness, confound perception and scramble subtle social cues. Our brains strain to fill in the gaps and make sense of the disorder, which makes us feel vaguely disturbed, uneasy and tired without quite knowing why.

Jeffrey Golde, an adjunct professor at Columbia Business School, has been teaching his previously in-person leadership class via Zoom for about a month now and he has found it strangely wearing. “I’ve noticed, not only in my students, but also in myself, a tendency to flag,” he said. “It gets hard to concentrate on the grid, and it’s hard to think in a robust way.”

This is consistent with research on interpreters at the United Nations and at European Union institutions, who reported similar feelings of burnout, fogginess and alienation when translating proceedings via video feed. Studies on video psychotherapy indicate that both therapists and their patients also often feel fatigued, disaffected and uncomfortable.

Sheryl Brahnam, a professor in the department of information technology and cybersecurity at Missouri State University in Springfield, explains the phenomenon by comparing video conferencing to highly processed foods. “In-person communication resembles video conferencing about as much as a real blueberry muffin resembles a packaged blueberry muffin that contains not a single blueberry but artificial flavors, textures and preservatives,” she said. “You eat too many, and you’re not going to feel very good.”

To be sure, video calls are great for letting toddlers blow kisses to their grandparents, showing people what you’re cooking for dinner or maybe demonstrating how to make a face mask out of boxer briefs. But if you want to really communicate with someone in a meaningful way, video can be vexing.

This is foremost because human beings are exquisitely sensitive to one another’s facial expressions. Authentic expressions of emotion are an intricate array of minute muscle contractions, particularly around the eyes and mouth, often subconsciously perceived, and essential to our understanding of one another. But those telling twitches all but disappear on pixelated video or, worse, are frozen, smoothed over or delayed to preserve bandwidth.

Not only does this mess with our perception, but it also plays havoc with our ability to mirror. Without realizing it, all of us engage in facial mimicry whenever we encounter another person. It’s a constant, almost synchronous, interplay. To recognize emotion, we have to actually embody it, which makes mirroring essential to empathy and connection. When we can’t do it seamlessly, as happens during a video chat, we feel unsettled because it’s hard to read people’s reactions and, thus, predict what they will do.

“Our brains are prediction generators, and when there are delays or the facial expressions are frozen or out of sync, as happens on Zoom and Skype, we perceive it as a prediction error that needs to be fixed,” said Paula Niedenthal, a professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who specializes in affective response. “Whether subconscious or conscious, we’re having to do more work because aspects of our predictions are not being confirmed, and that can get exhausting.”

Video chats have also been shown to inhibit trust because we can’t look one another in the eye. Depending on the camera angle, people may appear to be looking up or down or to the side. Viewers may then perceive them as uninterested, shifty, haughty, servile or guilty. For this reason, law scholars and criminal justice activists have questioned the fairness of remote depositions, hearings and trials.

But as anyone who has been on a video call knows, people tend to look more at themselves than at the camera or even at others on the call. “I would be lying if I said I wasn’t super aware of my appearance on video chats,” said Dave Nitkiewicz, a recently furloughed employee of Experience Grand Rapids, the convention and visitors’ bureau in Grand Rapids, Mich. “I have the skin of Casper the Ghost right now — it’s, like, fluorescent — so I’m always concerned with framing and lighting.”

Craving company while confined at home, Mr. Nitkiewicz frequently arranges Zoom meet-ups with family and friends and he even went on a Zoom date. And yet he doesn’t find these interactions terribly satisfying. “On video chat there’s literally a glowing box around your face when you’re talking, so you feel like every eyeball is on you, like a very intimidating job interview,” Mr. Nitkiewicz said. “The conversation kind of defaults to trivial drivel because people don’t want to take a risk.” And the delay in people’s feedback makes him feel that it wouldn’t be rewarding to share a good story anyway.

He doesn’t feel the same reserve when he talks on the phone, which he does for two or three hours every other Sunday with his cousin in Los Angeles. “We have for years, and it’s never occurred to us to video chat,” said Mr. Nitkiewicz. “Our comfort place is still on the phone.”

This makes sense given that experts say no facial cues are better than faulty ones. The absence of visual input might even heighten people’s sensitivity to what’s being said. It could be why Verizon and AT&T have reported average daily increases of as much as 78 percent in voice-only calls since the start of the pandemic, as well as an increase in the length of these calls.

“You can have a sense of hyper-presence on the telephone because of that coiled relationship where it feels like my mouth is right next to your ear, and vice versa,” said Dr. Brahnam during a telephone interview. Provided you have a good connection, she said, you end up hearing more: slight tonal shifts, brief hesitations and the rhythm of someone’s breathing. When it comes to developing intimacy remotely, sometimes it’s better to be heard and not seen.

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To see the current church calendar, go to

<https://www.fccak.org/current-calendar/>



A service that explores other ways to engage our faith and spirituality together.



Member of the
National Association
of Congregational
Christian Churches

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