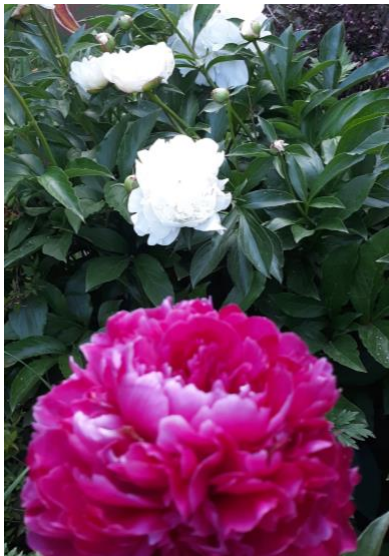


## Minister's Musings – June 2021

Reverend Karen G. Johnston



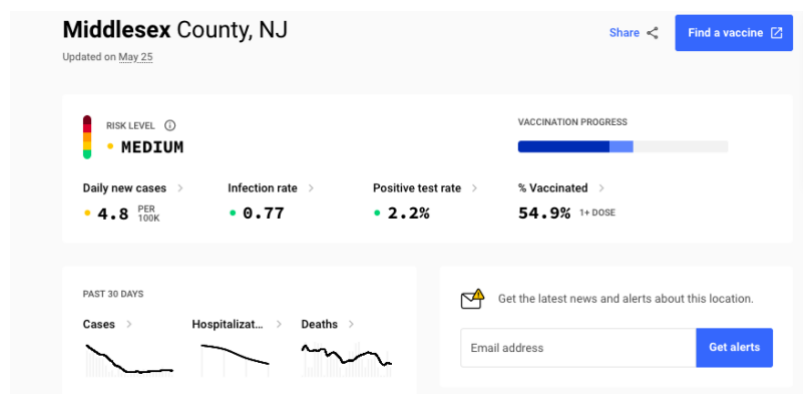
I've been back from three months of sabbatical for a month now. It's nearly June. The daffodils have come and gone. At the parsonage, the peonies have decided it's their turn.

And what a turn they take! So abundant and voluptuous! I love them. I can't bring them inside because their strong scent does not work well with my body. I don't have a visible allergic reaction but I taste them before I can see them, it does not seem as easy to breathe, and my mind gets foggier. So: enjoy from a distance is what I get to do.

As this pandemic continues, there are so many ways our bodies have taught us that we live in an interdependent universe. First it was that one person's breath could make someone else very, very sick. Then it was that each of us masking could take care of each other. For many of us, our nervous systems have moved up and down on the rollercoaster of pandemic spikes. Now we are learning how to (holy, slowly) come out of high-pandemic-space and move towards what I hear being called endemic space: a virus that can kill living among us, like the many other germs, bacteria, and bugs with which we make our co-existence.

Unless your medical provider has cautioned you against it, or you are under the age of 12, I hope that you have gotten your Covid-19 vaccination or have a date to do so. It is how we take care of ourselves...and how we take care of one another. As the guidance and mandates around masking changes in the state, we will probably always be on the cautious side of things – we do this out of a combination of our belief in science and our commitment to be as inclusive as possible, recognizing that not everyone has access to the vaccine.

I think the imprint on us of this pandemic is going to be with us for a long time to come – long after all the tracking indicators go green. There is a kind of trauma that we have been going through that is taking its toll. Sometimes in ways that are obvious. Sometimes in ways that aren't so easy to observe or realize.



For instance, there has been over a year in which we have been taught to keep our distance from people because of unintentional harm that might come of it. An existential message of

that kind sticks and stays with us, lodging in our lizard brain, which is a big part of our nervous system.

Whether we consciously recognize it or not, it's a kind of trauma. I've heard many stories – and experienced in myself – folks who are trying out activities that before the pandemic were normal and easy. For instance, eating inside a restaurant. Returning to such “normal” activities can bring nausea, anxiety, inability to eat, self-doubt, insomnia. As with any kind of trauma, it is a good idea to pay attention to it so that our healing is as wholesome as possible.

I just learned that some UU congregations, as they have waded into meeting in person again, have added (or plan to add) colored cards hanging from their name tags:

**Red means please stay 6 feet apart and no conversation**

**Yellow means conversation but still distant; ask about closer or how much chat**

**Green means talk and close are fine, ask about hugs**

I think that's kinda cool and perhaps something we should consider.

As we begin our own re-opening – the ReOpening Task Force announced at the May 16 Annual Meeting that we can meet outdoors in small groups – let's practice magnificent consent. This means honoring each other's choices around distance and asking explicitly about how to greet each other (handshake, elbow bump, wave at a distance) and celebrating each choice. Let's be gentle with ourselves and each other as we move and shift into these new spaces.

I am blessed to be on this journey with you ~ Rev. Karen