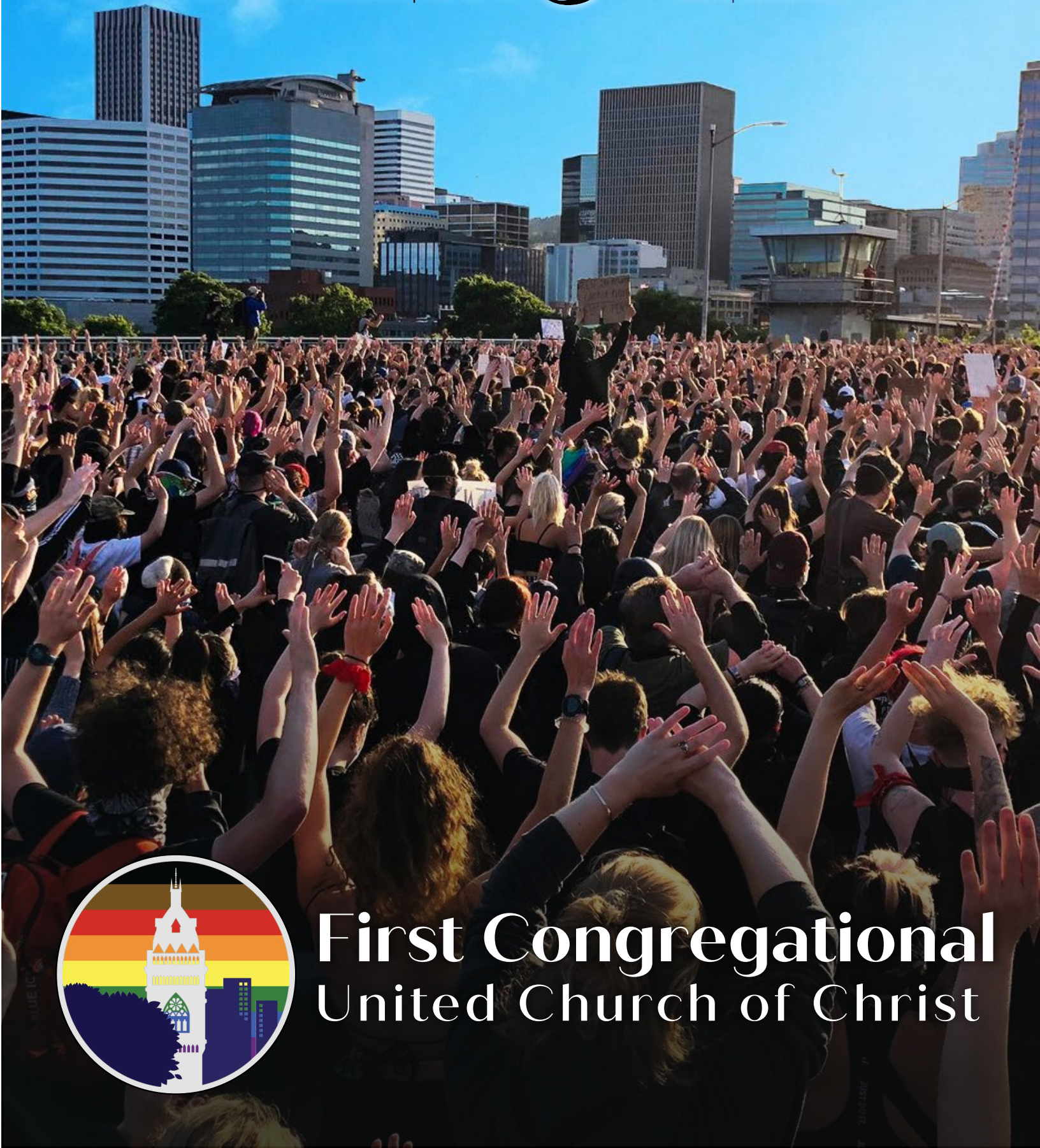


The Pilgrim

A SEASONAL PUBLICATION | Vol. XXVIII

Issue 2 | Summer 2020



**First Congregational
United Church of Christ**

Interim Senior Minister

Rev. Dr. Janet Parker

Dear ones, I can't remember a time in my life that has been as complex, dangerous, tense, frightening and...full of potential... as the times we are living through right now. I don't know about you but I alternate between feeling exhausted, excited, anxious, and hopeful, often all in the same day! Sometimes it feels like we are reaping both the sins and the dreams that our ancestors laid down over generations in the blink of an eye. The prophet Hosea warned that those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind.

*We are reaping the whirlwind as COVID-19 bulldozes through our decaying and neglected public health systems and exposes generations of racial inequities in the provision of health care and economic security.

**“RIDING
THE
WHIRLWIND”** *We are reaping the whirlwind as people of all races rise up to say “not one more death” of Black men and women at the hands of police— just the most exposed tip of the iceberg of white supremacy’s deadly impacts on African Americans in our country. Into this fray, WE are called, you and I, and congregations and faith communities across this land. We are called to be Isaiah’s “repairers of the breach and restorers of streets to live in.” (Is. 58:12).

How is First Congregational UCC rising to this challenge? I am proud to say that while we still have much to learn, this congregation is stepping up to lead. Far from falling behind, our congregation has responded with creativity and compassion.

When it comes to COVID-19, we were quick to move our worship services online, first using Facebook Livestream and soon adding the option of worshipping via the Zoom format. Andre, Cara, and many of you worked hard to reach out and help folks connect to worship through Facebook and Zoom. Council and the Called to Care team also engaged in an unprecedented effort to reach out to every active member and friend of our congregation by phone and email. Grant has worked hard to maintain the morale and participation of choir members, and Rev. Avena and I have convened new opportunities for small group discussion, meditation and prayer. Jessie, our Children’s Ministry Coordinator, has been recording wonderful Godly Play videos for our children which are available on our website and emailed out each week. I truly believe that in many ways our congregation has grown closer through this experience, and that is a testimony to this congregation’s resilience and commitment to one another.

In response to the killing of George Floyd and the resurgent Black Lives Matter movement, this congregation is finding its voice through powerful worship services, an anti-racism small group, and the creation of a Respite Station for protesters in the Fellowship Hall on weekends (see Peacemaking article). Through our connection with IMIrJ (Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice) and personal connections some members are making, more opportunities are emerging to work on racial justice. Stay tuned! I see this church rising to the moment, striving to be that “repairer of the breach” that calls out injustice while building bridges to the more just future we need.

In all of the tumult happening in our wider world, this congregation is continuing its internal journey toward change of a different sort. Your pastoral search committee began to meet on March 25 and is making great progress toward identifying and interviewing strong candidates for the “settled” Senior Minister position. You can have confidence that this diverse and representative team is working faithfully on your behalf to find the right person to lead this congregation into its best future. Their progress means that my time with you is moving towards its conclusion. We are entering a new phase of the interim period when we attend to unfinished business and prepare a launching pad for your next pastorate. While I will miss all of you greatly, I’ll find great fulfillment in completing my mission with you and releasing you to the care of your new pastor. My leaving will represent a successful conclusion to this intentional interim period and a new beginning for you. As the time draws closer, we’ll find ways to bring closure to this interim period that honors the journey we’ve been on together.

In closing, I urge you to remember that we do none of these things alone. Every challenge we meet, every initiative we undertake, every step towards the future is supported by the God who makes all things possible. In this God we live, move and have our being. Thanks be to God!

THANKS FROM REV. JANET

I want to make sure everyone knows how deeply I appreciate all the support, love, care and prayers I received from the congregation during the recent death of my mom. I can’t even believe how many of you sent cards and reached out through email and Facebook and other ways to make sure I knew you cared. Robyn greatly appreciated all your cards as well! The prayer shawl that Judy Bishop made was so comforting to have with me in Houston in the immediate aftermath of my mom’s death and it is still such a warm reminder of your prayers. And many thanks to Council leadership for the creative option of converting some of my study leave into bereavement leave so I could stay in Houston longer to take care of matters there. It’s good to be back and fully engaged with you again.

Moderator's Moment

by Daniel Russo

When I and the rest of the Church Council at First Congregational decided that our church building was going to serve as a base of operations for medics aiding the protesters in downtown Portland, I volunteered to be there on the first night—a Friday. I was nervous about it, but I felt that after watching the situation evolve for two weeks without taking an active part in it I had to do something meaningful, perhaps even something brave.

Instead, it ended up being a pretty quiet evening. A lot of medics came in, and they all seemed very grateful to have a safe, indoor space to set up their stuff, but there was no big standoff with police, no influx of protesters fleeing from tear gas, no drama of any kind, really. And thank goodness for that! I'll admit something, though: I felt disappointed that I didn't get to do anything important. Then I immediately felt ashamed of myself for that disappointment.

This is a time in history that couldn't be less about me and my white-cis-straight-male privilege, except that I've been complicit in an unjust system, and I've been guilty of implicit bias—both conscious and unconscious—over the years, as have we all. (I highly recommend going to <http://implicit.harvard.edu> to find out more.) It's why we need to strive to be anti-racist—to uncover and push back against the biases which exist in various forms within all of us, and which none of us can avoid having—instead of just not being actively racist.

When something is wrong in our world we can do one of two things: we can blame it on someone else,

which is an easy, tempting option, or we can figure out our share of the responsibility for it. Taking the second path may not seem all that attractive up front, but it does something kind of magical: it gives us a stake in finding the solution. Responsibility for racism, for example, can take many forms: it can look like silence at someone else's off-color remark, it can look like crossing the street when we see someone who looks "suspicious", and it can even look like a well-intentioned misunderstanding of the needs of people who come from different experiences. (Personally I think there's something downright devious about how deeply ingrained into many of our cultures the notion of "good = white, evil = black" is—particularly with regard to our storytelling, and how destructive the notion of sorting people into "good" and "bad" bins in general is, but that's too big a subject to unpack in this space right now.)

In any case I'm glad I was there that Friday night. Nothing happened, but something certainly could have. We're living in the age of COVID-19, when doing the right thing can feel very dull and unsatisfying: staying at home, not embracing loved ones beyond our innermost circle, attending worship from our living rooms... Going out in public can be risky, so we have to be careful how we weigh those risks against the potential good we can do, but there are still things worth doing out there, even if it's something as simple as a responsibly socially distanced walk to get some fresh air. I hope this message finds you well, and I hope that you in turn find a role in this strange, constantly evolving narrative we're living through that's meaningful to you.

about the background of this particular organ, and how it has evolved over decades. Grant is very knowledgeable about what is obviously a passion of his. I am definitely thankful for one advantage of the alternate reality of these covid19 days, getting a personal and very close-up tour of this magnificent organ, plus meeting through Zoom all the fellow participants, from thousands of kilometres (miles) away!" Cathy Cordes

Since April 1, the Prayer Chain, coordinated by Susan Adcock, has requested prayers for at least 20 individuals. Susan writes, "For some of these individuals we have requested prayers several times as their conditions changed. In addition, we have received or sent out requests for prayer for a number of groups or general concerns, such as the Search Committee and caregivers for COVID-19 patients. We have also sent out hopeful or joyous updates on several individuals whose conditions improved. Over 50 church members or former members are part of the prayer chain. This little ministry is a joy and a blessing to me personally and I am thankful for all those who take time to pray for others."



Spiritual Path coordinated by Patty Bonney hasn't been able to meet in person, and it doesn't lend itself to meeting by Zoom. They look forward to the end of quarantine and prefer to wait for safer times. Other spiritual explorations have sprouted during this time. "For Such a Time as This" led by Pastor Janet and "Love Casts Out Fear" led by Rev. Avena are two examples. Please see their updates elsewhere in this Pilgrim.

Don't miss Jessie Tarter's inspirational "Godly Play" videos on the church's website. They're intended for our youngest church members, but folks of all ages find education, connection and pleasure in them.

Called to Care continues their vital ministry of outreach and friendship to the community. See Ann Laskey's update below.

CALLED TO CARE

by Ann Laskey

Called to Care organized as quickly as we were able in mid March and began reaching out to church members who might be isolated during the quarantine. We needed to find ways of communicating with those we regularly serve who have been unable to attend church, and to find ways to reach out to those over 65, and those who are vulnerable. We communicate via cards, notes, phone calls, texts, email and Zoom meetings. We began meeting by Zoom every other week in order to improve our ministry and be sure we're not missing those in need.

Avena Ward, our chaplain, suggested we begin offering our congregation a buddy system for all members to participate in reaching out to one person in particular.

This has been a gift to each person who serves on Called to Care. Our lives are greatly enriched through this ongoing contact with so many of our members.

The members we have contacted have been very grateful for the communications. We have had return

notes and amazing conversations. Each individual has dealt with many emotions while isolated, from grief to relief. Some have found this to be a good quiet time. Some have started projects or completed projects that they had left when their lives were more busy. Others have struggled with depression and feelings of aloneness. This has been a great way to share our experiences and to bolster one another in many ways.

We have tried to find ways to help each person connect with Zoom Church and continued Community with one another.

We also check to be sure each person's basic needs are being met, including ways to find groceries and other needs.

Finding Joy in changing and challenging times has been our greatest gift to ourselves.

Blessings, Ann

LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR

by Avena Ward

This meditation/prayer group has been a bit of an experiment. We've been meeting on Friday afternoons at 1:30 PM on Zoom. In the early days of the stay-at-home orders a small group began connecting to each other and listening for Spirit in the words of poets and psalmists. Over time we've experimented with using a finger labyrinth as a tool for meditation involving the body. The labyrinth also can be a visual way of giving form to the movement of our thoughts and prayers by jotting or drawing on it. On days when words fail we have ventured into the silence of Centering Prayer. The group is gently facilitated by Rev. Avena Ward, acting as pastoral ministry associate. We'll continue meeting for as long as there are people who come with concerns or desires to offer to God in prayer.

UPDATE FROM THE SETTLED SENIOR PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEE

Round One of Zoom interviews have begun with the five selected candidates and will continue throughout the next ten days. These individuals were gleaned from more than 30 profiles that were submitted for our review. It's exciting, nervous-making, fun and hard work! We are very aware of our responsibility to First Congregational UCC in Portland and yet we know we are the lucky ones who get to spend (digital) face to face time with these really interesting leaders of our denomination and progressive Christian theology. Please continue to keep the committee and the candidates in your prayers as we move along this path, listening always to the Still, Small Voice whispering to us, "Come this way." We are lead.

Hospitality Core Ministry

CHOIR UPDATE

by Grant Edwards

It all seems like so long ago. This year began with some of the most exciting and fulfilling experiences I have ever had in church music. We rang in the Epiphany season with selections from Mendelssohn's unfinished oratorio, *Christus*, and in late February presented the Epiphany movements of Handel's *Messiah* —it's not just for Christmas, after all—featuring historically informed instrumentation and performance practice, and a rockin' timpani solo during the grand pause of the Hallelujah Chorus! During a service honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. we sang "Ukuthula" (Peace), a traditional South African Freedom Song, and honored those lost to gun violence in our country by singing "Calling My Children Home," a powerful new a cappella work by Joseph Jennings. On February 2 we welcomed back the Park Avenue Jazz Trio led by Roger Paulson, and premiered a new work of mine, "And the Table Will Be Wide," a setting of the wonderfully hopeful text by Jan Richardson.

The season of Lent began with a tremendous challenge for the choir, singing Knut Nystedt's re-envisioning of J. S. Bach's "Come, Sweet Death" for Ash Wednesday. In this arrangement, every singer intones the chorale as slowly as possible, at their own tempo (while always listening and reacting to the other singers), creating a transcendent, otherworldly effect not usually possible with a small ensemble. After this, the plan was for the choir to "get back to basics" —focusing on the roots of singing— with a wide variety of works focusing on breathing, on unison singing, and the simpler gems that the world of choral music has to offer.

But we all know what happened instead.

I am quite sure I do not exaggerate when I tell you all that this time has been the biggest challenge of my entire life and career. I am also quite sure you believe me. Group singing —perhaps the most spiritually uplifting activity ever undertaken by mankind— suddenly became a deadly proposition. Singing indoors, it turns out, is one of the most devastating means of spreading coronavirus. Remembering the teachings of Martin Luther, I believed the devil had finally figured out how to win; by removing the most powerful spiritual weapon we have besides the very Word of God.

But we soon discovered, nevertheless: we still have music. We still have singing.

At the end of March we all saw the videos that started popping up online of various musical ensembles around the world trying their best, somehow, to do something —anything!— despite the imperatives of "social distancing." Music directors everywhere felt the pressure to make "virtual choirs," Brady-Bunch-style boxes showing each singer's face, the ensemble created artificially through layers and layers of painstaking digital manipulation. It cannot be emphasized enough how unreasonable the expectation

was and still is, that we can somehow maintain choirs via this technology. First of all, many of these producers have had well nigh hollywood-level budgets to work with. A four-minute video could take 100 hours just for the editor, nevermind the fussy conducting videos or pages of pedantic instruction required before any singing could actually take place. This is also not to mention the work put in by the singers in which they cannot hear each other, cannot tune nor respond in any way to their fellow singers, and have only a tenuous one-way connection to whatever leader or conductor is foolish enough to attempt the feat. A singer feels quite lost, alone, and particularly vulnerable singing into their own cell phone (which often rewards their efforts with embarrassingly poor fidelity or ruinous noise). Furthermore, these are not “choirs” in any sense of the word (since choir is a real, in-the-moment, collaborative effort). This fact led Dr. Ethan Sperry of PSU to refer to such videos not as “virtual choirs” but more appropriately, “social-distance sings.” I participated in several such experiments myself to familiarize myself with the inherent and multitudinous pitfalls.

Although many church music directors literally begged me not to attempt “virtual choir” videos (and I downright dreaded the learning curve), I didn’t heed this plea. Sure, I agreed that “social-distance sings” should not be normalized. I also agreed that the time and/or budget it takes to make these are rarely worth it—a fad which would quickly grow tiresome and silly. I also knew any computer I had available would not be able to process more than a handful of individual contributors. However, being already quite adept in digital audio technology, I couldn’t resist seeing what direction this type of music making might lead. Indeed, I thought it would be a cop-out not to at least pantomime the intricate rigmarole necessary for such projects. At worst we would prove the detractors correct. If it truly was futile, even pointless, at least we would know from our own experience, not from the fears or admonitions of others. At best, however, we would all learn through the process what is most important about singing together, and maybe even have a valuable souvenir of our enlightenment. All of this could be opportunity for growth, not cause for despair.

There is no need to describe the results of this new type of music making, as it is all available for everyone to view on the church’s online services, our YouTube channel, our website, and social media. Enjoy. Keep in mind that for my own sanity as well as to honor the singers and instrumentalists who have risked considerable effort and self-identity, I asked myself these questions before every project:

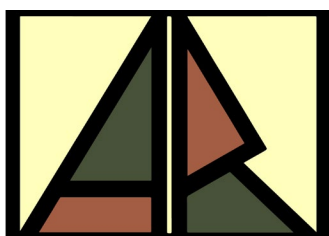
- Is this worth it?
- Does it respect the formidable, hard-earned skills of our professional and volunteer musicians?
- Does it have something unique to say, that only we can say right now?
- Does it give us hope for the future?
- Will the participants and eventual listeners learn at least something?
- Will this be a worthy artifact—a memento—to our future selves and congregation?
- Does this honor and glorify God?

Astoundingly, over and over again, the answers to these questions were YES. As much as I cannot wait for this pandemic to pass and for all of us once again to partake in the most spiritually uplifting activity ever known this side of heaven, the skills, empathy, and patience we are all forced to practice now will surely prove to serve us well in the future. Despite the challenges, much of the musicmaking I have been a part of in the past three months have been deeply rewarding, and the evidence is all right there on the internet! (Seriously, check out the church’s YouTube channel.)

I am grateful beyond words for the creativity and cooperation of our choir section leaders and volunteer singers and instrumentalists. THANK YOU for being such good sports, as it would have been easy to say “pshaw” and throw up our hands when faced with this new reality. Our ad hoc “rehearsals,” online classes, fellowship (even game nights!) via Zoom the past 3 months of Wednesdays have been a great opportunity to stay in touch with each other and even plan for an uncertain (but inevitable) future. How are we going to move forward? Well, I really don’t know—it’s a mystery! But we have great ideas, even greater questions, and a lot of faith. We will all find out, soon enough.

ARTREACH GALLERY AND ARTS LIBRARY

by Dr. Sheldon Hurst, Curator

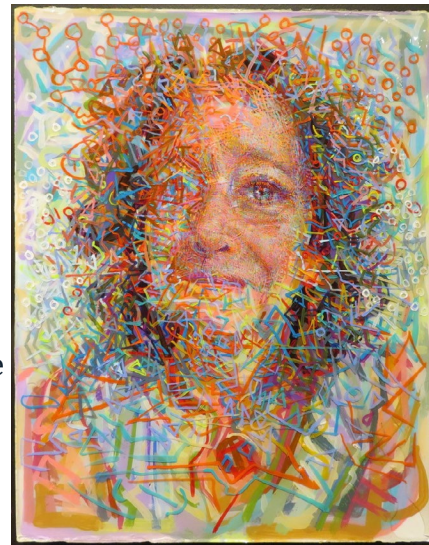


Since March of this year, the gallery has been closed, however on Wednesday June 24 we will begin to be open during our regular hours: 10am - 2pm Tuesday through Friday and Sundays, 9am - 1pm.

The two exhibitions that were in the gallery in March have been extended through August. Thanks to the artists, the May/June and July/August exhibitions have been re-scheduled for a later date.

7 X 7 GALLERIES

Our involvement with the six other churches in Portland continues. However the plans for the FOOTPRINTS exhibition on immigration have been put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We felt that the Sunday worship uncertainty for each of the churches put a crimp in our plans for the exhibition and for the education program we planned. While we are disappointed in this needed change, we promise a video that focuses on the planned exhibition which will take place later in the coming year when it will be available to all.



ARTS LIBRARY

We have two exhibitions in our gallery now: Linear/Nonlinear by John Hampshire and Bill Hornaday’s Water Over Stone. I find it interesting to know that the artists have influences by different ideas present in the art world through the past years. John Hampshire has created an anamorphic drawing based on some explorations that took place in the 16th Century. A book that explores the beginnings of this process may be of interest to you: Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphic Art*. Trans. W. J. Strachan. NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1977. John Hampshire was also influenced by a prominent artist in America: Chuck Close. Two books about his art may be found in the library:

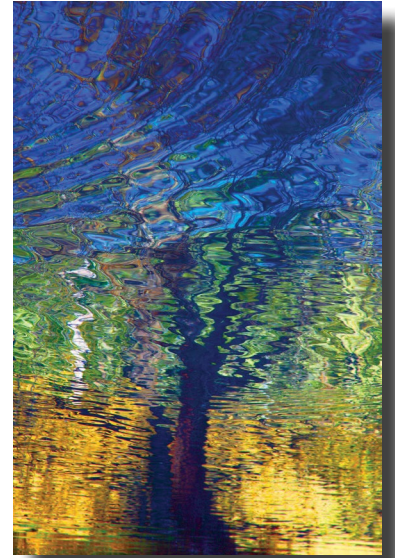
- Chuck Close. *Face Book*. NY: Abrams, 2012. Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan. Chuck Close: Up Close. 1998.

Bill Hornaday's photographs are amazing revelations that include natural subjects: trees, water, rocks. However, the artist's photographs become more than de facto presentations. We look and wonder: how did he do that? One is reminded of work of Impressionist who separate colors and provide unique ways of seeing. Several books of Impressionist art are in the Arts Library including:

- Charles F. Stuckey. *Water Lilies*. NY: Park Lane, 1991.
- Michel Hoog. *Musée de l'Orangerie*. Paris: 1990. Selections from Monet and Renoir are very informative
- John Gage. *Color and Culture*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1993.

I was talking with one visitor to the gallery one day, and he noted that both artists are part of the aesthetic of "Break Up" — Hornaday breaks up the forms in his photographs, and Hampshire breaks up the colors and lines in order to build up the form of "face" in his paintings. Here is a book you may be interested in reading:

- Katherine Kuh. *Break Up: The Core of Modern Art*. NY: NY Graphic Society, 1966.



SCHEDULE OF ART EXHIBITIONS 2020

JULY & AUGUST

- AR Gallery: LINEAR/NONLINEAR — Paintings and Drawings by John Hampshire
- Chapel Gallery: WATER OVER STONE — Photographs and Sculpture by Bill Hornaday

SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER

- AR Gallery: Prints by Artists at the Rufino Tamayo Arts Center in Oaxaca, Mexico.
- Chapel Gallery: Tapestries by Stephen Karakashian

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER

- The art of LoMeiHing in both galleries

JANUARY & FEBRUARY

- Both Galleries: INTERTWINING Chinese Poets and Poems
- Paintings by ZHANG YAN LI

Peacemaking Core Ministry

Carter Latendresse

PEACEMAKING CORE MINISTRY SURVEY

More than three dozen responses to the Peacemaking Survey have been collected and analyzed. We are discussing the survey results and using them to create a series of Storylabs.

PORTLAND PROTEST RESPITE STATION

Since June 12th, on Friday and Saturday nights from 9 PM - Midnight, First Congregational United Church of Christ has provided respite and a restroom, and we have hosted an independent medic station, with hand sanitizer and masks, for people gathering for racial justice and protesting police violence. We will continue our support in this fashion until at least July 4, at which point we will reassess the needs and our commitment, and we will then make decisions on future support. We have hosted up to 20 visitors at any one time, and because we are still in the COVID-19 pandemic, we have insisted that all who entered our church wear a mask, not have a fever, and maintain six feet of social distance. We remain peacefully engaged in the struggle against white supremacy and systemic racism, which is state-sanctioned violence that has dehumanized black, brown, and indigenous people through police brutality, mass incarceration, denial of democratic rights, health inequalities, and generations of dispossession.

IMMIGRANT WELCOMING CONGREGATION GROUP

What joy to hear some good news! Last Thursday the Supreme Court ruled that DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) is lawful and may remain in place...for now. Though the decision is good news and provides relief, it is temporary. Together, as we continue to advocate for immigrants, we must push Congress for a permanent legislative solution.

Many of us have recently begun to follow DACA through the movement HomeisHere. Our church agreed to support this campaign over a month ago. Its website features numerous DACA recipients sharing their stories of how much the program has meant to them. Well over 700,000 young adults have greatly benefited from DACA since 2012 when President Obama announced the policy.

Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, an associate general minister in the UCC, said, "Dreamers are contributing to the fabric and foundation of building this country. We must keep dreaming for a world that is

welcoming and for policies that will provide all with the opportunities for living a life that is free and fulfilled.”

—Submitted by Jane Brolsma

If you are interested in getting involved with this group, please contact Bruce Bishop at babishopdx@me.com

POTLUCK IN THE PARK

Potluck in the Park has been temporarily canceled due to COVID-19. Once it resumes, every Sunday afternoon, from about 1:00 - 5:00 PM, our church provides beverages like hot chocolate and coffee to about 300 to 700 hungry and thirsty people in downtown Portland. We buy, prepare, deliver, and serve the beverages, and then we return to the church to clean out the containers and store them for the next week. Most of those we serve are currently houseless. We have four teams — each team has the responsibility once a month. One of our teams has an opening for at least two people with a car to help on the third Sunday.

If you are interested in getting involved with this group, please contact Ron and Cheryl Clevenger at clevenger2508@comcast.net

TRANSITION PROJECTS

For over 50 years, Transition Projects has delivered life-saving and life-changing assistance to some of Portland’s most vulnerable residents. Whether by helping a homeless veteran and her family find housing, sheltering hundreds of people each night with nowhere else to turn, or opening new pathways to employment, Transition Projects represents an invaluable part of Portland’s social fabric.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our teams of volunteers from UCC have shifted our involvement. Ordinarily, before the pandemic, our volunteers would buy, prepare, and serve a delicious, hot meal to 60+ men at Doreen’s Place on the third Saturday of every month. Since the pandemic started, Doreen’s Place has made some changes in accordance with health regulations, and these changes will remain in place until at least the end of August, 2020. The shelter has reduced its occupancy to 40 men and has requested that, through August, we continue our new “status quo” in the shelter: No on-site cooking or serving; meal delivery only. Our UCC volunteers are buying, preparing, and delivering food to the staff at Doreen’s Place, who meet us at the door, and then they take it into the shelter themselves to serve and eat. Officials at the shelter will revisit this change in August, to determine if we may be able to safely resume some or all our “normal” business, like on-site meal providing, in September.

*“life-saving
and
life-changing”*

If you are interested in getting involved with this group, please contact Tim Pollard at timothyrapollard@gmail.com

THE SOUL BOX PROJECT

As we've found in so many areas of church these past months, we're not easily stopped. That goes for our work with The Soul Box Project. Busy hands still fold while zooming through Fellowship Hour or sheltering at home. Here are a few updates.

Gun Violence Awareness Month: Thanks to Keelin Sullivan, Jayden Laskey, Jo Jo Hammond, Lucy Wohlmutter and Denise Denniston for helping put together a video for church service on Wear Orange Weekend. The youth read names of victims from all 50 states as a tribute to the people killed or injured by gunfire. The video was offered to congregations across the country to use in their own gun violence awareness activities. If you missed it, you can access the video here.

[<https://vimeo.com/424185778>]

Boxing Day: Are Soul Boxes taking over your home? Drop them off at the Multnomah Arts Center in southwest Portland on monthly Boxing Days. On the 26th day of each month (beginning in June) The Soul Box Project will offer contactless collection. Check out their website for the details.

National Mall Procession and Exhibit: The Project has postponed their event in Washington D.C. at the National Mall until April 2021. Watch their website for more information.

The Soul Box Project raises awareness of the U.S. gunfire epidemic by counting and honoring victims, offering healing participation to those seeking solace, and providing dramatic visual support for all initiatives working for a safer, more civil society. Each origami Soul Box represents one person killed or injured by gunfire. Our UCC Soul Boxes join others from around the country to create large-scale displays of tens of thousands of Soul Boxes in public spaces that move the U.S. population and leaders to understand the magnitude of the gunfire problem. www.soulboxproject.org

Please contact Nanci Tangeman at nanci@nancitangeman.com or Cheryl Clevenger at clevenger2508@comcast.net for more information. So far, people around the country have folded 117,225 Soul Boxes!



Behind the Desk of the Business Manager

by Cara Rothe

The last three months have been a time of true transformation for the staff, congregation, community, and for our beautiful building.

Being “closed” due to Coronavirus has given me an opportunity to interact with this church family (staff and members) in a whole new way. We have individually had our own challenges, but my experience with this family has been inspiring. I have been honored to get to know staff in a deeper way, having had many deep and meaningful conversations with them as we have navigated this very difficult time. Our part-time staff have been tending to their own sections of the building. Jessie Tarter, Maria Felex-Pedro and Monique Cordes cleaned and organized the classrooms and nursery; Marcus Lee rejuvenated the sound booth, Steve Eggers tackled the storage areas and his office by building shelves, deep cleaning and painting; Andre Cordes lead us into a whole new era of communications through technology; and Maureen Gullett, Mpagi Kirumira and our new staff member, Johnny Amundson have lifted everyone’s spirits with their amazing attitudes and servant hearts putting in many hours shining-up various corners of the building. The love and generosity from the congregation has gone a long way to build trust and a sense of family with our staff, and their gratitude and sense of belonging is palpable.

In this time of “isolation,” I have watched the entire congregation find creative ways to come

together and support each other. And even though I have not been in contact with members during this time, I have felt strongly connected to them as I have been moving through the spaces where they worship. Holding their most sacred moments.

I have also been edified by the relationships that I have built in the community as we have all tried to do our best to care for each other and for those struggling more than others. I have built stronger relationships with PPOP and the Portland Police, and recently with the protesters downtown along with our hosting of the Respite and Aid Station. I am so very moved by seeing the role that the church can play in the community in such troubling and uncertain times. In my more than seven years with the church, I have never been more grateful and more honored to work for this church.

“edified by the relationships that I have built in the community”

One of the most meaningful experiences has been interacting with the building in a way that I typically don’t have time for. I spent many hours polishing, scrubbing, and organizing and

working with staff to lovingly care for the various wounds and wear that the building has incurred over the years. At times, I have been moved to tears with the cathartic experiences that myself and staff have had loving this space. I am honored to care for a space that has dutifully held so much joy and sorrow of the years. The early weeks of the protests, our building did incur some bruises that were painful for us all to witness, but it felt good to continue to hold that space and love the building and a hurting community through it. And continue to operate in a spirit of generosity and peace.

ARE YOU WITH US?

We are concerned that we are still missing some folks in worship who don't have access to internet or computer/smartphones at home, and we continue to strive to make sure everyone who wants to can participate in worship; if not through internet connections then through the dial-in phone option. If you are not yet worshipping virtually with us and want to connect, please email or call Andre Cordes at communications@uccportland.org or 503-228-7219.

If you have been part of a small group that has not been able to meet because of the pandemic, we are now opening the building for small groups to resume meeting using careful protocols for social distancing and hygiene. Please reach out to Cara Rothe, our Business Manager, if you would like a space to meet in our building that meets the requirements for Phase 1 re-opening. You may reach Cara Rothe at cara@uccportland.org or 503-228-7219.

Are there other ways we can help you connect to our church and its various ministries in the age of COVID? Please don't hesitate to contact our Core Ministry Facilitators or Pastor if you would like to find ways to be involved or get reconnected to our church. You may reach Carter Latendresse, our Peacemaking Core Ministry facilitator at latendresse@catline.edu; Nan Wagner, our Community Core Ministry facilitator at nannwagner@gmail.com; and Rev. Janet Parker at revparker@uccportland.org.



First Congregational United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. Janet Parker, Interim Senior Minister
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Phone: (503) 228-7219 Website: uccportland.org
Email: first@uccportland.org

*Follow us on social media for event updates, news of our spiritual community, and more.
Find us on [instagram](#), [twitter](#), and [facebook](#) (@uccportland)*