



## *The Steeple*

*November 2020*

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As the restrictions imposed to curtail the spread of Covid-19 are eased, please watch your email for Constant Contact updates about church services and activities. The Board of Deacons publishes a Constant Contact e-mail newsletter periodically to the congregation. If you do not currently receive this and would like to, please e-mail [news@nmchurch.org](mailto:news@nmchurch.org) to be added to the mailing list, or call the church office with your updated e-mail address.

Regular services and events continue to be postponed or cancelled, as we all keep a safe distance. Many members of the congregation and community have been watching our **10am Sunday worship** services **live-streamed** from our newly repaired sanctuary. Find the link at [www.nmchurch.org](http://www.nmchurch.org)

**Your continued support for our church is critical while attendance at services is restricted due to COVID-19. Please visit the main page of the church web site and click, "Donate to the Church!" to find out how you can keep your regular pledge or donation to the church current.**

Please see the link below to review guidelines for community/faith organizations regarding COVID-19. Please visit the CDC website for updates; information can also be found by dialing 2-1-1.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>

## **Church Reopening**

In mid-August, a Reopening Committee was formed to plan and coordinate a safe way to return to in-person worship. Working with our insurance representative, Emery & Webb, and closely following the guidelines set forth by both the CDC and the State of Connecticut, along with the Governor's published guidelines for worship in indoor space, the team is creating guidelines to make sure we comply to the fullest extent possible, ensuring that all in-person worship services will be healthy and safe.

We are working toward an early November re-opening. The exact timing of in-person worship will depend on the phase of the State of Connecticut Reopen Plan and how quickly we can secure the supplies needed. Please continue to stay tuned.



**Wednesday, November 11 is Veterans' Day.  
We give thanks to all service members, past and present.**

### **Sunday Bulletin Deadline**

Announcements are due to Nicole Henderson [nhenderson@nmchurch.org](mailto:nhenderson@nmchurch.org) by **Tuesday** for the bulletin. **Please note:** let Nicole know if you would like them printed in the bulletin or read at the start of service. Thanks!



### **Prayers**

Anyone wishing to submit a prayer request during the week is asked to send an email to [prayer-requests@nmchurch.org](mailto:prayer-requests@nmchurch.org) or call the church office.

## **Pastor's Page**

### **"Roger Sherman: Faith and Community"**

In the rich, 304-year tapestry of esteemed members of the First Congregational Church of New Milford, one person towers over all: Roger Sherman. While his portrait hangs in the Yale Art Gallery, and his impressive biography is featured in books on the Founding Fathers, his spirit lives on in our community.

Following the death of his father in 1741, when Roger was 19, his mother moved the family from Newton, Massachusetts to New Milford, living there until 1761 when he moved his family to New Haven. He was a cobbler, merchant, surveyor, lawyer, justice of the peace, and issued an annual almanac.

The family was devout in the Christian faith. Sherman became a Deacon of the Congregational Church. He also served as the Treasurer of the building committee for a new meeting house on the green. He was very intentional about funding the education of his two younger brothers, both of whom became pastors in Connecticut.

While history books never fail to highlight the significant fact that Sherman signed all four founding documents of our new republic: the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Association, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution as well as authoring the Great Compromise establishing a two-part legislature, we cherish his local church and community dedication and leadership.

From family stories, he knew about the worse smallpox epidemic in Boston in 1721, the year he was born. It was this devastating outbreak that motivated Puritan minister Cotton Mather and Harvard doctor Zabdiel Boylston to vaccinate hundreds in the initial experiment of inoculation in North America.

Sherman was one of a small circle who succeeded in introducing inoculation to the New Milford community. The disease was greatly feared and considered almost inevitable. Many leading religious voices of the time opposed inoculation, arguing that smallpox, measles and other epidemics afflicted people for a divine reason. To inoculate was to oppose God's will. Racism kicked in, too. Opposition came from those who pointed to the roots of inoculation being in Africa, Asia and the Middle East and was, therefore, a heathen practice. As a person of faith, Sherman embraced science and advocated for community health. His faith prevented him from being captive to this bigotry dominating some quarters of church thinking at the time.

Today, our congregation gives public health for all persons the highest priority. Wearing masks, social distancing, and other Covid-19 protocols are being strictly followed. Faith and health walk hand in hand.

Saving lives and celebrating life run deeply in most world religions. We turn frequently to what Christians call the two great commandments. Jesus paraphrases the Torah: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

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Loving your neighbor during a pandemic is a challenge new to most of us. Taking all precautions to protect our family members motivates us to be diligent and alert. Reaching out to the community at large and sustaining our support calls for courage, vision and hope.

We need bridges! Roger Sherman was an early New Milford citizen when the simple wooden bridge washed out more than once during storms. He joined others to have a more substantial bridge built over the Housatonic River. Many in our faith community desire to build bridges over our growing gaps in politics, values, views of science, and any number of social justice issues.

Sherman skillfully broke the deadlock and bridged the critical concerns of the large states and small states during the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. His concept of a legislative structure providing each state with equal representation in a Senate and representation based on population in a House of Representatives prevailed. It is known as the Great Compromise or the Connecticut Compromise or the Sherman Compromise.

His experience as a Deacon gave him a fundamental faith in the goodness of all people, enabling him to hear and comprehend opposing viewpoints. I greatly admire this gift of character and have tried to practice it throughout my ministry. I've yet to have a theologically homogeneous congregation. Diversity of thought reigns! This is healthy but does require quiet bridge building in order to prevent fracturing.

Sherman did not own slaves. He did work with the slave-holding states during his political career and this leaves him open to charges of complicity. This is a worthy discussion just beginning to take shape. Faith communities have opportunities to join with academic communities in re-examining colonial history through the lens of racism.

Grace and peace,  
Rev. R. Randy Day

Editor's Note: The above article was published in the "Forum on Faith" column on Saturday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, in the Danbury News-Times.

### **Meetinghouse Restoration Committee**

We hope you had a chance to see the completed work during our open house! The interior and exterior of the Meetinghouse is spectacular! The physical work is complete. We are also pleased to share that our contractor, Lambert and Barr LLC, has given us notification that all of our financial obligations have been met. What does that mean? It means that the paperwork is complete, and we will not receive any bills for unexpected expenses. We have also received our Certificate of Occupancy from the town.

The only thing remaining is to submit for the \$100,000 grant payout from the state. John Wittmann has been doing some remarkable work on this final portion. He has not only been the lead on preparing the documents, he has also been able to lead the state to amend some of their requirements in the current COVID environment. We would be waiting many months more for our funding if John was not leading this for us!

Dan Martin, Chair

## **Deacon's Bench**

We are all aware of the passage in the Bible where Jesus is asked whether people should pay their taxes and He gives an unexpected answer. I think many of us wonder whether He would give any unexpected answers to today's questions, or whether He would just point back to the basic principles as our solution.

These days, there is a great deal of talk about the increased tribalism and polarization around our political dialog. It seems we cannot have a debate about much of anything these days without it turning "ugly". This leaves people wondering, "What changed?" People blame these changes on the media or the education system or demographic changes or changes in our religious beliefs. I wonder if the problem is not a whole lot simpler than that.

Going to the grocery store these days is an "interesting" experience. You must wear a mask, you must follow the arrows, and you must travel the aisles in the designated direction. You could, if you were an infectious disease expert, argue about the efficacy of these rules but, in the end, if the owner of the store wants you to do it, you do it, regardless of whether you feel COVID is an issue or not. It is just plain courtesy. Due to the COVID situation, we are all a little more aware of our space and perhaps a bit more sensitive than usual. Given this, I find it amazing how many times someone strolls up the aisle in the wrong direction and crosses my space to grab an item directly in front of me. This would be fine, I suppose, but there is often not a single acknowledgement of their transgression which is truly amazing. No "excuse me" or "I am sorry," etc. It is like all the rules we learned as children have suddenly disappeared. The rules that our parents so carefully taught us, the rules they carefully modeled, have suddenly vanished.

I am not talking about "Miss Manners" type rules. For my younger readers, "Miss Manners" was an actual syndicated columnist who wrote a regular column carried in newspapers. Miss Manners (and a similar column called "Dear Abby") instructed readers each day on the finer points of manners. Like which fork to use first during a four-course meal, or how to graciously yield your time in a debate to your opponent. Those manners are good, I suppose, but I am talking about something more basic; the rules that you learned from your parents.

I learned these fundamental rules from my parents and I also had them heavily reinforced from my school. I went to a Catholic school in Bridgeport. These rules originated from one basic principle: Treat everyone as you would want to be treated. There were also some basic rules, too. Treat adults and all people with respect. Do not call people names. Do not interrupt. Wait your turn. Say "Please" and "Thank you". These rules are simple enough but learning them also required the adults around you to model them and correct you when you infringed upon them. Yes, we still called other children names on the playground, but we knew it was wrong and we did not do it when we came inside or when we became "adults". It is pretty-clear to me that we are no longer following these rules in grocery stores or in political discourse these days. I need not go into details. I would go even further and state that adherence to these rules would be seen by some folks as "weakness". These days we might even call a political candidate weak if he or she behaved with too much congeniality or politeness!

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Again, I am not sure we can easily resolve the issues we have in the political sphere these days. The problems are many and they are complex. But perhaps we can start in the grocery store and in other public places by treating each other with more respect, by not cutting in front, and in general by treating all those around us with the respect that we would like to receive.

Mahatma Gandhi created peaceful and successful change in the postwar powder keg of India by preaching respect for all, only participating in nonviolent protest, and promoting calm respectful dialog. He brought peace and stability to a seemingly impossible situation applying these simple principals. I wonder if we cannot do the same by simply treating others with the respect and courtesy that we ourselves would want to receive. We need to "be the adult" and "model the behavior" we seek. In this case, we must be a role model not just for our children but also, alas, oddly enough, even for our politicians.

As Christians, this really is no big revelation. Jesus taught that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. As responsible adults, we know that modeling and reinforcing this behavior is key to the proper development of our children. Perhaps modeling this behavior and reinforcing this behavior is also key to the proper development of our society as a whole.

I am not so naïve as to assume that simply "minding our manners" would solve our problems overnight. I do think if we as a church community can create an island of civility a place where people can go and see the proper norms in action. A place to recharge and perhaps restore our faith not only in God but in the possibility of respectful and productive discourse. We can create a place where our children and others will see the Golden Rule in action.

For the Board of Deacons,  
Paul Mayer



## **Confirmation**

On Sunday, October 13, 2020, we finally held our Confirmation Service. This a group of dedicated and definitely patient youth who waited an extra six months for this day. A huge thank you to the Rev. Dr. Pat Nicholas, Becky Passero, and Joan Vill for leading the class this year, and to our Deacons, Sarah Faye, and the Reopening Committee for orchestrating the morning. Thanks also to Mike Bensema Photography for taking pictures during the service, to Debbie Poole for the mums, to our Chapel Stitchers for the beautiful prayer shawls...Thank you all so much! If you missed the service, you can still view it on the Live-stream playlist on our website [www.nmchurch.org](http://www.nmchurch.org)



In the picture, left to right:

The Confirmands standing in front of their Sponsors: Anna MacDonnell with Carrie Forsman; Olivia Pouder with Evelyn LeCates; Amy Passero with Hannah Albright; Jack Costable with Jessica Menkes; Elizabeth Berry and Brittany Berry with Tim Shute.

On October 11, the Daughters of the American Revolution held a program at Center Cemetery to honor two African-American Revolutionary War soldiers. Mary Schenzer of our church is Historian of the Roger Sherman Chapter of the DAR. At her invitation, Reverend Day led a prayer, and spoke about Roger Sherman and his involvement in The First Congregational Church and the community.



### **The Chapel Stitchers**

The ladies of the Prayer Shawl Ministry continue their mission, but are currently working in their homes. They recently provided shawls for all of the members of the Confirmation Class. If you need a shawl or know someone who does, please call the church office or email Leslie Schlemmer at [news@nmchurch.org](mailto:news@nmchurch.org). Donations of yarn are always welcome.



## **Social Concerns and Missions Committee**

- The six week virtual discussion series, "Be The Church" kicked off on Wednesday, October 14<sup>th</sup>. It was well attended, with 16 participants including Rev. Day. The first week's topic was Justice for Children. Here is the schedule for the next five weeks:
  - October 21: Voting
  - October 28: Hunger
  - November 4: Disabilities/Mental Health
  - November 11: Racial Justice
  - November 18: Gun Violence

Meetings are from 7:00-8:00. Please contact Dan Martin if you would like to participate in the discussion, or would like to just listen to the discussion.

- The annual Walk-A-Mile program, which is sponsored by New Milford Social Services, was virtual this year. We had several volunteers help sort donations at the Food Bank this year, and we received a thank you note from Social Services telling us how much they appreciated our help.
- We will be meeting in the next 3-4 weeks with representatives from St. John's Church to discuss our community garden plans for 2021. The joint project worked well this year, but there is always room for improvement!
- We are working on a fundraising idea to help the New Milford refugee family from the Congo that we have been assisting for a few years. The family is interested in helping people, and family members that remain in the DRC, obtain and maintain equipment that provides cacao for chocolate.
- We are still working through our Open and Affirming Church (ONA) Starter Kit. Our goal will be to have a 2021 calendar action plan developed by the end of this year.

*Dan Martin, Chair*

## **Investment Committee**

The MRC (Meetinghouse Restoration Committee) has used the funds in this account to pay for the "Raise the Roof" construction project which concluded in late September.

The other invested funds were down about 2.5% through month-end September, along with a decline in the stock market that month. Our fund balances have gone up a bit through mid-month October. The market fluctuations are consistent with the uncertainties created by the election and the pandemic.

*Dave Elmore, Chair*

## **Fall Cleanup**

The Fall Clean-up will be held on Saturday, **November 21**, at 9 am. Please email Cary Westfall ([cabewest@aol.com](mailto:cabewest@aol.com)) with any questions or to volunteer.

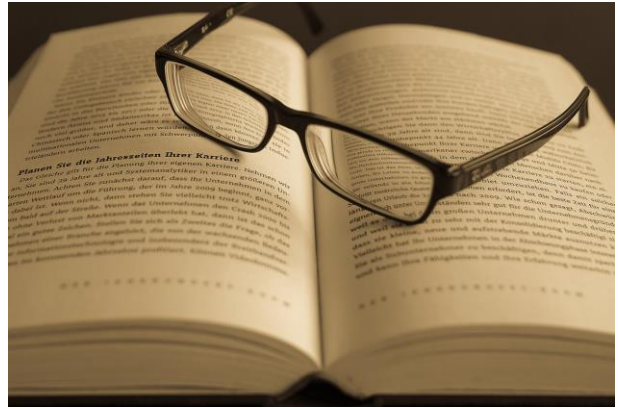


## **Operation Thanksgiving**

The Woman's Club of Greater New Milford is asking for help in providing holiday meals for local families. They will be collecting non-perishable food items on **Saturday, November 7** from 10:00am until 3:00pm on the Green. In addition, items can be dropped off at Town Hall from 9:00am until 4:00pm Monday through Friday. Just go to the front door of Town Hall and call 860-355-6010, and someone will come out and get the donation from you. Suggested contributions are:

- Packaged pie crust
- Canned pie filling
- Canned cream soups
- Canned vegetables
- Cranberry sauce
- Boxed mashed potatoes
- Packaged stuffing mix
- Canned/jarred gravy

## **Rev. R. Randy Day's Recommended Reading**



Please refer to the September and October 2020 issues of *The Steeple* for comprehensive lists of recommended books and articles. Here are some recent additions:

### **Quoted in Sermons**

- *Christ and the Fine Arts* by Cynthia Pearl Maus
- *History of Christianity* by Kenneneth Scott Latourette, Revised Edition

### **General Reading**

- *Gospel of Matthew: A Bible Study* by Carol Walker
- *Goodness and Light: Advent and Christmas Readings*--Orbis Books

### **Music Committee**

We have approved a plan for socially distanced choir rehearsals, supporting a plan developed by Sarah and Chris Fay for a "virtual" Christmas program. The danger of singing in person in an enclosed space during the pandemic is preventing live performances.

The Bell Choir has held a couple of rehearsals outdoors. It is hoped that a small bell choir will be able to perform when church services reopen for in-person worship.

Sarah and Chris Fay have produced two more virtual choir videos featuring the hymns "Gift of Love" and "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us." Thanks to them and to the singers for participating. The videos can be [viewed on Facebook](#).

*Dave Elmore, Chair*

## **Called to Care Ministry**

This program is our way of extending Christ's helping hand within our own congregation. We recognize that members come to our church family with diverse needs and talents. Called to Care is devised to match those two elements that we might first meet the needs of our own congregation, thereby equipping ourselves to go into the world as disciples of Jesus Christ. There is a need for:

- **Parish Friends** – congregants develop ongoing relationships with the other members through regular visits, over the phone or in person.
- **Parish Drivers** – serve the congregation by volunteering to drive those who cannot to church and, in rare cases, to the other crucial appointments.
- **Meal Chain** – church members make and deliver meals to those who have suffered a loss, welcomed a new child, or are in times of transition.
- **Prayer Ministry** – a prayer chain set up to offer prayers on behalf of congregation members and others in times of illness, difficulty, or joy.
- **Condolence Reception** – volunteers bake cookies, make finger sandwiches, and host receptions at funerals and memorial services.

If you would like to be part of our church's Called to Care Ministry, or have any questions, please call the church office at 860-354-8232 and leave a message. If you prefer, you can contact me directly by email ([jilmcc60@gmail.com](mailto:jilmcc60@gmail.com)) or at 860-355-9388.

*Jan McCarthy*



## **Website**

More information is now available on the church website, [www.nmchurch.org](http://www.nmchurch.org). You will find updated announcements, the weekly bulletin for the service (usually available on Friday before the service), and the link to the livestream. You can also find email links to staff. Be sure to check this site often.



### **Baby Bundles**



We continue to work closely with Social Services and the Nurse-Family Partnership, a new program that is coordinated through the New Milford VNA. Donations of diapers and wipes are always welcome. Please call the church office to arrange a time to drop them off. Thank you for all the support you continue to provide.

*Jan McCarthy, Chair*



- To all who have worked so hard to RAISE THE ROOF! And a special thanks to John Wittmann and to Lambert and Barr Construction.
- To those who helped with mowing duties this year!



People are shopping online more than ever, and this will likely increase as we approach the holidays. If you are among this group, did you know that as you make online purchases at Amazon you can support the church at the same time? Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price - there is no additional cost, and once signed up, the donation to the church is automatic.

To shop at AmazonSmile simply go to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) from the web browser on your computer or mobile device. You may also want to add a bookmark to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) to make it even easier to return and start your shopping at AmazonSmile. You use the same account on Amazon.com and AmazonSmile. Your shopping cart, Wish List, wedding or baby registry, and other account settings are also the same. On your first visit to AmazonSmile ([smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)), you need to select First Congregational Church, New Milford, CT to receive donations from eligible purchases before you begin shopping. Your selection will be remembered, and then every eligible purchase you make at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) will result in a donation.



### **Pastoral Search Committee**

The Search Committee is a flurry of activity. We are reviewing profiles, scheduling virtual "Get to Know You" interviews with candidates, and handling new business items as they arise. We met twice within the past week, a total of three to four hours for the week. Luckily, with virtual communication and emails, it is easier to concentrate our efforts when we meet. We plan to continue adjusting our pace to the work load. Rev. Michael Ciba has returned, and as expected, he has been very helpful for advisement. As always, he advises; but we, as a committee, ultimately make decisions, as expected for a Congregational Church.

#### **Progress:**

- We continue to receive candidate profiles, although the recent pace has been slow. Rev. Ciba indicated that there has been an increase in available profiles in October, which is promising. Not all profiles are a fit for us. Some candidates don't find our church the best fit. This has been due to compensation concerns or the acceptance of a different call for the candidate.
- We have received a total of 14 candidate profiles since July 21. We are reviewing profiles each week as needed, often after an interview.
- We have several candidates that are being considered for a more extensive interview. (This may or may not be in person due to the pandemic.) The interviews have been very helpful. Evaluation is much easier after reviewing a profile and having a conversation with the candidate.
- We are continuing to schedule initial interviews with candidates.

Please contact Doris Papp ([pappducc4@gmail.com](mailto:pappducc4@gmail.com) or call 203.770.3392) directly if you have questions, concerns, or feedback on anything. We regard all communication as confidential. It will only be shared within our committee. This will give you assurance that your thoughts are communicated completely and accurately.

There are many unknowns in 2020. It is unlike any pastor search in the past. Please keep our committee and the church in your prayers. This is a challenging process any time, but it is exceptionally challenging in the current situation. We are all optimistic, as is Rev. Ciba, that the right person is out there to lead our church into an exciting time of growth as we meet the challenges of serving our congregation, our community, our country, and our world.

*Doris Papp*

**Planned Giving**

That's the name that has come to be associated with gifts to your church or other charity that happen after your lifetime. Simply put, you plan now, for a gift that will occur later. In our church, we recognize those who have declared they have arranged for a planned gift by receiving them as members of the Deacon Roger Sherman Society.

There are many ways to make a planned gift, and depending on your unique circumstances, some methods are better for you and for the church than others. Contact the Church Office for more details. The simplest and most direct way to make a planned gift is to include the church as a beneficiary on your life insurance policy. Your insurance agent can guide you on the specific forms and options available from your insurance company. Just tell them you want to add a beneficiary; the agent will take it from there.

When you have arranged your planned gift, be sure to let our Pastor know – no details, just that you made arrangements – so we can appropriately recognize your generosity. For your convenience, you may use the form below.

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**THE DEACON ROGER SHERMAN SOCIETY**

**A gift to First Congregational Church of New Milford is in my (our) estate plans.**

☐ *Yes!* **Please count me (us) as a Member of The Deacon Roger Sherman Society.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Please Print Name(s) as you would like them to appear on recognition documents**

✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂

**Church Directory**

Our church directory is available to view on any web browser! Instant Church Directory — the program we use to build our church directory — has a free website for church members to view our directory online. You will be asked to enter in your email address as it's listed in our directory. If your email address isn't listed in the directory, let [news@nmchurch.org](mailto:news@nmchurch.org) know so it can be added.

The first time, click on the "Create a login now" under the Sign In button. Enter your email address and set up a password to be sent an email confirmation. Click on the link inside that email to confirm your email and log in with the password you just created.

## **Food Bank**

Non-perishable foods are always needed, but other items are also helpful. Government subsidies do not cover the purchase of laundry detergent or basic home cleaning products. Also appreciated are personal care items, and monetary donations.



Laundry detergent  
Cleaning supplies



Shampoo  
Soap  
Toothpaste  
Feminine hygiene products  
Adult incontinence products



Monetary contributions – make checks payable to FCC, with “Food Bank” written in the memo line. Drop off or mail to the church.