



Advocate July 2020



Dear Aldersgate Family,

One of our members sent me a message they saw on a church sign:

“The building is closed, but the church is open!!!!”

That is certainly true of Aldersgate! Even though we have not been able to gather in person, the church continues to be in ministry. We are so happy to share in this issue of the Advocate some of the many ways members of the congregation, some of our standing committees and some newly created committees have been working to keep us connected.

In my sermon last Sunday I spoke of the Yoke and the heaviness of it when we feel alone. What we have seen in these times of navigating through the wilderness is just how important it is to have others share the load. These are heavy times, indeed...but God is with us. We do not shoulder our burdens alone. We are given the gift of His presence and the gift of one another.

I am thankful for the gifts in this church family and the ways we are staying connected to one another and to God. We look forward to a time when things will resemble what we once knew as normal...but until that time, we continue to be the church in new and creative ways. Some have even suggested that we will be stronger through this time, as we learn to care for one another in different ways and expand our ministries beyond our walls.

So, look inside these pages and see what God is doing in new ways though Aldersgate!

“The building is closed, but the church is open!!!!”

Thanks be to God!

In faith,

Pastor Lisa

Staff Updates

A shortened version of the New England Annual Conference was recently held, via Zoom, for clergy only, to conduct time-critical business. We are thrilled to announce that the Bishop has re-appointed Pastor Lisa to Aldersgate for another year beginning July 1st!

We learned this past week that our Office Manager will be leaving us to take a full-time position elsewhere. We have so appreciated her time on our staff and wish her God's blessings in this next chapter in her life. Her last day will be July 10.



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Worship Update

This Fourth of July Weekend, we reflect on the gift of freedom and re-dedicate ourselves to use our freedom rightly, for the good of others. Worship will include music and reflections from our Clergy Session of Annual Conference, led by Mark Miller and Marcia McPhee. They have prepared a powerful video worship that I pray will encourage, challenge, and bless you.

We will conclude by celebrating Holy Communion virtually where we are. We encourage you to plan to have bread and juice of your choice with you when you tune in to worship next Sunday. Pastor Lisa will speak the Communion blessing during the video service and invite you to hold the bread and the cup you have in your home to be included in the blessing. We will then partake of the gifts of God where we are and remember that Christ is with us.

Sunday Coffee Hours in July!

During the summer months, when we would normally be worshipping in one service, one of our favorite things is seeing everyone! So, we invite you to join in a Sunday Zoom Coffee Hour on Sunday mornings at 10:30 a.m. The worship link is sent to your email at 6:00 a.m. so watch it at your leisure and then join us at 10:30 to see one another's faces and re-connect. You can share stories, show off the smiling faces of those kids in your house that we all miss, or talk about what you found meaningful in worship. The Zoom link will be included in your Sunday morning email beginning July 12 (not starting over the holiday weekend). We hope you'll join us! We want to "see" you!

Want to Learn How to Zoom?

Want to attend a church Zoom meeting, or even host one, but are unsure how to do that? To get a free account, go to <https://zoom.us> or just download the app at <https://zoom.us/download>. Short, simple tutorials about joining or hosting meetings are at <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>. Want a tutorial in writing or be walked through how to Zoom? Contact the church office. If you don't have a computer, you can still attend Zoom meetings, audio only, by phone.

Church Building Remains Closed

During this COVID-19 pandemic, the church building remains closed until further arrangements are made for safe re-opening. We are trying to schedule staff hours to avoid cross-contamination of spaces. If you need access to the building, please contact the church office so we can schedule a time for you, and be sure to follow safety protocols, including wearing a mask, while in the building. All staff are still working from home and are reachable via phone or email. Please reach out if we can be of support to you!



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Ways We Stay Connected

What's Up At Aldersgate Session, Sunday, July 12!

Find out what's happening at Aldersgate during this time of physical separation, and how our ministries, small groups, and church business continue to be exciting and vibrant! Pastor Lisa and church leaders will host What's Up at Aldersgate on Sunday July 12, 7:00 – 8:00 pm to share current and planned activities in areas like worship, education, outreach, small group fellowship, re-opening, and others. Each topic will include time for Q&A. Join the Zoom call to see other members of your church family and learn about how we plan to navigate the future!

Caring Calls Help Keep Us Connected

A group of church members continue to reach out to everyone in our congregation to stay in touch during these times. The team is grateful to connect and share in fellowship with all of you, whether by phone, email, text, mail, and/or Zoom meetings. If you are not being contacted and wish to be, please notify the church office (978-256-9400 or aldersgatehelmsford@verizon.net) to be added to the list.

Aldersgate Connect and Chat was a success!

Thank you to everyone who attended one of the Aldersgate Connect & Chat Zoom coffee hour sessions on Tuesdays in June! A changing group of 15 – 20 people attended each week and we had a fun time in fellowship! Connect & Chat will be taking a break over the summer, but if you have ideas for how you would like to be in fellowship, or host an activity with your church family during the next two months, please contact the church office.

Share Your Ideas!

Want to host a bingo or game night? How about a movie night? Are there things your Scout group or school group is doing that we might adapt for our church family? We would love to discuss how to take your thoughts and help flesh them out, or apply a prior fun experience you had elsewhere to the church community. We can even help navigate how to host free small group Zoom gatherings! Any or all ideas are welcomed! Contact the church office.



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Summer Ministries

Garden Update

The garden is producing! Thank you to those who are faithfully watering, weeding and harvesting in these hot days. We are blessed to share the gifts of the garden with those in need in our community through the Chelmsford Food Pantry. This past two weeks we donated:

5 pounds of lettuce, 8 bags of snow peas, 1 bag of garden peas,
2 lbs. plus 1 bunch of radishes, 2 lbs. plus 2 bunches of small broccolis,
1 lb. of spinach and 1 box of loose-leaf green lettuce

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

New - Aldersgate Farmers Market!

A second weekly harvesting of the garden (after our donation to the food pantry) is being offered on Sunday mornings as a “farmer’s market” to church members...at the right price, free!

We will have seasonal produce pre-bagged on a first come first serve basis Sundays from 10 AM to 12 noon. Please come prepared with a personal mask and practice physical distancing when you greet us at the table under the front maple tree (near the garden). We’d love to see you!

Summer “Early Bird” Study

Charles will be offering a summer version of his “Early Bird” Bible study...This will be an opportunity to explore some familiar Bible stories through the eyes of our 2020 experiences. Look for details about times and topics in the coming weekly announcements.

Aldersgate Listening Session and Conversation about Race- July 28 at 7:00 p.m.

We have all been deeply troubled by the events that have unfolded over the past month around race and injustice in our country. The United Methodist Church has unveiled a “Dismantling Racism” Initiative that will continue into the new calendar year (more detailed information is available on the next page). We will be looking for ways to have conversation with one another around this important topic.

To begin the dialog, we invite you to an hour-long listening session for our Aldersgate family. This is an opportunity to share thoughts and experiences on matters of religion, inequality and injustice and how we as individuals and a church are called to be “our sisters’ and brothers’ keepers.”



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UMC Unveils “Dismantling Racism” Initiative

United Methodists Stand Against Racism www.umc.org/endoracism

We recognize racism as a sin. We commit to challenging unjust systems of power and access.

We will work for equal and equitable opportunities in employment and promotion, education and training; in voting, access to public accommodations, and housing; to credit, loans, venture capital, and insurance; to positions of leadership and power in all elements of our life together; and to full participation in the Church and society.



What can you do?

Pray - We listen for the voice of Jesus in our private acts of devotion and our public acts of worship.

The Upper Room has collected resources for the [spiritual work of overcoming racism](#).

[Prayers for the Healing of a Nation](#) - Discipleship Ministries

[No justice. No peace](#): Devotion written in response to George Floyd’s murder

[Turning to God in Days of Trouble](#) is a prayer for difficult days.

Connect- We begin our work by joining hands and hearts to journey side by side.

Read [White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism](#) by Robin DiAngelo.

Or [watch her speak](#). Other titles at Cokesbury.com.

A United Methodist Pastor in Ferguson, Missouri, offers [helpful tips for talking about race](#).

The General Commission on Religion and Race offers several [video series to encourage discussion](#).

Discipleship Ministries offers some [great resources](#).

We also have some tips for [talking to your children about racism](#).

Seek diverse blogs, podcasts, news outlets, and new relationships.

Show up – View the video from the Service of Lament held on Weds. June 24, 2020

www.umc.org/endoracism

View the video from the Denominational Town Hall, on July 1, 2020 www.umc.org/endoracism

Act- Jesus calls us not only to speak, but to join in the work of liberating the oppressed.

Join [Church and Society](#) of the United Methodist Church in their work for civil and human rights.

Connect with [United Methodist Women](#) in their work for racial justice.

[Suggested Resources for Becoming Anti-Racist](#): Discipleship Ministries

Give to The United Methodist Committee on Relief's [Community Developers Program](#).

Work for justice in your church, community, work and school.

Learn more - Find more information and resources on [our Racial Justice page](#).

<https://www.umc.org/en/how-we-serve/advocating-for-justice/racial-justice/united-against-racism>



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Education News

SUMMER CHURCH SCHOOL

The senior youth will continue to meet on Sunday mornings for church school via zoom at 9:30 a.m.

ACTIVITY TIME WITH MS CHERYL

I am inviting all children, ages 4 years old through 5th grade to join me weekly via Zoom on Tuesday afternoons at 4:00 p.m. for ½ an hour.

We will do an activity connected to the Sunday morning worship theme using different media. We may do a craft, science experiment, cook, read a story, etc.

I hope you can join me for some summertime fun!

SAVE THE DATE—SUMMER VBS via ZOOM!

August 17-21

We will be offering a special VBS program this summer. We will be using a VBS resource from Illustrated Ministries called: “Compassion Camp”.

COMPASSION CAMP is centered on compassion for others, ourselves, and the world. This at-home/virtual VBS is geared toward K-5th graders, plus activities specifically for preschool-age children. We will have group time via zoom and will also hand out activity kits for you to use at home.

We will be sending a survey out next week to see what families plan on attending so we have a better understanding of how many people will be participating.



ADULT EDUCATION

Our Adult Education committee met this week and is excited about new possibilities for Bible and Book Studies for the Fall! We are putting our energy into finding things that will connect with our vibrant congregation, even if we are needing to do so remotely. So, stay tuned!



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Music News

During our time of physical distancing, music groups are keeping in touch with one another via email and phone calls.

A heartfelt THANK YOU to the musicians who have contributed to the recordings for our worship services during this unprecedented situation. We appreciate your time and the sharing of your gifts for the glory of God and the spiritual enrichment of our congregation. We miss making music together and look forward to whenever we are able to meet in person again. In the meantime, we encourage you to look through the wealth of musical resources now available online. Music is a universal language and one that the Spirit of God uses to speak to us and bring us God's peace. Keep the music playing, and keep singing along! Prayers for health and safety.

In Christ's love, *Maylis and Cheryl*

New Committee Members Wanted for the Fall

Over the summer we will be working to fill our slate of committees for the Fall and we wanted to extend an invitation for you to think about where God might be calling you to use your gifts.

Committees Include: Adult Education, Children's Ministry Team,
Finance and Stewardship, Endowment & Memorial Gifts,
Garden Club / Landscaping,
Membership & Congregational Events,
Outreach,
Staff Parish Relations,
Trustees, and Worship

Please contact the church office if you are interested in serving in one of these areas!

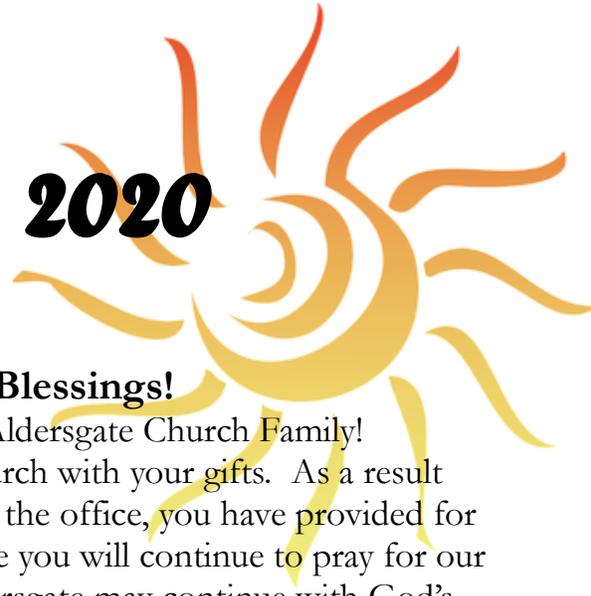
Celebrations and Appreciations!

Ice Cream Sandwich Thank Yous!

The July 4th Chelmsford Country Fair may have been cancelled this year, and with it, the Aldersgate booth, but thanks to those faithful bakers we kept the tradition alive of offering those yummy ice cream chocolate chip cookie sandwiches we sell at the fair! Pre-ordered regular and vegan options were available for curbside pickup at church this Friday. This year there were over 265 sold! Proceeds will go to support future youth mission trips. Thank you for helping us celebrate the Fourth in a safe and delicious way!



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Stewardship

Stewardship Update – Continued Blessings!

We continue to receive blessings from the faithful givers of our Aldersgate Church Family! We want to **thank** each of you for continuing to support our church with your gifts. As a result of **your generosity and faithfulness** in sending your pledges to the office, you have provided for our needs through June 30th - we are still in good shape! We hope you will continue to pray for our church family and fulfill your pledges as you are able so that Aldersgate may continue with God's Will for God's Work in God's Kingdom on earth. *"Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow!"*

Ways to Give

Many of you have asked how you can continue to give your tithes and offerings during this time. You may choose to mail your gift or use bill-pay to have a gift sent to the church. You may also drop off your offering in the outdoor mail slot located beside the front door to the lobby of the church. We continue to receive mail daily. Pastor Lisa will place those gifts in the offering plates she raises each week after the Doxology in our video worship services. God understands, and we are sensitive to the changes that have taken place in many people's financial situation. We are grateful for any way you are able to respond with your gifts during this time.

Extra Opportunities to Give

The first Sunday of June was "Peace with Justice Sunday" on our United Methodist calendar. It is one of our denominational Special Sundays which often includes receiving a special offering with envelopes in our pews. Although we are not meeting in person, we wanted to offer two opportunities for you to make an additional gift if you choose...

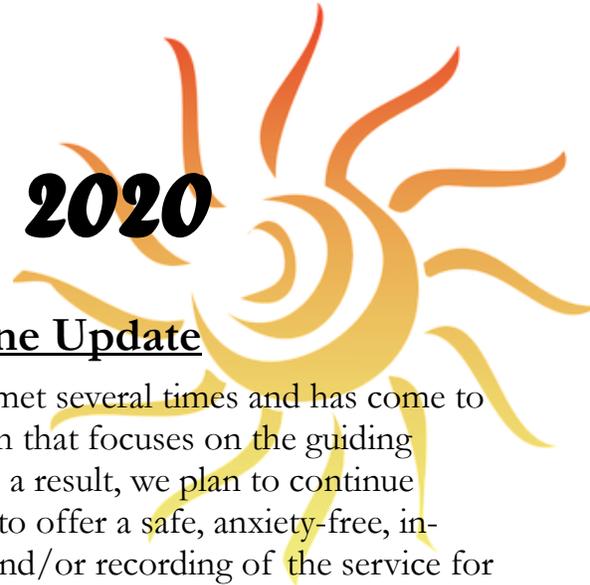
Our United Methodist denomination's General Board of Church and Society focuses on ministries of reconciliation in the United States and around the world. Areas of focus include: Civil and Human Rights, Economic and Environmental Justice, Health and Wholeness, Peace with Justice, and issues relating to Women and Children. You can learn more about their important work at www.umcjustice.org. (Mark your gift - Peace with Justice offering)

Our brothers and sisters in Nicaragua are experiencing the devastating effects of COVID-19. Pastor Santos' brother, Elias and his wife Castro, have both perished from the virus. In addition, many of the families at the school are finding it difficult to pay their tuition due to increased unemployment. They have had to lay off teachers and are facing difficulty paying the bills for their internet and facility needs as well. You are invited to make an additional love gift to the Sierra Maestra School to help meet their needs at this time. (Mark your gift - Nicaragua)

If you choose to give, we invite you to mark your gift clearly where you would like it to be shared. Thank you for your prayers and care for the people of God's world. May we live as people of peace and justice in our daily lives as well. In faith, *Pastor Lisa*



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Reopening Aldersgate Timeline Update

A team to discern when and how to hold in-person worship has met several times and has come to some preliminary conclusions. They developed a phased approach that focuses on the guiding principles of safety and inclusion for our entire church family. As a result, we plan to continue offering the current remote worship experience until we are able to offer a safe, anxiety-free, in-person experience coupled with the ability to view a live-stream and/or recording of the service for those not attending in-person. This plan was reached after much prayer, discernment, and conversations with many of you. This approach acknowledges the challenges with conducting in-person worship while the virus is still active in our community: (1) having only very limited attendance while maintaining safety protocols and (2) dealing with the stress on resources – both people and finances – needed to provide in-person worship, while most of the congregation cannot safely attend. A number of issues were identified. With no singing or spoken unison prayers, no hymnals, Bibles, or pew cushions in the pews, no social contact (e.g., Passing the Peace, greeting the pastor post-service), and other in-service changes, such as to the Children's Message and collecting the offering, the worship experience would be very different than pre-pandemic and poorer, we feel, than we currently experience at home. The number of volunteers needed to direct proper parking, greet you at the limited entry points to provide masks and guidance, escort you to and from your designated, socially distant pew, and perform deep cleaning between services would be comparable to the number of congregants at a service. Alternatives, including outdoor and "in-car" parking lot services were also considered, and discarded for similar reasons: very different worship experience, weather dependence, health concerns with idling cars, and others.

We all long deeply to be together again in worship and fellowship in person. The team believes worship and fellowship is still on-going, and that our energy and resources should remain on supporting our ministries and connectional relationship with each other and with Christ.

The phased approach focuses on a gradual opening of the church building itself, starting immediately with small groups being allowed to meet outdoors on the church grounds, with no restroom access, while maintaining safety protocols. Once it is deemed safe to do so and an adequate cleaning protocol is in place, small groups will be allowed to meet briefly indoors, provided masks are worn, and meetings are kept to less than 25 people. If you have an urgent business reason to enter the church, please follow the protocols posted at the entrance, for your health and the health of others. For both outdoor and indoor meetings, please notify the church office to schedule a time that avoids conflicts.

The team has created a survey to get your thoughts about the current worship experience, what you envision in-person worship to look like, and what you would need to be comfortable attending in person. Please look for that survey in your in-box or mail! We will share the results and use that feedback to create a long-term plan.



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Prayer List

At Aldersgate, we believe strongly in the power of Prayer. We are privileged to pray for your loved ones. Their names will remain on our prayer list for four weeks. If you would like to extend the time, please notify the Church Office at aldersgatehelmsford@verizon.net

Ongoing Prayers

- For the ongoing struggles in our country as we pray and work for racial justice
- For a cure or vaccine for COVID-19
- For those on the front lines giving medical care and support
- For people in decision-making positions
- For people who keep life running for all of us...pharmacists, grocery workers, store clerks, internet providers, postal workers, trash collectors, delivery people, teachers...
- For all those who have lost jobs or had hours reduced
- For all those who are working from home and caring for children
- For our sister church and school in Nicaragua
- For our church community and the world

Prayers for Healing

Those suffering from mental illness: depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, other psychoses

Sympathy to those who have lost loved ones

Our Military and Families