



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

THE BELL

1 Gilligan Road, East Greenbush, New York 12061-1780

VOLUME 22 ISSUE 8

SEPTEMBER 2020

At Church on Sundays:

- ◆ Early Informal Service
8:30am - Outdoor Chapel
weather permitting
- ◆ Regular Service 9:30 am in
the sanctuary and
 - ◆ Via Facebook
- ◆ Sunday School to be
determined

Visit us on the Web:

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Rev. Sundar R. Samuel,
Pastor

Gail Welkley,
Administrative Assistant

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As we go through the Pandemic-2020, we long for an answer to it. As we see lives blown apart by natural disasters, fires, diseases, our hearts cry out with it. As the economy worsens, businesses fold and more and more people in millions lose their jobs and livelihoods, our souls seek satisfaction to this enigma. It is the age-old question that haunts us: "I wonder why bad things happen to good people?" This is a burning question for anyone who has experienced the horrors of life. People who are faithful in following their faith and doing good works are asking this question. People all over the world pray this question: why do



bad things happen to good people? The brokenness of life shatters many people's ideas about how the world is supposed to operate. We don't live life very long before many of our illusions are shattered. We ask: "why do the innocent suffer and the wicked (seem) to prosper?" "Why does God allow evil and suffering?" "If God is real and good, why is there

suffering?" Another way it is put is: "If God can't stop suffering, then God is not great. If God can't, then God is not good." Often like many of you, I ask myself "Why is Faith so Hard" during times like these?

Unfortunately, these are the times that we Christians have to be on guard or our desperation to have this question answered, we will be seduced by hope hustlers. These hope hustlers churn out cotton candy theology that teaches that if you really have faith in God you will never experience tragedy or hardships in life. And then when pain and tragedy comes they blame their suffering on a lack of faith. Some may even give up on God all together. As a result, they are left with no inner resources with which to battle the trials of life. The very first time I heard from my pastor when I was twelve-years old that Christians do not escape tragedy and turmoil, I was taken aback. In fact, Apostle Paul writing to the church in Rome (Romans 8: 28-29), uses the words like suffering, tribulation, persecution, peril, and the sword. Suffering

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A Reconciling Congregation

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in the Greek means "pressure." Persecution in the Greek means "To be squeezed." All of us can relate to those things, don't we? The Bible is not a book that whistles in the dark and denies pain. Quite the contrary, the Bible is a book that was born out of pain. In fact, it may come as a surprise to some of us that throughout the Bible, the Psalms ask it. Job asks it. Lamentations is full of it. The prophets complain to God about it. We ought to take a lesson from the biblical writers who cry out with the same burning question that we ask today. The lesson is that if we are going to be intimate and personal with God, we need to give God all that we have inside of us, even our deepest complaints and questions. Don't worry. God is big enough to handle them! There is a partial answer to the theodicy question: free will. God wants us to love God because we choose to love God, so God has given us free will. It is a fantastic gift, but there is a negative side to it. We can use our free will to do evil things and cause much pain and suffering to our neighbor whom we are commanded by God to love as we love selves. So, we wage wars, some choose to get into airplanes, crash into buildings, some ignore the plight of innocents out of self-centeredness allowing innocent people to die. However, free will is only a partial answer because it does not address things like natural disasters and diseases. Unfortunately, there is no complete answer to this question "Why is Faith so Hard?" and Why bad things happen to good people?" The truth is that we live in a sinful world that runs amok and bad things happen to both the innocent and the guilty. Sin permeates biology, humanity, and geography and everyone, good and bad, experience the consequences of it. This side of heaven we will never know why bad things happen to good people. But as Christians we have the assurance that one day Christ will come in glory and all of our questions will be answered, all of the great mysteries will be solved, all of our confusion will turn into clarity, and every tear will be wiped away. So get your list of questions ready for that day. I know I've got mine! And the question at the top of my list will be, "Why did bad things happen to good people?"



Until that great day comes, however, we still have to cope with life in all of its suffering and tragedy. We still have to deal with the bad and unfair circumstances of life. So, I want to offer some things that have helped me as I have struggled with the question of why bad things happen to good people. My prayer is that they will help you, too. My offer is simply this: do not allow the "Why bad things happen to good people" question make you cynical. It's fair and healthy to ask this question and struggle with it, but don't stop believing in God altogether. Don't allow unfair pain and suffering to harden your heart. Reflect on the insightful words of Harry Emerson Fosdick: "Goodness is a far greater problem for the atheist than evil is for the believer." Here is another thing to consider: We do not face pain and difficulty alone. We don't face the darkness alone. This is what Apostle Paul was expressing when he said, "I am convinced that nothing will separate us from the love of God." Whatever you are going through, God is there, giving you guidance. God is there, giving you strength. God is there saying, "I will

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never leave you.” . believe the best help you and I can receive when we grapple with the question of why bad things happen to good people, is to look at something which brings healing and goodness. Apostle Paul uses several words to describe the assumed pain and suffering of life: hardship, persecution, distress, nakedness, peril, the sword. Paul says that not only that we will never be separated from God’s love but he says something truly remarkable: “All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God’s purpose.” Evil and pain is never the will of God, but God can take evil and pain and use it for good. When evil attacks with pain, God uses it to build character. When evil shows resistance, God uses it to build strength. When evil cripples with tragedy, God finds a way to victory. When evil destroys with death, God restores life. God is in the transformation business. God can turn our trouble into triumph! We can’t control the fact the bad things will happen to us. They just do, and one day we will find out why. But the one thing we can control is how we respond to the bad things that happen to us. We can either get bitter or better! We can stay angry at God and never move on, or we can give our pain to God and allow God to do something beautiful with it.



God's peace is with you!

Pastor Sundar

LECTIONARY FOR SEPTEMBER

September 6 – 14th Sunday after Pentecost – Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 149; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

September 13 – 15th Sunday after Pentecost – Exodus 14:19-31; Exodus 15:1b-11, 20-21; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35

September 20 – 16th Sunday after Pentecost – Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45; Philippians 1:21-30; Matthew 20:1-16

September 27 – Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Hello Sunday School Families,

"Sunday" School will continue this fall in a different format to keep families safe. Sunday School and youth group will continue on an alternative night to help reduce density in the church, and will be very similar to the previous Friday and Saturday Night Alive. The Director of Sunday School and the Youth Group Leader will be meeting this week to discuss specific details. Please watch your email for more information soon.



God Bless,
Amanda Trainor

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN



Have you been stockpiling items for the thrift sale? Unfortunately, there won't be a thrift sale this fall, but you'll be able to sell those treasures at our outdoor **flea market** on **September 26** from **9:00 am - 3:00 pm**. Call the church office at 518-477-9693 by September 18 to reserve your 10' by 10' space. Bring your own tent and table. The cost is \$15.00, and you can make checks out to United Methodist Women. This is an opportunity to sell your



thrift sale items.

No thrift sale this fall, and no roast beef dinner, but never fear the **Brooks Barbecue** is **ON October 10**, take out only, and curbside pick up is available upon request. We usually ask the congregation to make brownies for the barbecue, but this year we thought if you would like to donate brownie mix the UMW would make them so as to limit the number of people handling the food due to the COVID-19. Boxes of brownie mix can be dropped off at the church. Stay safe and healthy and God Bless.

Finance Committee

We want to thank all our members for their continued support for the ministries of our church. Even as we moved Sunday services online and changed the ways we reach out, your faithful support of our church has continued. We are profoundly grateful for it during this difficult time.



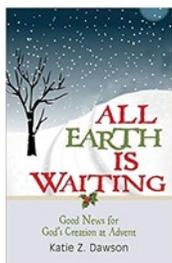
The Finance Committee has been working this summer (on Zoom and email) to plan the Financial Commitment Campaign for 2021. The Financial Commitment Campaign will run for three Sundays from October 11 through Commitment Sunday on October 25. We will be in touch with you shortly more information. Please pray for our church and for this campaign.

Finally, online giving, available at www.fumceg.org or through the GivePlus App, continues to be available. We are grateful that online giving has grown during this time as it helps support our church during this uncertain time.

Thank you again for your continued support.

Colleen Rumsey
Finance Committee Chair

Book Study



On September 28 and 29, we will be starting a five-week study of **All the Earth is Waiting** by Katie Z. Dawson. There will be two discussion groups: Monday evenings starting at 7:00 p.m. led by Kevin Conley or Tuesdays mornings at 9:30 a.m. led by Pastor Samuel. Groups will offer three meeting options for participants: in-person meetings in the back of the church sanctuary, video or audio-only via Zoom. Sessions will be 60-90 minutes in length and will include prayer, bible readings and questions for reflection that are listed in the book or added by participants. **All the Earth is Waiting** was written with Advent in mind,

but explores themes that are timeless: hope, joy, peace and the responsibility to care for the earth in preparation for Christ's return. Please provide your name, email address and which discussion group you would like to join to the office (office@fumceg.org) by September 15 so we may order the books and send you Zoom invitations for the sessions. A \$10 donation is requested for each book.

MISSIONS

Styrofoam and Battery Recycling: Our next collection of Styrofoam and batteries will be the half hour before and after the 9:30 am service on September 27. Batteries must be clean. If they are leaking or corroded, please throw them in the garbage. Styrofoam must be clean with tape and staples removed. Styrofoam used for food or drink products is not accepted. Peanuts are accepted. Note that some packing and peanuts look similar to Styrofoam but are a different type of plastic material that is not able to be recycled. Please check questionable material with us when you bring it on the 27th.



Crop Walk: The Castleton Hunger Crop Walk will be held on October 18 at 12:45 p.m. Because of COVID-19, we will wear masks and keep appropriate distance between walkers. Also, rather than assemble at Emmanuel Reformed Church, we will meet in the parking lot on Boltwood Avenue behind Riverside Nursing Home. We will start with a prayer and picture and set out on the 3.2 mile walk. There will also be a 1 mile walk. One quarter of donations raised from the Hunger Crop Walk is directed to the Anchor Food Pantry in Castleton. The rest supports Church World Service programs. Because of the COVID-19 virus, the need is greater this year. CWS programs serve vulnerable populations in the United States and across the world, including distributing information about the virus, responding to requests for food and hygiene supplies and providing cash grants to families with urgent needs for medicine, housing, internet connectivity, and more. In the U.S., they provide a continuum of services to newly-arrived refugees, migrant farm workers and asylum seekers. In the last four months, many resettled refugees lost their jobs, or have not yet had a chance to enter the labor market and largely do not qualify for government benefits. Those still employed are often forced to work without appropriate personal protective equipment and frequently have to carpool to get to their places of employment. The vast majority do not have social networks or savings to fall back on in this time of crisis. If you can join the walk, please let us know (e.kevin.conley@gmail.com, 518.253.4907). If you cannot join the walk, please consider making a donation to support a walker or the team at <https://www.crophungerwalk.org/castletonny/fumceg>.



IT'S THE 2020 CENSUS. IT'S IMPORTANT.

Counting noses for the 2020 Census is scheduled to finish this month of September. That means there is not much time to be sure you have been counted.

Why is this tally of people so important?

- Results from the 2020 Census will be used to determine the number of seats each state has in Congress. It is also used to apportion political representation at all levels of government.
- Your response helps to direct billions of dollars in federal funds to local communities for schools, roads, and other public services.



Public health officials use the data to target their interventions in at-risk communities, and from there plan for various health and wellness programs. For these reasons and more, we need to have all in our church family plus all our neighbors and community members counted.

If you think you may not have been counted, respond online at 2020census.gov or by phone at 844-330-2020.

The census has ten questions that take 10 minutes complete. A small investment for great benefits. Now if you still have questions, here are two contacts: There is 2020 census help at (518) 722-0803 or you can email 2020CensusHelp@gmail.com.

PUT MY NAME DOWN FOR THE MANNA IN THE WILDERNESS CAMPAIGN.

It was one August a number of years ago while I was working the Teller's line at State Bank of Albany. A young boy and I sat in the tall grass at the edge of a softball field. We were having a very emotional conversation that ended when the boy looked up at me and said, "Thank you for talking to me." His comment made me decide to resign from the bank, go back to college and become a teacher. The conversation took place at Skye Farm where I was volunteering for my first time as a camp counselor.



Now up to 2020. The world got turned upside down earlier this year with the COVID-19 pandemic. Programs galore were cancelled. The Upper New York Conference summer camp season, and a number of related special retreats and other gatherings were on that list. Many potential life-changing events – gone. Five conference camping sites, including Skye Farm, shut down. One result with major impact – the loss of over a million dollars in revenue. We can't just let the camping program wither up to nothing.

Upper NY Conference has begun an emergency financial appeal, **The Manna in the Wilderness Campaign**. Please join me in supporting this very important campaign. Why? Because Skye Farm is *special*.

Many in our church family have been part of one or more Skye Farm programs as directors, program leaders, support staff, or campers. A few have even had the chance to be a part of the program at one of the other camps in our conference. Our church has held retreats for our local church family at the Skye Farm site.

There is more information about the campaign at <https://www.unyumc.org/images/uploads/Aug. 2020 Issue I COLOR .pdf>

An aside. If you get to Skye Farm for any reason this fall, please check out the outhouse with my name over the door. I have not seen it in a while and I am anxious to know its condition. The campers gave me the outhouse as a birthday present for my 65th birthday.

George Herrick

Live Streaming Update

We've been live streaming our Sunday 9:30 am services since March, and we've learned a lot in that time! One of the things we learned is that we can't stop now. Our plans are to continue live streaming even after church life returns to pre-pandemic normal. The equipment we are currently using was brought in by Dave Caneen when he stepped up to figure out how we could continue church services during the shutdown. It's simple and basic, but it has worked pretty well as a temporary solution. Dave is currently leading the effort to set up a permanent solution. A camera, laptop, and other necessary equipment are on order, though the camera is facing a long backorder because of high demand. Once everything is here, Dave and other church tekkies will consult with the company that installed the church sound system so that can be integrated into the new system.



Upgrades to the sound system will be done if necessary. We also will be able to make videos of services using the new set-up. Once everything is ready we will return to using the pulpit and lectern during services. We are hoping that may happen in late September.

FAREWELL

Dear Church Family,

We cannot begin to thank you for all the wonderful years of ministry we have shared. Our time at FUMC has been a blessing in so many ways. We are grateful that we stepped through the doors 15 years ago. It has not only been our place for worship and prayer, but our place for community and comfort. We have not only raised our children here, but we have raised our faith and wisdom here. You have shown us love, taught us grace and strengthened our leadership. It has been a joy to walk this journey with you, to do good with you, and to serve God with you.



Thank you so much for the beautiful, cozy blanket collage. It was such a thoughtful gift with pictures of memorable moments at our beloved church. The many cards of well wishes and the celebration after church on August 16th are so appreciated. Your love has been overflowing.

We move from here to be closer to parents on a family farm; to serve Jesus in another community, following God's call. And like Gideon in Judges 6, multiple requests for signs that we are on the right path have been made. God's unfailing love, compassion and understanding abound during these moments, and God's will for us has been revealed multiple times. And so we part from here knowing that God goes before us, making our path straight, not without challenges, but smooth.

May your work at FUMC continue to be for God, of God and with God. May your hearts, minds and doors always remain open, reflecting God's grace, welcoming all and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. "Finally dear Siblings, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."
2 Corinthians 13:11

Joy, Hope, Love and Peace, The Giso Family
Rachel, Mike, Victor and Jack



You are cordially invited to our 9th Annual

Online Fall Fundraiser

"Be The Change"

Featuring Kareema Pickney Partin Cornerstone Alumna Class of 2009

Wednesday, September 23, 2020

7:00 p.m.

Via Zoom and Facebook Live Stream

YOU ARE INVITED!

The Cornerstone Campus Ministry at the University at Albany will hold their 9th ANNUAL PATRON'S DINNER virtually on Wednesday, September 23. Come support Scott Bogart, our new Peer Minister. Here's a chance for the "next" generation and today's older generation to fellowship together, to share ideas and to listen to each other. We will be attending by either Zoom or Facebook Livestream. Please call/contact our church office to make a reservation and/or for more information at 518-477-9693. Can't attend but would still like to support Scott and the campus ministry? Make checks out to our church and send them to the church office. Mark "Campus Ministry" on the memo line.

REACHING OUR SENIORS

This article appeared the current issue of the Advocate submitted by our very own Shawna Lambert and Jean Sheviak. There is a picture of Lois Heyer and Jean Sheviak—check it out!

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost every religious organization began to ask the same question: How can we help? We at First United Methodist Church of East Greenbush (FUMCEG) decided early on that a major target of our focus should be the elderly population, who would surely be among those most adversely affected in the days and months ahead. Fortunately, we were well positioned to do this, as our congregation already had established longstanding relationships with several area facilities where many of our senior citizens reside. At Rosewood Rehabilitation and Nursing, for example, we have been conducting services every month for the last 30 years; and a similar monthly program was instituted at Riverside Center for Rehabilitation and Nursing five years ago.

In 2018, Deb Samuel, who is the wife of our Pastor, Sundar Samuel, formed a weekly Bible study for church members living at Eddy Hawthorne Ridge senior living community. The program was well received and grew beyond church members. Participants soon began asking if we could provide a weekly worship service at that location as well, which we are pleased to have initiated two years ago.

So, in March of this year when it became essential to further address the needs of our senior communities, recruits were quickly found and teams were put into place at once. Currently, we are engaged every single week in reaching out, both by telephone and through handwritten notes, to over 100 area seniors, many of them in the adult facilities mentioned above. Working independently from their own homes, our volunteers maintain contact with individuals who are otherwise feeling the burden of extreme isolation. Note cards are collected and delivered by mail to the nursing/rehab centers. At Hawthorne Ridge, church bulletins and other notices are sent directly to those who do not have access to e-mail.

In addition, thanks to some tech-savvy church members, we have been providing a livestream of our Sunday worship services through the FUMCEG Facebook group page. To our delight, many senior citizens have risen to the task of joining us via their computers, tablets, and smart phones. The feedback we have received as a result of our various efforts has been especially heartwarming. Callers engaged in telephone communication reported that even if people didn't have a particular need, they were just happy to have someone reach out to them. What's more, they were anxious for word of how everyone else was faring, too. One person noted, "When I didn't call on the usual day, people worried that I was sick."

Frank Fortino, former activities director at Riverside, told us, "Thank you so much for the note cards. The residents here love them because they are receiving something in the mail, and it is exciting when it is a friendly card!"

Ethel Center, a centenarian who lives at Hawthorne Ridge, wrote to us about the special messages Pastor Sundar sends each week, calling them "both inspirational and enjoyable."

At Rosewood, residents acknowledged their appreciation and also gave us some lovely pictures they had drawn.

Deb Samuel, who composes her own weekly message to accompany the one written by Pastor Sundar, observed, "When we first came to live among you, it seemed that there were so many different groups within the church operating along parallel lines. Now, hearing so much about the warmth and connections that phone calls, notes, and livestreaming of Sunday services are making, has allowed me to witness these lines crossing and intersecting, instead of simply running parallel. It is such a joy to see how God is using this time to draw us toward Him and each other."

Indeed, if anything positive can be said to result from the novel coronavirus experience, it may just be that having to be separated from one another has brought us all closer together! The link to The Advocate is <https://issuu.com/uppernewyork/docs/vol12issue3>.

There is a picture of Lois Heyer and Jean Sheviak.

ANNUAL CHARGE CONFERENCE

Our Annual Church/Charge Conference will be held at 7:00 pm Monday evening, November 9. This year our new District Superintendent Rev. Deborah (Debbie) Earthrowl will be the elder leading the meeting. At this meeting we will be electing people to serve in leadership positions in our church for the new year, including any vacant Trustee position(s). (Interested in a slot, speak to Sundar.) Also, at this meeting one of the agenda items required to be discussed is the compensation for the clergy person appointed to serve the East Greenbush charge. In other words, Sundar's salary for the coming year. At the present time it is expected this will be a "virtual" meeting. More details will be announced as they become available.



WELCOME PEER MINISTER SCOTT BOGART

Hello everyone at First United Methodist Church, East Greenbush! My name is Scott Bogart and I will be your new Peer Minister for the academic year 2020-2021. I am currently entering my



Senior year at the University at Albany with a major in Homeland Security, and a minor in Leadership. I hope to one day work for a governmental agency under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Faith has always been prevalent in my life. From helping to start and run a Christian Club in my high school, while we were facing rebukes from the highest in authority, the Superintendent. Faith has taught me that we serve thee God of the Universe, to not stress when the mountain seems unbearable, to pray. With my faith, I have been blessed to travel to Perú, South

America. I will be the first in my family to graduate from college, none the less a University. This program at UAlbany, Cornerstone Campus Ministry, truly feels like home to so many, including myself. Through this program, I can now say I have helped with various amount of outreach. From helping homeless population in the area, to helping hurricane victims in the Bahamas. The biggest event I have done with CCM, which was definitely the most rewarding, was a week trip to Panama City, FL to help some locals rebuild from a hurricane that hit a year and a half ago. None of this would be possible without your church's generosity in supporting Cornerstone Campus Ministry at the University at Albany. So truly thank you and I look forward to meeting each and every one of you! Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or ideas for outreach or anything at all! Prayer can work over the phone as well!

Scott Bogart, Peer Minister stbogart@albany.edu 518-232-9053



◆ **Deadline** for October Bell is **September 17**. Please have your information emailed to editor@fumceg.org by that date. Thank you.

◆ **Red Cross blood drive**, is Saturday, **September 19** from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm. Contact the Red Cross for appointment either online or by phone at redcrossblood.org or 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) use sponsor code: egumc.