

First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA

May 6, 2026



PASTORAL MEDITATION by Reverend Thomas Hawkins

LOST AND FOUND

Each year, approximately 600,000 people are reported as lost in the United States, according to a recent article. Most are eventually found, usually within a brief period of time. Rescue response time has been improving since a researcher named Robert Koester published a search and rescue guidebook entitled “*Lost Person Behavior*.”

Koester, who curates a lost person data base of over 145,000 searches worldwide, has analyzed these search reports for patterns of behavior that can help search and rescue workers more quickly and successfully find lost persons. According to Koester, there are different patterns of behavior among different populations of lost persons. An elderly person suffering from Alzheimer’s Disease behaves differently than a child who has wandered off the path while exploring a forest behind his home. A four-year old child behaves differently when lost than does a teenager. And, of course, there are people who intentionally want to get lost, such as those who are seeking to hide from law enforcement officers. For example, Koester found that small children when lost usually wander in a random, erratic pattern, whereas an older adult with dementia typically walks toward the right or the left depending on which is their dominant hand.

Many of us can sympathize with getting lost. Maybe we have turned the wrong way in an unfamiliar city and lost our bearings. Perhaps we’ve been hiking in an out-of-the-way park and suddenly realized that we were no longer on the right trail.

There’s a familiar hymn that most of us know by heart. It includes the phrase, “I once was lost but now am found.” We usually resonate with Isaac Watts’ hymn, *Amazing Grace*, because we’ve all had the experience of losing our bearings at one time or another in our lives—spiritually, emotionally, or vocationally. One interesting aspect of Koester’s work is how people respond when lost. Most people do not panic. They respond most commonly with feelings of embarrassment and shame. If we’ve ever lost our way emotionally or vocationally or especially spiritually, we can understand that response.

Still more interesting is that most people who become lost don’t imagine anyone is looking for them. They therefore don’t try to make themselves visible or call out for help, even when they see a helicopter overhead. Similarly, most children who are lost won’t answer when they hear searchers calling their names. They have been taught by parents to avoid strangers. So, they are apt to hide from searchers even when they are frightened and lost. One recovered child told those interviewing him that he was afraid of those searching for him because he thought they were “monsters looking for him in the dark.”

Our biblical tradition repeatedly tells us that what matters most in our lives is that God is always searching for us. God’s constant searching for us ultimately matters more than whatever strategies we may be using to search for God or, I suppose, to hide ourselves from God. Scripture frequently tells us that our yearning for God is only an echo of God’s yearning for us. When we find ourselves searching for God, it is a sign that God has already found us whether we realize it yet or not.

As Psalm 139 says,

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. . . .

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and night wraps itself around me,”

even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you. (1-3, 8-12)

Even when we feel disoriented by life's unexpected experiences, there is One searching for us who is already acquainted with all our ways and whose right hand holds us fast.

Easteride blessings,
Pastor Thomas

SUNDAY WORSHIP in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

NOTE FROM YOUR MODERATOR: *The annual meeting is in less than 2 weeks!*

This year the First Congregational Church of East Longmeadow/UCC Annual Meeting will be held immediately after service in the sanctuary **on May 17**. The warrant to call the meeting with the details and agenda is posted. The first item will be to read and vote to accept the presented slate of officers and Board members that will be presented prior to the meeting in the annual report from church leadership. There will be a few changes, as is normal, to some of the Boards and committees so if you, as a member, feel like you want to engage with a particular board please reach out!

UPDATES for SPRING PLANT SALE

Hi Everyone,

The annual plant sale is this coming Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

This is just a reminder that we need your plants, shrubs, trees, tag sale items, jewelry, books, baked goods real soon. Please remember to label your plants and let folks know what color they are, if any. We would like to have everything by Friday morning, if at all possible. And remember that the church is open from 9:00 to 3:00 Monday through Thursday and to noon on Friday (though I suspect things will still be coming in on Friday afternoon).

Thank you so so much for your anticipated contributions, as always!

The Spring Plant Sale Committee

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Plant Sale/Tag Sale

We can't have a tag sale without stuff to sell. Please look around your garage, your shed, your basement, your closets(?) and donate any outside, garden, bird related items you no longer want and please leave on the stage in Butler Hall before this Saturday. We need STUFF! Thanks so much.

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Notice for Baked Items

Baked goods should be delivered to church on Friday after 2:00 p.m. or Saturday before 9:00 a.m. Thank you for your help in making this sale a success.

CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Blanket Sunday

When you place a few dollars in the envelope provided in your pew or mail a donation to the church... we share care beyond our own walls – helping families feel seen, supported and wrapped in compassion.

Making a donation provides warmth, comfort and hope to neighbors near and far. It provides a tangible reminder to migrant families that they are not alone as they seek safety. It wraps refugees in warmth as they arrive in the United States to build a new future. It provides comfort to our neighbors who have lost homes or are struggling in the face of extreme challenges. Around the world, your support means relief and hope.

Springfield YWCA - 5th largest in the country

The Springfield Y exists to fulfill its mission of eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. The Y provides safe places for women and children in crisis. It provides shelter, support services, and tools for self-sufficiency for women and girls in our community. It operates an 11-acre campus in Springfield that provides shelter to battered women and their children in a modern facility with state of the art computerized security.

When women and their children arrive having fled a dangerous situation in their homes, they arrive with nothing but the clothes on their backs. The Y provides them with a basket of necessary toiletries. We can help, we can offer our support. Please read carefully and donate any of the following items:

- Full size -NEW - soap, body wash, body moisturizer, mouthwash, toothbrushes and paste,
- ***shampoo and conditioner, etc. from brands: Shea Moisture, Pattern Beauty, Mielle, Camille Rose, Curl Mix, CURLS, The Doux, Miss Jessie's,
- feminine hygiene products,
- baby wipes & disposable diapers (especially large)
- coloring books and crayons,
- board games and cards
- GENTLY USED books for children, teens and adults

Please leave your donations in the breezeway until May 31. Thank you for your continued support of this truly life-saving agency right in our own back yard. We can really help out these families in crisis.

PRAYER

God of lilacs and bluebells: In these early days of May open our hearts to your hidden energies at work in every living thing; for all things live and move and have their being in you. May we have eyes to see and hearts to understand how you search us out, know our ways, and act on our behalf as well as what you call us to do on the behalf of neighbor and stranger. Amen.



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