

*News and
Stories
from the
people of
FCC of
Anchorage*

June 2021

The Northern Light

First Congregational Church of Anchorage

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Message from the Moderator

Hey FCC family and friends, this is Paul Wasko. I'm the Moderator for the coming church year. By the way, it's the first time I've actually served on Council or served as Moderator, so you never know, I might do some things different, much like I'm doing now. So, instead of doing a written note to the congregation in the newsletter, I thought I'd do a video to kind of shake it up...



To see the rest of Paul's message, go to <https://youtu.be/vsZ83j79wes> or you can find it on the Moderator's page on our website, www.fccak.org

Guided Garden Tour

At the Saturday Summer Fellowship (SSF) on June 5th, we will be taking a guided garden tour of the grounds at the church. We will meet at the church in the lower parking lot at 1pm, and begin the tour shortly after that. If you have been curious about all of the projects outside at FCC, this is a great opportunity to see what work has been completed, what is actively happening, and what we have planned next for the Edible Landscaping project of the church. As always, everyone is invited to SSF, even if you have no interest in plants or gardening. People are welcome to come and fellowship, eat a picnic lunch, and join in on a project if they find one that interests them.





SAFE DISTANCING

**THIS PEW
NOT IN USE**

Worship Ministry

When I walked into the sanctuary for our first hybrid service last week, the signs that read This Pew is Not in Use immediately caught my eyes. It was a glaring reminder that even though we are making progress in terms of the epidemiology of the pandemic and are now returning to some in-person services, things are not the same as when we last met in March 2020. But, I was still very excited to return to church and to worship in-person again. It was an excitement of a return to a familiar space, familiar colors and familiar light. It felt normal again-except those signs on the pews. The empty pews made me reflect on the meanings of emptiness, void, and of unoccupied spaces. During the pandemic, unoccupied spaces have gained health and social significance serving as a means for curbing the spread of the virus. Unoccupied spaces and the distance they offer, have a comforting effect making us feel safe and protected.

I also saw something else in those open pews: an opportunity to recreate and reimagine a new way of doing things. As part of the worship ministry, we thought a lot about how the return to hybrid services would look like. How the seating will be arranged to ensure safety and how ushering and offering collection will be managed. How we would handle greeting each other, bulletins, singing, and ensuring that those participating online are able to have a seamless experience.

It's as if we were rediscovering our old space and, through it, our selves. And then, there were those awkward moments when you unconsciously threw a handshake because you so much wanted to do things the old way. I also noticed myself paying more attention to eye movement as the luxury of reading lips is long gone. Perhaps you are one of those who walked in and found your favorite pew is labeled This Pew is Not in Use, or you had to take the longer route to get to an open seating.

I also saw another moment of reimagining our services when those of us who were in the sanctuary turned to the camera on the wall and waved to those online. It was beautiful to see. In that moment of spontaneity, we came up with a creative way of filling the void, of connecting, sharing and including. We did exceptionally well. May the spirit of togetherness and the binding love continue to inspire us as we reimagine this new way of connecting, worshiping and filling the voids. And, may we see God's unfolding creation in the open pew.

-Amana Mbise, Chair

Life & Learning Ministry

The youth gathered in person, for the first time since last fall's harvest, after our first in-person church service this year on 5/30. We discussed summer gathering plans, but mostly just enjoyed each other's company after being apart for so long.

- Marcie Errico, Chair



Fellowship Ministry

“What is it that we really lived through?”

I recently read a very thought-provoking interview between Anand Giridharadas and his wife, Priya Parker, whose work as a group conflict-resolution facilitator has given her a unique perspective on our pandemic months. At the end of the interview, Parker recommends some conversations we should take time to engage in now that we are beginning to move into a world that is not “this.”

I was particularly fascinated by Parker's comments on a couple of pandemic life features that I experienced personally. One was that moment when I realized that, as her husband described it, “people were about to go through a very long spell of un-gathering.” Parker commented: “I realized at some level that not being able to come together physically in person is a significant obstacle

to meaningful connection.” In fact, as Giridharadas noted, gathering became an illegal activity. One of Parker's solutions for how we could meaningfully come together while apart was to launch a podcast, with “every episode answering one person's question about how to navigate this moment in a way with a group that you care about when you can't all be in the same room.”

As I thought about her description, I recognized what we members of the FCC community have been doing almost from the very first. We found ways to “gather” safely and spent many hours sharing our cares and fears, learning new ways to provide support and assistance that didn't require us to be physically present. For me, the clearest example of this is that the Chancel Choir and the Northern Lights Ringers knew that music was part of the heart and soul of

our faith community, which meant we couldn't be without it for an indefinite period of time. So, we all figured out how to use the Acapella app, which enabled us to provide music for Sunday worship services and even the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. What we've learned as a church is that we are resilient when we gather, however we can, to honestly and respectfully work out how we will respond to every challenge.

Priya's analysis of another pandemic year experience, the Zoom room, was fascinating. “Zoom is not a place” she stated. “You don't have a door to come into. You don't have almonds on the table. You don't have music playing. You don't have a decision to choose which chairs to sit on and whether you're a front-of-the-room person or a back-of-the-room person.” We've discovered that Zoom is pretty good for formal, structured conversations, but

Fellowship Ministry continued...

terrible for spontaneity. It also exacerbates inequities of power, e.g., mansplaining was even more pronounced on Zoom because of the way the algorithm works. Also, it doesn't provide a way to have productive, healthy, tense conversations because it's easier to leave the room or to turn off your mic or your video than to stay and be uncomfortable.

Another series of Anand's questions caught my attention. "But this year is eventually going to take a lot of processing, cultural processing — like, what is it that we really lived through? What is it that we did? How did we change? How do we think about it?" Before we at FCC make decisions about how we proceed into our "new normal," I believe we must begin by creating a history of the pandemic at First Congregational Church — specifically by weaving our individual stories into a crowd-sourced portrait of the church in a time of upheaval. Not only would this help us identify what worked and what didn't, it will

provide future members with information they'll be able to build on if and when they must be together apart.

One of Anand's questions for Priya led me to connect this interview with the FCC Fellowship Ministry's purpose and focus. "What have you observed about the practice of grief in this time? And what collective grieving do you think we're going to still have to do once we're able to actually do everything?" Priya responded,

We are experiencing both collective and individual levels of grief at a level that we've never at least been aware of before... There is expertise and wisdom in fields that exist to help us with this moment. There are groups like the Dinner Party (<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/inspirational-stories/a34628731/the-dinner-party-grief-group/>) that just produced a PDF to help create collective grief mechanisms...I think we are about to witness a moment for some period of time where we will no longer take for granted

physical gathering. And we will see extraordinary forms of physically based joy and transgression... Everything — and deep joy. And I think there will also be moments in those moments of ecstasy that we will connect with our grief because we are safe enough to allow for that grief to come out. Perhaps it's like in a moment of rapture because all of a sudden, all of the things that we've been holding are allowed to be witnessed and shared and seen and OK. So, I think it will be a mix of emotions and guilt and pleasure and, at least for some time, no longer taking for granted this thing that we did for very long and were on autopilot about, which was gathering.

Your Fellowship Ministry members invite you to join us in conversations about how we can create a safe and respectful environment where we can freely express our "mix of emotions." And from that sanctuary, we can move confidently into the AC (After COVID-19) era.

-Kate O'Dell, Chair

Worry About the COVID Test

Our trip from Anchorage to Wausau, Wisconsin was (and still is) quite memorable. The beauty of the trip was amazing, with every possible type of terrain and scenery. But daily details often got in the way of enjoying the scenery. Following is a summary list of the trip, which went from May 8 to May 16, 2021.

Before we left Anchorage, the major worry about the trip was that our Covid tests would not be negative as required for entry into Canada and we would need to quarantine and would not be able to begin our trip. The actual test early on May 8th was uneventful and negative and so we began.

Our first overnight was in Tok so we could enter Canada early the next day. At Beaver Creek (Yukon Territory) the Canadian customs people were suspicious that we were really not moving and were sneaking into Canada to be a tourist or fraternize with the locals. Finally, however, after showing them evidence of the offer to purchase our Anchorage house, evidence of our purchase of the Wisconsin house, and a copy of the bill of lading from the movers, they reluctantly decided to let us enter Canada. Although nothing in the rules appeared to require it, they told us that we must also do a self-test for Covid within 24 hours and another at day 8 if we were still in Canada.

So, rather than settle back the first night at Johnson's Crossing after a long day, we unsuccessfully tried to contact a nurse online as required for the test administration. There was no cell service, but we finally were able to learn that the nurse office was closed for the day. We finally were able to talk to someone in the Canadian government and tell our tale of woe, who assured us that we had done the

best we could. Because the laws clearly required that we be out of the Yukon within 24 hours of entering, we could not linger at the motel and try to contact someone to do the Covid test the next day, so we headed out, with worries that lasted the entire time we were in Canada that the gendarmes would be after us for not doing the day 1 Covid test (they left repeated phone messages for us for over a week after that reminding us of our Covid duties). Note: we were never sure when we were actually finally out of the Yukon but were relieved not to have someone with a stopwatch timing our Yukon departure.

In our drive through the rest of Canada, though not time-regimented, we were required to keep moving, stay on the highway, not enter stores or restaurants, only stop at motels and gas stations on the highway. Which we did. It was picturesque, even at top speed. We spend the next nights at Muncho Lake and Fort St. John (BC) and Red Deer (AB).

Finally on May 13, we entered the US again, and stayed overnight in Great Falls, MT. We took a beautiful scenic route from there, finding that Montana goes forever – it's not just big sky country but big land country. After that North Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

The entire trip was 3905 miles, with an average of 433 miles per day, some days much less due to winding mountain roads and some days much more as things leveled out on the plains.

We arrived at our Wausau, WI house without incident, opened the pass-number door lock without incident and found a lovely house with a gift basket from our realtor. We shopped for food, inflated our inflatable bed, and slept with no need to get up early

the next day (which was my birthday).

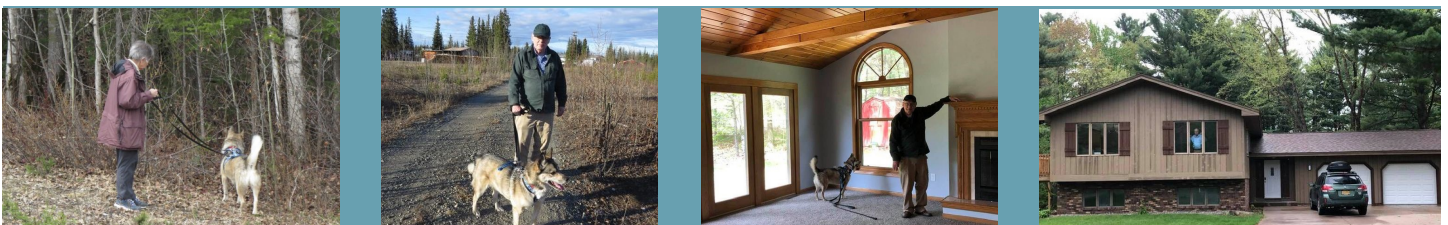
Also to be noted, the purchasers of our Anchorage house, originally scheduled to close with us on 5/27, were urgent to do so more quickly because their rental was expiring before then, and they also needed to have access to our house to rip up the carpet and put in new flooring because one of their children is allergic to all things dog, and our carpet, in addition to being old, was all things dog hair. But it is now their house, not ours.

We knew that our new house was minus washer, dryer and refrigerator, but could not get them right away. We bought lightweight chairs so we had something to sit on and are using our dog crate as a table. It turns out that the soonest we can get our moving van stuff is Friday, June 5. So we will continue to be without furniture (including our bed), dishes, clothing, bird feeders, lawn mower, most of our computers, printer, office supplies, you name it, until then.

One good piece of news is that our dog, Caster, who had been terrified of getting into the car, rather rapidly got used to it on the trip and without pushing actually hopped into the car when asked to do so (he probably feared being left behind at one of the places we stayed). He seems most content now that we are not bouncing along the road in the car.

A day before writing this, our inflatable bed started to lose inflation while we slept. When I started this writing we had been unable to stem the flow of air leaving it and eventually bought another, better inflatable bed. So, we sleep on our new bed, watch the thunderstorms roll in and the birds come to the newly purchased feeders, as we await the moving van.

-Lynn Barber





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



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