New Hampshire Conference
United Church of Christ

2021 Annual Meeting
Worship Service

The People’s Prayers for Healing and Hope

Introduction of Lament from a Spiritual Care Chaplain Concord VNA:

For being a chaplain in the time of Covid, I lament. For all the people in nursing homes, who are separated from their loved ones, I lament. For people with dementia, who don’t even know why their loved ones have suddenly disappeared, I lament. For all of their family members waiting outside, for a window visit, or a glimpse, I lament. For trying to do a ministry of presence, while wearing all of this, I lament. For trying to do a ministry of presence, without being present, I lament.

Written and narrated by Rev. Sean Dunker-Bendigo, South Church, UCC in Concord & Rev. Gail Doktor, Jackson Community Church, UCC. Prayer written using contributions by deacons Wendy McVey, Tish Hanlon, Sue Carrigan, Robert Carper, Eileen McDonald, and Sandy Louis of Jackson Community Church, and prayer responses delivered by email from Rev. Tara Olsen Allen of Pilgrim United Church of Christ, UCC in Brentwood; Rev. Pam Spain (retired pastor); Rev. Donna Vuilleumier of Smith Memorial Church, UCC of Hillsboro; and Erin Wessells, First Congregational Church of Croydon.

O Holy One, source of all love, hear the voices of your children, the member congregations of the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ, and the prayers we lift up together as a church wide community of faith.

This past year has felt empty, draining, strange, overwhelming, confusing, a blur going by too fast, frustrating. It has felt like a mixture of gains and losses. The past year has felt challenging and inspiring to us.

We lost connections, including connections to many loved ones in our lives. We lost too many friends and loved ones. We lost in-person worship, beloved
activities, time together, music, and community.

We remember how it felt to gather together for worship and meals. We remember better, healthier times, gatherings, and activities. We remember the old days: Croydon singers, our church choirs. We remember freedom and our loved ones, those we have lost.

What hurt was the daily reality of missing our loved ones. What hurt was our own isolation and seeing the isolation of others. What hurt was not celebrating Thanksgiving, Christmas, and holidays physically in person. What hurt was being so abruptly cut off from one another, from the church building, from our worship life as we know it. What hurt was no good-byes between pastor and church community. What hurt was not hugging and missing family.

And yet. And yet, we discovered we are strong. That we have strengths we didn’t know we had. That there were silver linings in the midst of the gray. We discovered how nice it was for the family to have dinner together every night. We discovered new ways of being together safely and virtually. We discovered unexpected creativity, zoom awesome virtual choir performances, and a greater ability to learn and adapt than we could ever have imagined. Endless possibilities. We discovered that life’s ups and downs were not all bad. That we still had both good times and some times that were sorrowful. We discovered ongoing faith and daily prayer. We discovered humanity, love for each other, nature, hope, and resiliency.

We gained new skills for connecting, a little more technological savvy, and growing online presence and congregation. We gained appreciation for the little things in life, tolerance, and a little more weight. We gained sensitivity, a broader way of seeing and knowing ourselves, and new friendships. We gained strength, and a sense of balance to life.

We remain grateful for family, church, ingenuity, our minsters and their work, and the ability to worship and adapt when we could. We remain grateful for new friends, enduring friendships, for nature, and the opportunity to see how much our environment can heal if we just stop our hurtful, careless ways. Above all we remain grateful for the grace of God, and God’s eternal presence through it all.

We celebrated the little things, such as taking note of things we didn’t notice before, like ladybugs, or a person’s smile or hugs. We celebrated laughter, friendships, family. We celebrated the creativity and innovation that has come out
of this time. We celebrated the ability to launch a capital campaign to replace our aged heating system, so that we have an even better church for the community to return to for worship and activities. And we celebrated how well we stayed connected as a community.

Now as we gather we pray for the ways in which Covid is still rampant in our world and we pray for new developments to end this pandemic. We pray for people and places that don't have access to healthcare, vaccinations, and other essential resources. And we pray about the realization that we do have access to these resources. And we pray for people struggling with mental health challenges. We pray that we may not only find a healing way, but also learn and grow from this unique time. We pray for God’s continued guidance and blessing as we find our way forward. We pray for peace and unity. We pray for health and happiness. We pray for continued strength, continued patience, hopefulness, and the Lord’s presence in all of this.

O Divine, you who have lifted everything from the know of all nothing, you who provide a way where there was no way, you of abundance and blessing, hear our heartfelt prayers. Act with your love and creativity and may we respond out of much abundance through your beloved community into our world. Amen.