

Stewardship 2020

A Facebook meme was going around that said, “The dumbest thing I ever bought was a 2020 planner.” While I laughed and shared the post, it also stung as painfully true. Between the widespread racial, social, political, religious and economic (to name a few) injustices and divides AND the pandemic, our country is experiencing destabilization and distress. From where I stand, the net result is a growing sense of fear, hatred, hopelessness, self-righteousness and despair. If people want to know what separation from God (AKA “sin”) looks like, it looks like fear, hatred, hopelessness, self-righteousness and despair. It feels impossible to plan on anything.

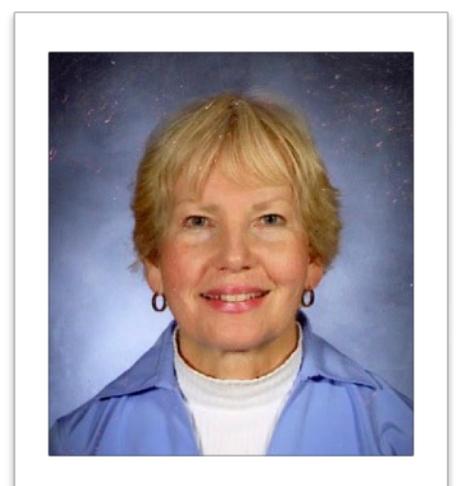
As a person of faith, I fully believe that apart from God/The More/Creation (however it gets named), I can do nothing that will come of any good. My own efforts focused on my own wants and needs will fizzle out and be misguided. What I have come to trust as I continue to make my way through life is a concept I revisit with you all often (with credit to Dr. Walter Brueggemann): While we might crave a God of certitude, we worship a God of constancy. It’s true. The arc of humanity is all over the place. Maybe we should rename the arc to the zig-zag of humanity. Yet, despite all the places we go, God never leaves. God is constant – we can plan on that.

While we may have different ideas when referring to “God,” God’s constancy is accessed in similar ways: We seek God through prayer, meditation and contemplation. We see God in nature or when prayers are answered or miracles occur. We find God in compassion, through acts that promote justice and loving kindness. And during these challenging times, we also find that while the church is a place we gather to worship and carry out justice and mercy, God is of course far flung and not tied down anywhere because God’s constancy is everywhere.

These times shake up what it means to be the church, reminding us that the people are the church. We now find ourselves worshipping online and as a result, new folks join us as well as those of you who live far away. We continue to be the church by safely operating the food pantry through dedicated volunteers from our church, other churches and the community at large. Our care team helps tend to each other through calls and notes in these rearranged times. Council, deacons and trustees still meet regularly (a la ZOOM). Ken still goes into the office on Thursdays to return phone messages and emails. Missy and Alan regularly keep the place clean. Cindy is refiguring the music program, Bonnie records for us, Harper keeps paying bills, the Getchell Window Campaign continues and so many of you quietly help out in the background. Phew!

This all means that despite a pandemic, despite racially stressful and divisive times, despite our new virtual reality, God is still speaking and we are still the church. Part of that work brings us to this time of year when we review our budget and determine our expenses for the next fiscal year. It is because of God’s constancy that we plan. We plan to minister in new and yet-to-be discovered ways. We plan to one day re-gather in the sanctuary. We plan to get through these challenging times with prayer and patience. Max and I plan to continue our financial support of our Church. I invite you to revisit why you contribute to Centre Street Congregational Church, United Church of Christ as you read why others do the same:

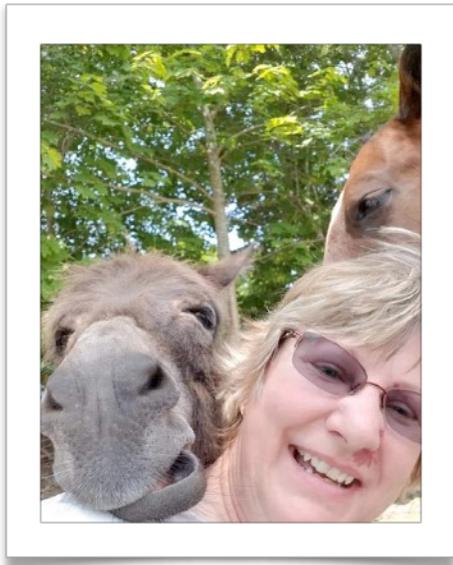
I know that Centre Street takes its name from its address - but for me it is aptly named because it IS the “center” in other ways. After memberships in several churches where conservative doctrine/dogma boxed Christ’s teachings into narrowly defined ideologies (and then becoming a UU where over time secular humanism crowded out the name of Christ), I feel I have arrived at the perfect place for me - not right, not left but in the Center- a place where progressive Christianity is valued and lived and where I can still freely follow my unique spiritual path. Attending church and participating in its fellowship “Centres” me every week. After six days of life’s distractions it brings me back to what I need



to be my center, inspiring and refocusing me for the coming week. Even its very location, with its tall steeple right in the Center of Machias, where its ministry is so vital, reflects its centrality and importance to this area. That's why I consider myself blessed to be a member of and financially support Centre Street UCC.

Bonnie Beiswenger

Stewardship includes more than financial tithes and offerings. It's volunteering and helping out. It's donating things that others are in need of. It's participating in events and productions. Stewardship is something as simple as listening and offering a hug. Since joining the church choir and coming here, I finally found a church that I truly believe and agree with their teachings. In the past, I thought it was enough to agree on most of the teachings at a church and agree to disagree on some others. I learned to look past what I considered to be a misunderstanding on semantics... until I couldn't anymore.



When my mom invited me to come sing with the church choir, I was happy to come simply to have the opportunity to sing with my mother. As I listened to the sermons and watched the congregation, never hearing any judgement or perceived requirements to be part of this church family, something in my heart began to heal. I love Jesus Christ and his teachings and I was seeing them being shared with no conditions. True acceptance with no underlying, barely hidden, judgement. Being able to give back in any way I can, to participate in the stewardship of this church, both giving and receiving, is a gift in and of itself. Thank you.

Kate Atkinson

I have been involved with Centre Street Church since my birth in 1957. I was born, raised and grew up in the shadow of the steeple a few houses away on Center Street. The Church has always been an important part of my personal and spiritual life in many ways. Some of the milestones are baptism, Sunday school, pastoral search committee, the youngest Deacon in the state at that time, clock winding, historical committee, worshiping with my children, Machias Wild Blueberry Festival, and my surprise proposal to Peter at a Pride service in June 2018 which led to our wedding in October 2018. All these events have helped shape my personal and spiritual life, and continues to this day.



To be honest I have not financially supported the church on a regular basis since I moved away. I only gave when I was home to visit and worship. Peter and I have recently decided to regularly pledge to support the church using "Tithely." We are so proud of Rev. Susie Maxwell and her ministry and we feel so welcome and comfortable in our "open and affirming" church. Please join with us in the decision to financially support Centre Street Congregational Church, UCC (founded in 1782) so that the mission will continue doing God's work for another 238 years and more in Machias and beyond. Yours in Christ.

Dwight Whitney Jr and Peter Wood

Remember, what and how you give is between you and God. In turn, your prayerful considerations make a difference to our shared faith community and to our particular Body of Christ. If you are able to pledge, that helps us plan our budget. While I am very aware of the many ways you each give of yourselves, never forget the **most important gift you bring is yourself**. Each of you make up the *real* church body and it is an honor to walk in faith with you. **Thank you** for sharing your faith journey at Centre Street Congregational Church, a proud open and affirming member of the United Church of Christ, where no matter who you are and no matter where you are on life's journey, you sure are welcome here!