



The Forecaster - February, 2015

Official Publication of First Congregational Church, UCC
30 Main Street, Binghamton, New York 13905
The Rev. Dr. Arthur M. Suggs, Pastor



**No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here at First Congregational Church!**

Pastor's Perspective

In May of 2014, the winner of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion was announced. The honoree was the Msgr. Prof. Tomáš Halík. He is a Czechoslovakian priest and professor. Admittedly, I had never heard of him, (which frustrates me because I do try to keep up) yet, I was also excited because here is a theological luminary who is brand new to me. And so I've been reading some of the online sources about and by him, and I would like to share two with you:

The first is from his acceptance speech upon receiving the Templeton Prize.

When I first visited Britain almost half a century ago, I arrived from a country whose violently imposed state religion was so-called "scientific atheism." Not only was religious freedom totally suppressed in the name of the militant ideology of scientific atheism, but so too was freedom of artistic creation and scientific research. I was happy to be allowed to visit Britain, a country with a long tradition of tolerant Christianity – the wise and cheerful Christianity of Chesterton and C.S.Lewis. Half a century has passed. Buses drive around London with the message "God probably doesn't exist" on their sides, and the statement that Britain is a Christian country gives rise to heated polemic and protest. No, I'm not seized by panic. I always find efforts to understand others more congenial than calls for cultural wars. In a certain sense I'd be more radical than Mr. Dawkins. I am convinced that the God of Dawkins' atheism – God as a naïve scientific hypothesis – doesn't probably not exist, it definitely does not exist. It is not the God of my faith, that's for sure. It is not the God of the faith for whose freedom we fought atheism linked to political power. No, it is not religion as such, or science, or even the atheistic interpretation of science that causes difficulties, but instead/ people with closed minds who think they need to belittle and insult the beliefs of other people/ in order to propagate their own.

The second is from one of his previous books, Chci, Abys Byl (I Want You to Be) Lidovne noviny, Prague 2012.

I can't help thinking that God doesn't particularly care whether we believe in Him or not. What really does matter to Him, however, is whether we love Him. Or more precisely: He doesn't care about our faith in the sense that the term is often used, namely, that to believe in God is to be convinced of God's existence. I don't think our salvation depends on our religious opinions, notions and convictions. St Thomas Aquinas maintained long ago that we do not know what 'being' means in the case of God, because God exists in a different way than things exist. What really matters to God and what he will presumably judge us by, are not our opinions, but the nature and degree of our love. He is not concerned with faith in the sense of 'opinions,' but faith that is fundamentally associated with love. Faith without love is hollow; indeed it is often no more than a projection of our wishes and fears, and in that respect many atheist critics of religion are right. Faith without love is dead, like salt that has lost its taste: – 'It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.' (Matt. 5. 13) 'Even the demons believe that and tremble,' scripture tells us....

God cannot be the object of love because God is not an object; objective perception of God leads to idolatry. I cannot love God in the same way that I love another human being, my city, my parish or my work. God is not in front of me, just as light is not in front of me: I cannot see light, I can only see things in light. Likewise I cannot see and visualise God. Even faith does not 'show' him ('No one has ever seen God,' the Bible declares resolutely). With faith all I can do is 'see' the world 'in God.'

(Continued on page 2)

Happy Birthday to those celebrating their special day in February and March



Jeanne Ellison	2/2	Jay Carstrom	2/27
Linda Excell	2/3	Liz O'Neill	3/1
Collin Miller	2/3	Leanne Lott Morrell	3/3
Cindi West-Davidson	2/3	Evan Brigham	3/4
Dr. Louis Mateya	2/6	Angelo Dadamio	3/4
Pastor Art Suggs	2/7	Laura Mateya	3/5
Rob Hollander	2/9	Robin Whalen	3/6
Toni Rorapaugh	2/12	Alexander O'Brien	3/14
Markus Krieger	2/13	Kay Rhinebeck	3/15
Tim Mitchell	2/13	David Excell	3/19
Andrea Schaugency	2/18	Ethelyn Enos, Sr.	3/22
Lucinda Bucker	2/19	William Cluff	3/22
Timothy Christian	2/19	Germaine Smith	3/26
Darin Lewis	2/22	Dorothy Doane	3/28
Judy Giblin	2/23	Lola Schumann	3/29
Maynard Fahs	2/27	Catherine Cornelius	3/29
		Heather Excell Proppe	3/29

Please call the office if you notice an omission from our Birthday List.

Christian Education

We started the year with the lesson of Epiphany and how God is with each and every one of us. We discussed the journey of the three wise men and the gifts and the significance of the gifts they brought Jesus. For the month of February we will focus on God's love and the many ways we see God's love, the knowledge of love through and with authority, to grow in understanding and experience God's love more deeply. In addition, the Sunday school kids and staff will be involved in the service for the month of February- assisting with the liturgy readings on Feb 8th as well as with communion on Feb 15th. We delight and look forward to bringing Christ's teachings to you and your children. Please feel free to contact me at 607-226-2354 or 607-723-8981 with any questions, comments or concerns.

Respectfully, Renee Guidelli

Thank you to all the committee and board members I have had the pleasure of working with over the past year. I look forward to working the new boards and committees in transitioning to 2015. Leslie

(Pastor's Perspective from front page)

I think there are some deep thoughts here. It seems that 99% of the people I talk to, including myself, objectify God. And such thoughts keep us primitive in our spirituality and our faith. He said, "I cannot see light, I can only see things in light." What a beautiful way to think about our existence in God! And if you then want to think about something mindblowing... Jesus said both that he is the light of the world, and you are the light of the world. (Jn 8:12, Mt 5:14) I hope you enjoy these thoughts during our mid-winter. May they shed a little light and warmth into the darkness and cold.

Blessings,



The Sophia Center for Spirituality invites you to the following:

Feb. 9: Mystic of the Month - Dorothy Day, presented by Mary Pat Hyland, 6:30 p.m.

Suggested donation \$10.

Feb. 16: Spiritual Sampler - Liturgy of the Hours, presented by Barbara Kane, 6:30 p.m.

Suggested donation \$10.

Feb. 23: Centering Prayer regular monthly session, 6:30 p.m.

March 9: Mystic of the Month - St. Brendan the Navigator, presented by Deacon Tom Harley, 6:30 p.m.

Suggested donation \$10.

March 21: Thomas Merton Conference featuring Sr. Mary Donald Corcoran, OSB, and Rev. Dr. Arthur Suggs, 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Suggested donation \$30 (\$20/students). Register online here:

http://thesophiacenterforspirituality.org/Upcoming_Events.html

Join us the 4th Sunday of every month for our Taizé Prayer Service in the sanctuary at 6pm.

These programs are held at First Congregational Church (FCC), 30 Main Street, Binghamton, NY.



Spiritual Book Group

Our new book is *Abraham the First Historical Biography* by David Rosenberg. This book is widely available, and Amazon has many used copies for sale. *Booklist* had this to say about the book,

“The ancient patriarch Abraham lives here as a vibrant historical presence. Rosenberg warns however, that readers will not see this remarkable man of antiquity if they persist in looking for him over the shoulders of Christianity or Islamic guardians of orthodoxy. Instead, Rosenberg invites readers to see Abraham against the cultural background of ancient Jerusalem in the tenth century BCE. Hardly the unlettered nomad of Christian imagination, the historical Abraham, Rosenberg argues, studied Sumerian and Akkadian texts intensely before embarking on his epoch-making journey to Canaan. It was these archival sources, melded with oral tradition, that produced the biographical narrative that enshrined Abraham in scripture. Rosenberg’s explanations of how the God of scripture and first Hebrew appeared together on the stage of history draw on both immense research and shrewd speculation.”

Please join us every Wednesday at Noon—feel free to bring a bag lunch.

Share Your Gift Night

Following a meal on Friday evening, March 20th, you are invited to share your special gift, talent or interest with others in the church family at the *March Fellowship Night*.

Please consider what it is you enjoy doing that, in ten or less minutes, you could and would share with others. Maybe it’s painting or taking pictures, perhaps crocheting or knitting, or singing a song by yourself or with others, how about a dance, or reading something you’ve written, making soap, cooking a special dish, an impersonation or improvisation . . . it’s your special gift.

Whatever you do and are willing to share with others will be warmly welcomed and gratefully received. Please talk with Allyson or Bob White after church, or call 687-6294 for more information and to be included in the program on March 20th, at 6pm.

Faith & Fellowship

Super Giveaway

February 1, 2015 1-2:30PM

To benefit our neighbors in need we will be hosting a "Super Giveaway." Items to help our neighborhood friends get through the cold winter days (and especially nights) will be available for the taking, free of charge, at our parking lot entrance. Hot chocolate and sandwiches will also be offered.

Fellowship Evening

At our January meeting, twelve of us enjoyed a fine potluck dinner and discussed our programs for the year. After this discussion we enjoyed a movie called *Decoration Day*. It is a story of two veterans of World War II (one black and one white) who had been friends from childhood. The story of relationships offered much food for thought.

On Friday, February 20th, at 6pm, we will start our fellowship evening with a potluck dinner. Following dinner, Jay Mallery will give us a slide show covering his cross country bike trip in 2014.

Below is what we have planned, so far, for 2015. There are a few items yet to be settled. Please review and add any thoughts or corrections.

Schedule of Fellowship Evenings

(all dinners begin at 6pm)

Jan 16 - Potluck dinner - Planning - Movie "Decoration Day"

Feb 20 - Potluck dinner - Slide show, Jay Mallery

Mar 20 - Potluck dinner - Share Your Gift Night

(see column/article on left)

Apr 17 - Potluck dinner - To be announced

May 15 - Potluck dinner - Poetry & Prose Night

Sept 18 - To be announced

Oct 16 - Potluck dinner - Game night at the O'Neill's

Nov. 20 - Potluck dinner - Assemble Thanksgiving Baskets

Dec 18 - No program



CHOW Sunday will be February 1st and March 1st. Our pantry needs are fruit juice, canned fruit, soup, ramen noodles, pasta sauce, pasta, canned meats, canned green beans, peanut butter and potatoes. Thank you.



Jazz Vespers

Jazz Vespers on February 8th, at 5pm, will feature The Mason Warrington Orchestra with featured vocalists Judy Giblin and Ralph Mauro. This is big band swing music at its best with some of the area's top musicians. You'll recognize tunes and will love the presentation. If you haven't tried Jazz Vespers before, please do it now. You won't regret it.
- Judy Giblin

First Congregational Church, UCC Annual Meeting, January 25, 2015

The meeting was called to order about 11:30 after a luncheon of salad, pizza, cookies and beverage. Minutes of last year's meeting were approved and the reports from the 30-page "Annual Report" were received and accepted by the 30 covenant members present (along with close to 20 guests.)

John Roberts presented the financial plan for 2015 and that passed without comment. A motion to keep the original corporate name of the church "First Congregational Church and Society of the Village of Binghamton, New York" was presented and approved. That name was changed with the adoption of the revised By-Laws in December, 2013. None of the legal work was done and the cost to make the change would probably cost \$5,000 to \$10,000. The church will file a DBA (doing business as) with the County Clerk to be The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Binghamton, New York.

The members voted unanimously to change the employment relationship of Rev. Janet Abel from a year to year contract to a "Called Pastor." A full slate of officers and boards were presented by the nominating committee and elected.

Two issues that generated considerable conversation were a proposal to offer wine and grape juice in communion. A 2/3 majority approved this vote. The other issue was "passing the peace." A considerable amount of time was used to discuss this part of morning worship that most of those present want very much. There was talk of limiting the scope of the activity.

After some thanks to several people, the meeting was closed with prayer. It was a good meeting and as Deb Miller commented, although many opinions were shared it was all done with love and good fellowship.

BOOK-WORDS

[another new direction for our church!]

Magdalene's Lost Legacy, by Margaret Starbird. *The author decodes the symbolic numerology (gematria) embedded in the original Greek of the New Testament, attempting to prove that the Sacred Union (hieros gamos) of Jesus and his bride, Mary Magdalene, was the cornerstone of the earliest Christian community, thus revealing the powerful presence of the feminine divine in the text and in Christianity itself.*

232.9 STAR

Silence of Unknowing, by Terence Grant. *Drawing strength from both Zen and Christian mysticism, the author presents a practical approach to a new path of life, one that offers liberation from anger and fear, and points one toward self-knowledge.*

248.482 GRAN

The Good Heart, by the Dalai Lama. *The Dalai Lama offers insightful exegesis of New Testament passages, such as the Sermon on the Mount and parable of the mustard seed, through the lens of Buddhism, emphasizing the humanity common to both religious practices.*

232.9 BSTA

Book of the Hopi, by Frank Waters. *About thirty Hopi elders illuminate the Hopi worldview, including their history and religion, for the first time in written form.*

970.004 WATE

Light Upon Light, by Sarah Arthur. *This book weaves scripture and prayer with poetry and prose into a unique devotional experience for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany.*

242.33 ARTH

Everywhere (1989), by Janet Russo

Looking within I wonder
Where You reside

When I realize,
You are everywhere.

Inside of me
Rests a beautiful energy.

It is my world.
It is everything.

**Board of Deacons Summary Report
First Congregational Church, Jan. 20, 2015**

Chairperson's Report - Attendance in general has been up. Ninety people attended on Christmas Eve.

Pastor's Report - We reviewed the worship schedule. Discussed the upcoming Lenten Soup Suppers and Music and Meditation Services. Annual Meeting is next week. Super Giveaway will be held Feb. 1st. Information about Adult Forums will be forthcoming.

Associate Pastor's Report - Janet submitted a written report and shared some highlights. She has been working on advertisements through the Holistic Resource Magazine and a flyer for the Super Giveaway. She discussed her proposed change in her status to the Congregation from that of a "contracted minister" to a "called minister." This will be brought forward at our Annual Meeting. She discussed details about her visitations this past month. Janet would like to begin plans for another Congregational Retreat. She will put together a Retreat Committee soon. Janet is involved with communications with PAST. They will hold a Sacred Sites tour on May 17. We have been invited to take part. Our church will hold an Open House, we will need greeters, guides, and refreshments for the tour.

Christian Education Report - Renee supplied her report. Brief discussion on how to attract new families to our church.

Church Council Report - The Angel gifts were successful and appreciated. Church Council has been preparing for the Annual Meeting.

Old Business - Formation of a Flower Committee. Mary Cuddeback will put together a list of duties for the Flower Committee. At the Annual Meeting there will be a vote concerning the inclusion of wine during communion. If the vote is positive, both wine and grape juice will be offered and marked clearly.

New Business - Communion to be brought to the organist on a small plate with a cup. Discussion of a new florist. Discussion of altar flower donations and the clearest way to handle the finances and for people to contribute or donate.

**Are you interested in becoming a member of
First Congregational Church?**

Do you have questions about what is involved? A New Member Class will be forming soon. If you would like to learn more, please speak with one of the Pastors, either Janet Abel or Art Suggs.

February Adult Forum

After taking January off, the monthly adult forum has a special treat for the February gathering. Deanne Bellinger is coming to share her journeys to Israel and Palestine in 2014. Deanne is a very active volunteer in the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ. She has served on the Executive Council and been active on the Global Church Commission.

Last spring she went to Palestine to help farmers pick the olive harvest. In addition to working with local folks, she had to contend with all the security checks with Israel. In September, she was one of four folks from our conference who went with four from the EKHN church in Germany with whom we have a covenant partnership. The delegation met with many different people in both Israel and Palestine. They included all different groups who shared their dreams and concerns.

Deanne will bring her pictures and stories of her experience. This is a great opportunity to learn from first hand observation what is going on in the Holy Land! Save the date: Sunday, February 8, 2015, after morning worship.

H.E.A.R.T Centered Living (HCL)

HCL is a cooperative of like-minded individuals focused on purposeful living who share from the heart for the heart.

The following is our schedule of events: *

Mon, Feb 2nd-Energy Healing W/ Debbie, FCC, 6-8pm, \$6

Tues, Feb 3rd-Numerology explains recurring & lucky numbers w/Peter @ SUNY Broome 6-8pm

Thu, Feb 12th-Jewels of the Heart W/Renee @ SUNY Broome 6-8:30pm

Fri, Feb 13th-HeARTS and Crafts for the spirit w/ Renee @ FCC 5:30-7:30pm, \$15 Crafts are family friendly, so bring the kids

Mon, Feb 23rd-The History of Solfeggio Tuning Forks w/ Sylvia Scott 6-8pm @ FCC

Mon, Mar 2nd-Energy Healing W/Debbie @ FCC 6-8pm, \$6

*You can pick up a calendar of events outside the main church office. Check out www.heart-centered-living.org, or contact Renee at 607-226-2354 for more details.



How To Contact Us:

**Mon –Thurs, 9:00-3:00 pm,
(607)723-8981**

fcc@binghamtonwireless.com

Web: www.uccbinghamton.org

**The Rev. Dr. Arthur M. Suggs – Senior Pastor
The Rev. Janet Abel – Associate Pastor
Renee Guidelli – Director of Christian Education
Nancy Wildoner – Organist & Choir Director
Maureen Helms – Director of Joyful Noise
Judy Giblin – Director of Jazz Vespers
Leslie Dahlgren – Office Manager
Sharon Shadduck – Childcare Provider
Alice Pettit – Treasurer
Chuck Mallery—Financial Secretary
Erick Clasen – Web Master
Vanessa Warren— Bookkeeper
Cindi West-Davidson – Custodian
Toni Rorapaugh—Librarian**



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