



The Spirit at First December 2016

Some ponderings.....

What a day! Last Sunday in worship we focused on social justice. The scriptures were Peter's post resurrection interaction with Jesus when he repeatedly commanded Peter to feed his sheep, Jesus's parable concerning the separation of the sheep and the goats in the kingdom when those who received God's eternal grace were the people who took care of the least among us, and finally Micah's prophetic image of achieving peace by nations beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. The music by both Finally at First and the Sanctuary Choir were perfect for the occasion and inspirational in the way their music echoed God's justice and our participation in bringing it to fruition. Devon Thomas and Gary Smiths' prayers were heartfelt and touched many in their maturity and depth of spirit.

However, the key aspect of the service was in its demand for our congregants to actually participate in some physical act of social justice. During the service, everyone was asked to choose a piece of paper taped on the surrounding walls that had action items printed on them and follow through with the written social justice assignment. What struck me during that time was the level of comfortable conversation that took place among folks. People read the options seriously and must have been talking to each other about them. Many folks took more than one and relished the chance to put their faith into action: a welcome relief after a difficult week of presidential politics.

Once worship ended, almost everyone moved downstairs and either made sandwiches to be delivered later in the day or compiled food baskets to be offered to JUMP for their clientele or placards to display immediately at 5 Corners. I planned the general parameters of the event and it was amazing to see how easily young and old rolled up their sleeves and got to work. There was no master plan as to who would supervise each project and who would do what, but everyone came together so naturally and easily and just made it happen. For the first time since the election, I witnessed folks elevated above their anxiety for the future.

In less than half an hour there were 59 lunch bags compiled, 50 large boxes of meals assembled for JUMP and a slew of placards with slogans of God's love and rule brandished in bright colors. Two teams delivered the meals to *Steps to End Domestic Violence*, *Turning Point*, *COTS Daystation* and a group of homeless men and women who were simply hanging out on the street. Each person and group that received was incredibly grateful. All of us who delivered the meals received way more than we gave and returned with our spirits soaring. I was also amazed at the positive response our placards received at 5 Corners and how all those returning expressed such positive energy and jubilation.

This election has exposed a darker and more divided nation than what I knew existed. People fed up with and invisible to the intellectual elites as well as those outraged and mortally discouraged by the tone of division, hatred and xenophobia all suffered during this election. Families are deeply divided. Both political parties are in shambles. The world has changed and no one seems to have a clear picture of the future. Fear,

anxiety and apathy seem to greet us each day and remind us of our total lack of control. Many feel as if we are on some brink.....

And yet....when we gathered together to follow Christ's call to engage in social justice and to live out God's call to love - the shadow lifted. When people who surely voted for different candidates joined together, good surfaced in tangible ways. When we put faith into action, then joy, peace and an exuberance for life resulted. Working to usher in God's reign of justice and love is our calling after such an election. It was of course our calling before it as well. And in ten years or fifty as we adjust to a new world, then it will continue to be our urgent response to God's invitation to relationship. I do not know what the future will be like, but I do know that I will be working to create a peaceable kingdom where all God's children are precious.

Let me end this longer than usual pondering by sharing a story that came to me this week from a grandmother who lives with her extended family. The family was all gathered around the dining room table after a meal commiserating about the results of the election and wondering about the future. After a bit of this, her five year old grandson spoke up and said, "Gees, why are you worrying so much, don't you know God's in charge, everything will be fine." Although thousands of theologians and civic leaders use more words and arguments than this, it boils down to the same thing.

May we believe it and keep working with God on building a better world. Ever more committed to this sacred task, I am

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Mark

SPECIAL SUNDAYS & OFFERINGS

Communion at both services will be served on Dec 4th by bringing the elements to the congregation

December 11th ~ Friendship Sunday

On the second Sunday of each month, we will have a particular focus of faith that we live into in some unique ways. In October we honored Peace, in November we focused on Social Justice and in December we will focus on Friendship. We encourage everyone to bring a friend to both services on December 11th.

December 11th ~ A Quiet Service for Healing

During this Christmas season, we should remember that the Christ child brought healing to the world. His love overwhelmed people and principalities and brought them into contact with the most powerful force in the universe: love. Throughout his ministry, Jesus's healing touch brought sight, wholeness, freedom from disease and hope to people who had been downtrodden, broken and lost. Everyone is invited to bring their wounds and anguish to church on Sunday night December 11th for a healing service. Reverend Mark and

Devon along with the Deacons will offer specific prayers and offer the laying on of hands for anyone that wants to ask for God's healing. The service will take place on December 11th at 7:00 p.m. All are welcome.

December 18th ~ Christmas Pageant

How can there be Christmas without the annual Christmas Pageant at church where our children present the age old message to a world in dire need of a new perspective and some pure unadulterated joy. This year, we will observe this traditional rite on Sunday Dec. 8th at both services. If you invited a friend for Friendship Sunday, call them back up because this will surely be another service a guest would enjoy.

Christmas Eve Services

Family Service @ 5pm

Prepare yourself for a service of stories told by historical characters [our staff in costume and character!] that were present at the Christmas saga. Along with the stories, we will sing the great old carols and of course light our candles. Be sure to come and celebrate this ancient ritual of the church as we usher in one of the most sacred nights in our Christian tradition. The family service will take place at 5pm on Dec 24th. This is also a great time to invite a family with young children that have no church home.

Lessons and Carols @ 9pm

The Service of Lessons and Carols is perhaps the most traditional of Christmas Eve services. Our many choirs will offer their musical treasures both before and during the service. We will all sing plenty of carols and listen to the ancient story that still plants hope into our hearts and love into our community. The story resonates from decades of hearing it like an old friend coming to tea. Warmth enters our Christmas hearts as we remember loved ones no longer present that once stood next to us singing great old hymns of joy. And we of course pray for a light snow as we sing Silent Night and light the Christ Candle. Come and participate in this ancient ritual of the church.

A Service of Carols & Communion @ 11:00pm

As Christmas nears and the hustle of shopping is over, a sacred quietness covers the landscape for a few late evening hours, then one can reflect on the meaning of Christ's birth and how our world, families and selves have been molded and influenced by an event of legend. First Church offers a quieter service where reflection, recollection and a shared meal can restore one's soul and offer solace. Led by the beautiful music of Finally at First, we will sing some of the carols and light our candles from the Christ candle as close to midnight as possible. Come and partake of this ancient rite of the Christian Church. Come and settle into the spirit of Christmas. Come and center yourselves on the very presence of God.

Sunday, Christmas Day, December 25th

Rev. Mark proposed and the Deacons agreed that worship will be on Sunday at 3:00 pm on Christmas Day, instead of earlier in the morning. This will allow families to enjoy Christmas morning with family and still come to church to praise God for the inbreaking of Christ into our world so long ago. The service will be more informal so dress comfortably. We will share *the* story and explore how Christ's birth impacts our lives. We will sing great carols and the service will be family friendly.



Laurie's Lens

As I write this final plans are being made for our luncheon after church this Sunday, November 20th, and our Advent Event & Decorating that our Deacons and CE are planning. There will be a time of great fellowship as we begin our time with lunch from 11:30-12noon and then move on to make a nativity set or helping to decorate the Sanctuary for Advent and Christmas. There will also be Advent devotionals for you to collect and take with you...ones for adults, for young adults and youth, for children and families...something for everyone. Let these devotions help us to take a little time each day and set aside time to be with our God. Time to listen and time to pray as we prepare ourselves for the coming of God's son who came so long ago on that first Christmas. The children will be putting together a manager and then adding a sticker to it each day of Advent from their little book that goes along with it...counting down the days until Jesus is born. There are also Advent calendars that give you suggestions of something to do as a family as you anticipate the birth of Christ. I pray that that these devotions will help you with your spiritual time...so I encourage you to find a place in your home that allows you to be close with God ... maybe it's the place you feel the closest to God while in your home. Use your devotions in this place... as a place for just you to do your devotion and connect with God or as a family all gathered together. Spend some time being still and listening for the breath of God as you breathe in and out ... allowing your physical body to relax and be comfortable, let the busy thoughts and worries fade away. You decide whether your devotional is at the beginning of your time or at the end of your time.

Advent is the beginning of the church calendar year and this year it begins on the first Sunday of Advent, November 27th. On this day the children and youth will be together for our Multi-Age Activity Day and will build community in Christian love and fellowship as we connect with our spirituality and work on silence, breathing, body and thoughts. We are looking for adult helpers to be with us and to help us be more intergenerational. We hope to have a labyrinth set up in the building and will invite everyone to take a few moments and experience walking a labyrinth with a quiet space. The multi-age activity will focus on the many ways we are thankful. We will begin all together and then we break off into smaller groups as we share and grow together in our faith community. Join us! Youth, young adults and older members. Come be a mentor and share what you are thankful for with each other in a group and with our God.

Another fun part of Advent is our Christmas pageant that offers many ways for everyone to be involved. I look forward to seeing and catching up with all our youth during rehearsals this season. Oh Advent ... let us feel the hope, peace, joy and love that you bring to us and make us more aware of this season and throughout the year.

Blessed to be with you in ministry!

Laurie

Christian Education Director

ASSOCIATE MINISTER THOUGHTS

Halloween has come and gone, and with it the season where we honor all the saints who live, have lived and have yet to live. We are all God's saints, we all have a divine spark that God has embedded in us, which gives us the capacity to do good. Christ appeals to that goodness within us. Christ compels us to look toward the horizon and dream of a world where everyone can be a winner and live in peace.

I am aware that many of us are feeling a great disturbance due to the recent elections. First Church Essex is a community that proudly lifts up people who have different upbringings, cultures and politics. We have just been through a divisive election and we now are in a place where we must come together, mend wounds and recognize, whether our candidate won or lost, that those issues are secondary to the importance of our holy family here at First Church Essex. I know that in the future we are going to be called as God's saints to be the prophetic voice in this community. Together we must look to those who are suffering, those who are ill, those who are homeless, and those who are hungry. In our local community we are seen as a congregation that feeds, clothes and heals. We are seen as a people who will never turn another person away from God's table. So I will continue to pray that we can be that for our congregation here at First Church Essex, for the local community of Essex Junction, for Vermont and for our nation.

Last month was a month full of Halloween activities. Our youth spent an evening at Mazza's Corn Maze, the pictures of which are on Facebook. The next big events for the Jr. and Sr. High youth groups will be the pie baking overnight and the Christmas Pageant, which we are preparing for as I write this letter. As always, we are in need of parent volunteers and parents who are willing to sign up to provide snacks and dinners.

At Table met in October and discussed the Gospel of Mark. We had a good discussion. I would also like to again invite everyone in the congregation to join us for the At Table potluck. It is one of the best ways I know of to provide a space for those of us with busy schedules to meet and engage each other as a faith community outside of service. Again, it is groups like At Table, Wednesday Night Searchers and Sermon Talk Back that provide opportunities to engage in the life of this church that few other congregations offer.

Our congregation here in Essex is unique in that we don't just want you to show up at service and donate money. We also want to interact with you, getting to know your thoughts and ideas and faith. I welcome and challenge all of you reading this to find a way to get involved in our community, be it through our adult education meetings, or through our mission activities such as Essex Eats Out, the Food Pantry, or the Thrift Shop, or by serving on a committee. It is always a blessing when someone new comes to engage and participate with us as we continue our ongoing spiritual journey. God bless you all and God be with us and this nation.

Devon Lee Thomas: Bridge Associate Minister

DEACON'S CORNER

The Christmas season is upon us! The Sanctuary is decorated with boughs and bows, the Advent wreaths are out, and Christmas carols are heard everywhere you go. Through all the clamor and lights, though, there is an underlying angst this season. The recent presidential election has been followed by a spike in xenophobic and racist acts. There is serious talk of deportations, and significant limits on refugees coming into this country. This stands in direct opposition to what we believe here at FCCEJ – that all are welcome, and all are children in the eyes of God. We are reminded that we are celebrating the birth of the Son of God as a vulnerable infant to refugee parents who could not find a place to stay. This Christmas season, let us all work to spread the light of Christ's birth to all those around us, both near and far.

To that end, December 11th will be Friendship Sunday, where folks will be encouraged to bring a friend to service. A number of activities are planned to allow us to explore and enhance our current friendships as well as making some new friends. On December 18th we'll be blessed with our annual Christmas Pageant at both services, as the youth of FCCEJ bring the story of Christmas alive again!

As we look to our Christmas services, we are excited to again offer three very different types of services. At 5:00pm, we'll have our Family Christmas service, where pastors and staff will be in costume. We never know what they'll be dressed as, but we guarantee that it will be a Christmas service like no other! At 9:00pm, we'll enjoy the music of our Sanctuary Choir and Bells as we celebrate the season with traditional Lessons and Carols. Both of these services can be quite full, with overflow seating available downstairs in the Fellowship Hall, so you'll want to come early to get a seat! At 11:00pm, we'll have our Communion Christmas service with music and carols by Finally @ First. This service is a little quieter and more contemplative, celebrating the peace and joy of Christmas.

As your Deacons, we wish you all a blessed and holy Christmas season!

MUSIC



Just around the bend is Thanksgiving, then Advent, and then Christmas! It's hard to believe the holidays will soon be upon us. But the choirs here at First Church have all your music covered.

Starting on November 27th, we will begin our Advent music. Some wonderful new pieces by Pepper Choplin.

The Festival of Choirs will take place on Saturday, December 3rd at 6:00 at the Mormon Church in Essex. Four of our choirs will participate and it is always a lovely evening of music. Please plan to join us, it's so nice to look out at the crowd and see so many familiar faces.

Continuing on, December 18th brings the Christmas pageant to both church services. Christmas Eve gives three services. Ed Guild will provide the music for the 5:00 service, The Sanctuary Choir, MAF and Heavenly Harmony will sing for you at the 9:00 service and F@F will play and sing at the 11:00 service.

So many wonderful things to look forward to.....Catherine

CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

November 20th ~ Family Advent Event & Decorating

Join us for wonderful time of great fellowship after our second service on this special Sunday. The Deacons and CE are teaming up to bring two fun events together. Both activities will happen after we enjoy a lunch together in Fellowship Hall. This event is fun for all ages! You can end up with a nativity set that you can keep adding on to for your kids, grandkids, or pass it along as a great gift. Each year's set of figures is listed below. Sign up for the set you would like to make. If this is your first year attending, sign up for year 1 so you leave with the basic nativity of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. If this is your second year or more attending this event, sign up for the numbered year you wish to make. We'll have Christmas music playing, and folks can also go upstairs to decorate the Sanctuary. Come and prepare yourselves for the coming of God's precious son, Jesus, and enjoy a great time of fellowship with other First Church families. Year 1 ~ Mary, Joseph & Baby Jesus, Year 2 ~ Angel, Donkey & Sheep, Year 3 ~ King, cow, Shepherd, Year 4 ~ 2 Kings & a sheep, Year 5 ~ 3 camels



Cherub
Choir

Music Time During Faith Formation

Cherubs ~ Our Preschool & Kindergarteners gathering in the youth lounge with the junior and senior high youth as their mentors to sing a song during the first few minutes before moving on to their class. Kim Hamilton is their music leader.

Juniors ~ Our 1st through 6th graders gather in the Marvin Lounge for their music time of songs with motions before moving onto class time. Jessica Moos is their music leader.



Faith Formation Sunday School Calendar

Preschool – 6th Grade

November 27th ~ Multi – Age Activity Day

December 4th ~ Holy Communion Sunday ~ Spiritual Friends

December 11th ~ Faith Formation Class time *Join us in the Sanctuary directly after class time from 11:30am – 12 noon. Our Christmas pageant needs more Angels, Sheep, Shepherds and Magi. 5th & 6th graders are encouraged to stay for the full practice today and practice their parts.*

December 18th ~ All in worship for the Christmas Pageant for both services

December 25th ~ Intergenerational 3pm worship

January 1st ~ Holy Communion Sunday ~ Spiritual Friends

Lego Curriculum Coming Soon!

Looking for Lego donations for a couple of our Sunday School Faith Formation classes. If you have Legos that you are willing to part with, please be in touch with Laurie. Thank you!



Junior Youth @ FCCEJ

December 4th ~ 11:30-1:30pm ~ Mission Focus ~ Decorating & Filling goodie bags for our Giving Tree Children. *This Youth Group meets ONCE a month at this same time.*





Faith Formation Sunday School Offering 2016

Your 2016 offering is going to... **King Street Center** **Total is now up to \$ 714.64**

Continue to remember to bring your Sunday School offering each week and use an envelope in the pews for your money so that you know it will be put towards the Sunday School offering and not be confused with regular offering for the church. \$1 a week can go a long way!

December is the last month that our offering will be going to King Street Center.

Fellowship & Refreshments in the Gym on Classroom Sundays



We invite parents to make their way slowly to the Gym after our second service and enjoy refreshments and fellowship time before picking up your child(ren) at 11:30am, when class time is over. We would love food donations and they can be dropped off on the 'Gym refreshments' marked trays on the counter in the main kitchen as you walk up to worship. **December 11th** ~ Faith Formation Class time

Classroom Helpers Sign ups sheets are in the Gym on the green table for parents and volunteers to help us meet our Safe Conduct two volunteers for each classroom. You can sign up by connect with Laurie anytime. Family Registration Forms continue to be available in the Narthex, in the Gym on class time Sundays and in Fellowship Hall outside our Nursery. We welcome new families among us and encourage them to fill out a form as well so we can add them to our communications. Forms can be placed in the basket outside the Nursery, handed to Laurie or a classroom leader.

***All our First Church Youth Programs are parent supported!
1 to 3 parents/volunteers are needed at every youth group gathering!***



Bulletin boards with Youth Group information can be found in the lower staff hallway. *Sign up to volunteer, drive for outings and/or bring a meal. All youth, parents and volunteers ~ see a staff person to update and fill out paper work for your youth and yourselves to help out. We do conduct a background check for people working with our youth, so come on in and fill out the paperwork.*

Please mark your calendars for our upcoming events!



Faith Formation Sunday School Calendar

7th – 12th Grade

November 27th ~ Faith Formation Class time

December 4th ~ Youth Usher & Greet in Worship

December 11th ~ Faith Formation Class time

December 18th ~ Pageant Sunday

December 25th ~ Intergenerational 3pm worship

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/51999696273/>

dthomas@fccej.org

egarvey@fccej.org



Christmas Pageant Rehearsals

The Junior and Senior High will both be meeting together for all pageant rehearsals. We will start by reading through the pageant on November 27th from 5pm to 7pm and parts will be decided on. Please mark your calendars and come join Laurie, Devon & Erika for a fun evening. If you can't make November 27th, please let us know ahead of time if you want a speaking part or something different. Rehearsal times are listed below and we are in need of adult helpers to assist the youth with costumes and set for all rehearsals and on pageant Sunday. We are looking for snacks for all pageant rehearsals as well as adult helpers. Please see the sign up sheets for those are outside of Erica and Devon's office.

November 27th & December 4th – 5 to 7pm

December 11th – 11:30 – 2:00pm (preschool – 4th graders encouraged to stay & practice their parts from 11:30 – 12noon. 5th & 6th grades are asked to stay until 1pm)

Saturday, December 17th – TBA dress rehearsal

December 18th – arrive at 7:45am for the Christmas Pageant presentation at both our worship services

Acolytes



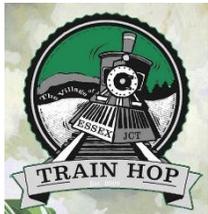
Acolytes are those who carry the taper and bring the light of Christ into the Sanctuary at the beginning of worship to remind us that God is with us. Acolytes also will carry the light out at the end of worship to remind us that God continues to be with us wherever we go. This is a great way for you to participate in worship. You can acolyte solo or with another friend or parent. Check the sign up calendar on the bulletin board as you walk up to worship and sign up for a future day also.

Ring the Bell

All children and their families are welcome to sign up and ring the church bell 15 minutes before worship begins, at either 8:15am or 10am. Check the sign up calendar on the bulletin board in the downstairs hallway by the Acolyte signup sheet. On the signup sheet it will tell you which rope to pull and how many times to ring the bell.



SAVE THE DATES



FCCEJ is a Stop on the Essex Junction Train Hop

December 9th from 6-8pm

Each year the village of Essex Junction celebrates the holiday season by having local businesses and civic organizations create stops for families to enjoy the festivities and get out for a night of fun. And what joy to know that our church will be an active participant in the town's festivals. We will have our own stop and open our doors to the wider community. We will have Thomas the Tank engine train tables set up, train movies to watch and crafts for everyone. We are looking for people who would like to be greeters at the door and others to help to assist the kids. See Laurie or Pastor Mark if you can help. This will be a fun evening of opening our doors and greeting our neighbors.



Cabin Fever Calcutta

Save the date of March 11, 2017 for the 3rd annual Cabin Fever Calcutta. Early Bird tickets will be available between December 15th and January 15th. Those who renew ball numbers before January 15th will be entered into an Early Bird drawing for a \$100 prize.

Vacation Bible Camp 2017

August 7-11

Hero Central: *Discover Youth Strength in God!*

Monday – Friday from 9am to 11:45am

Station leaders, group leaders, youth assistants and snack servers . . . VB Camp is a week of energy and excitement seeing God’s Love in Action! If you have not experienced the church coming alive during camp week, plan to stop by and join us!

Groups: You & Me (toddler & parent/grandparent), Preschool (three & fours - potty trained) Kindergarten & First Grade, Second & Third Grade, Fourth & Fifth Grade

Stations: Discovery, Bible Story, Crafts, Music/Snack, Games

Youth Assistants: Sixth Grade and up

College Students & Adults: Group & Station Leaders



Summer Outdoor Ministry Camps for 2017-Vermont UCC

The Vermont UCC Outdoor Ministry Team is targeting one week of summer camp program for Vermont UCC kids and youth and encouraging all to visit the Horton Center, Gorham, NH website www.hortoncenter.org and at Silver Lake in Sharon, CT website <http://www.silverlakeect.org/>

We are recruiting volunteer counselors for this camp! See Laurie for more info.

To registration for this camp go to Horton Center website.

July 30–August 4 ~ at Rock Point Camp in Burlington, VT

Horton Center will be sending two staff and VT is gathering additional staff to lead this week for those kids going into 5th - 8th grade.

Noontime Book Group

The Noontime Book Group will meet on **December 15th** at 12:00 at the home of Joanne Irwin. We will each choose a Christmas or holiday themed short story to share. There are multiple lists of Christmas short stories on the internet. Often if you click on the title of a story, it will take you to the text of the story. A quick Google search will give you many choices. Here are a few lists I found: americanliterature.com/christmas www.wanttoknow.info/christmas-stories www.mysterynet.com/Christmas/mysteries Goodreads: [Christmas Short Stories](#) [Christmas Stories from All the Year Round and Household Words](#) by Charles Dickens a collection of Christmas tales, but does not include "A Christmas Carol" This is a lunch meeting, so please plan to bring something to share. This might also be a good time to bring a feminine hygiene item for JUMP if you would like to.



Coffee Fellowship

Pastor's Coffee & Discussion Group

Join the Pastors, every Friday morning at 8:00am @ Martone's
Come on over and have coffee and a treat with Mark & Devon to ask all those questions you never get a chance to ask during worship or Sermon Talk Back!

First Church Bridge Club

On the third Friday of every month from 1:30 to 4:00 pm, a group of anywhere from 8-16 people come together to play some bridge. It is a friendly game with various skill levels. We come to just have some fun and play a game we all love. There are snacks and a prized "Pastor's Pick Jam" given away to the winner each month. This is a good activity to bring a friend. During the month of December we are meeting on **Friday, Dec. 16th**.



Women's Spirituality Group

The Women's Spirituality Group will meet in Marvin Lounge at 9:30 am on the third Saturday of each month. All women of the church are invited to join us for interesting programs and wonderful fellowship. For any of the trips away from the church we will meet at church and carpool to the sites. **Saturday, December 17:** Come and join us at Elaine Helmstutler's home, 12 Pleasant Street for Christmas brunch. Share a favorite dish and a meaningful Christmas memory. Note the time change to **10AM**.



Ladies Crafting Night Out

Do you knit, crochet or do any other crafty projects that you would like to do in fellowship with others? Join us in the Marvin Lounge the 4th Monday of each month at 7pm, **December 26th** this month, for a time of common crafting. All are welcome!

Mondays -Yoga Classes are Going STRONG!

Summer classes were such a hit that Jonah Moos will be continuing a beginning Yoga class but has switched to Mondays, from 5:30-6:45pm in the Fellowship Hall. Jonah is a professor at St. Michael's College and a member here at FCCEJ and he is taking a teacher training course in Yoga and would like to share his skills with you. Join us!



“At Table” Potluck

This September, First Church Essex Junction piloted a new education group. This group is a bible study over dinner. It will be potluck format and we will meet and gather to talk about a biblical text you all are interested in. So it is a night where you don't need to cook up a full meal, you can meet with other members of the church in a family friendly environment where you can also explore and build up your own spirituality.



Our next meeting will be Wednesday, December 28th from 5:45-7pm. It is our hope that this At Table will address two needs of the church. One, to offer programming to members of the church who are working and do not have the time to make it to an early morning Sermon Talkback or a late night Wednesday Night Searchers. And two, it is our hope that through this dinner we can give our congregation here at FCCEJ an opportunity to engage with the bible and build an understanding of it and its history which you can then work into your own theology of God. This will be an event for all ages and we plan to include activities for children, youth and adults. So, in essence, teach a person to fish so that they may gather spiritual food for a lifetime.

Tuesday Morning Sermon Talkbacks, 8:30 – 10am

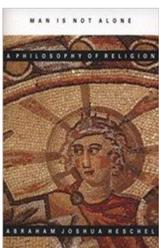
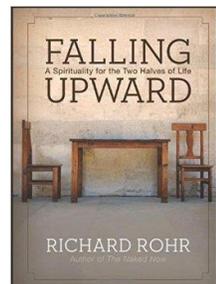
Each Tuesday morning 15-20+ people meet over coffee and goodies to discuss what went on that week in worship. We expand upon the sermon and explore the things that preaching just cannot get at in twenty minutes. We explore any and every subject that might properly come forward -although we try to leave politics out of it!. We laugh, challenge, eat, share our stories and support one another in our life journeys. It is a good group that you would be very welcome to attend.



Wednesday Night Searchers, 7-9pm in Marvin Lounge

November 9th – December 14th: “Falling Upward: the Two Halves of Life”

For six weeks we will discuss Richard Rohr's book, *Falling Upward: the Two Halves of Life*. Richard Rohr is a Franciscan priest who takes us on a journey from establishing our identity and life and all that entails to one of maturity and depth that we claim in later life as we understand our life's challenges, failures and the broader movement toward wider horizons and spiritual understanding. Exploring these aspects of life will be well worth the six week investment! Come and bring a friend.



After December 14th we will not meet again until January 4th, when we will be resuming after the holidays with our Dinner and Movie Night Out and then moving on to our next book, “Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion” by Abraham Joshua Heschel from January 11th – February 15th. We have the books available in the office if you would like to pick one up and get an early jump on the reading.

MISSIONS MOMENT & OPPORTUNITIES

Missions Moment

The Missions Committee has donated money again this past month to two organizations:

1. The UCC Disaster Ministries Emergency USA for flood relief in North Carolina as a result of Hurricane Matthew.
2. RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network). RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization and was named one of "America's 100 Best Charities" by Worth Magazine. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline in partnership with more than 1000 local sexual assault service providers across the country and operates the DoD Safe Helpline for the Department of Defense. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help victims, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. *

Their hotline number is 800-655-HOPE and their website is www.rainn.org

*Taken from www.rainn.org/about-rainn

Your Missions Committee wishes everyone a very Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving.

Got Coats?



Winter Clothing Drive for Food Pantry Clients

Mission Possible thanks everyone who donated coats and other warm clothing to our Winter Drive. Everyone was very thankful for all the new coats! Please check back in the 'FCCEJ By The Numbers' section next month to see how many coats were donated!



Jamaica Mission Team 2017

In July 2017, just nine months from now, an intergenerational team from FCCEJ will be embarking on a ten day Mission Trip to Golden Grove, Jamaica, West Indies. To support this mission, the team conducts two major fundraisers. The first is a Stock Sale that will occur during November and December, and the second is the Cabin Fever Calcutta on March 11, 2017.

The Jamaica Bound Team is selling Stock in support of the July 2017 mission trip. Anyone purchasing Stock will be invited to a luncheon of delicious Jamaica food when the team will discuss their experiences on this trip. Stock shares can be purchased from any team member and will be available in Fellowship Hall until Christmas after both services at a cost of \$25 per share. Team members are Betsy Weischedel, Cameron Starkey, Carolyn Rushford, Christine Czarny, David Dewey, Mark Mendes, Meaghan Frank, Nicole Frank, Sharon Dettenrieder and Zack LeClair.

Thank you for your support!



Mission Possible!

Reach out... Make a difference... Connect with others... Learn something new
“Mission Possible!” is the joint committee (Missions and Christian Education) that plans opportunities for people to put their faith in action. Our goal is to provide hands-on volunteer experiences for all ages, to bring members of our congregation together for mission outreach, and to connect service to learning – about different populations and community needs, and about the many nonprofit organizations that are there to help. For more information about Mission Possible! and how to be part of the planning team or to volunteer, please contact Andrea Sharp at andrea.sharp@gmail.com.

Dismas House

Please consider serving dinner at the Winooski Dismas House. Our volunteers provide dinner for 10-15 residents and staff there, enjoying great food and fellowship. FCCEJ has signed up for the fourth Wednesday in each month on an ongoing basis; **we are looking for volunteers for December 28th**. Please contact Dan Fortier (danny.fortier@gmail.com) or Peter Schmalz (pnschmalz@comcast.net) if interested. There is also a sign-up sheet in the hallway entering Fellowship Hall. The Dismas House organization describes its purpose as follows: “We continue our mission of reconciling prisoners with society and society with prisoners. With your continued support, we are working locally to serve former prisoners in their difficult transition from prison to the community, assuring harmony in their lives and greater public safety.” We need four (4) people to volunteer for each date (space is limited so that the residents and guests have a meaningful dinner experience. Our FCCEJ group will decide the menu to feed 16-20 people (which includes the FCCEJ cooks), and then purchase and prepare the food (typically includes the main course as well as vegetables or salad – dessert is optional). The Dismas House provides beverages, condiments, set-up and clean-up. There is no age limit on who can volunteer, and you can donate part of the meal even if you are not able to attend. Many people from our community have volunteered and it is a fun, rewarding mission!



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



Heavenly Food Pantry Needs Donations

We are in need of regular size jars of jelly and/or jam, cans of tuna fish, boxes of cereal and containers of fruit juice to restock our Food Pantry shelves. The December Food Pantry is on **Thursday, December 15th** from 2-6pm. The Monday evening Food Pantry will start on January 9th from 5:30-7:30pm and will be the second Monday of every month from there forward.



The Giving Tree

The Giving Tree is here! Perhaps you noticed the Christmas tree that is set up in the narthex. It holds tags for approximately 50 children in Essex Junction and Essex Town. The tags identify a gift for a child and for each child there are three tags. Two of the tags ask for gifts of clothing that the child needs and the third tag asks for a book, game, toy or gift card for the child. Please consider taking a tag or two to bring a smile and some Christmas cheer to a local youngster. If you do take a tag, be sure to sign your name on the sheet by the tree identifying the tag number(s) that you have taken. Wrapped gifts with the tags securely attached need to be returned to the church no later than Dec. 12. We will be distributing the gifts on Dec. 16. Families that we help have expressed how much they appreciate the gifts we give their children and the joy that abounds on Christmas Day.

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop Needs You!

The Thrift Shop is looking for people interested in helping out. If you are available for daytime hours on Tuesdays and Wednesdays or afternoon/evening hours on Thursdays for a two-three hour shift and if you enjoy meeting people and sorting and selling clothing, the shop could use your help! They are also looking for people who can help in the area of finance/bookkeeping, scheduling and communication/social media. If any of these areas interest you and you want to help out, give the church office a call. There is a lot of talent in the congregation, and this is a great way to use that talent to help a mission of the Church!



Volunteer & Support our Faith Formation Programs

Your continued support to our Faith Formation programs is greatly appreciated! If you have been with us for 6 months or more we encourage you to pray about being involved in one of the below ways and get to know our children and youth here at First Church and help them on their faith journey, as well as yours.

Please be in touch with Laurie.

Class Leaders & Helpers *Be a part of a team that helps to lead a class or be a set of extra helping hands during class. Laurie sends out weekly emails with curriculum lesson and outline. All classes need 2 volunteers each Sunday to help fulfil our Safe Conduct Guidelines.*

First Sundays Spiritual Friends *Help bridge the generations in our large church family and be a Spiritual Friend and join the Preschool up through 4th graders after Children's Message on the 2nd floor for a time of sharing with Faith Talks.*

Multi-Age Activity Sundays *Volunteer to help when all the ages come together to build community and enjoy a time of fellowship.*

Youth Group Volunteers *Be a helper and attend the Junior Youth, JH or SH Youth group gatherings. You can also sign up and provide a meal for them.*

Nursery Volunteers for 2nd Service *Be a friendly face to welcome our littlest among us and their parents as you spend time with them and get to know them in our Nursery.*

Our Nursery



We are seeking a Nursery staff person for our 8:30am and 10:15am worship services. If you know of someone who is interested in the position (8:15 to 11:45am) or is willing to be a backup sub in the Nursery staff person when they are away or sick, please be in touch with Pastor Mark or Laurie. Our Nursery is one of the first places that our little ones feel the love of God and learn that the church is a safe place to be. We also are looking for volunteers to help during our 10:15am service as we could have many little ones in the Nursery during this service.

OUR CHURCH FAMILY



December Birthdays

4th Judy Larrabee 5th Anita Guild 6th Irving Bartlett, Graeme Hutcheon, Joanne Irwin 7th Tom Helmstutler 8th Russ Kinaman 9th Andrea Taatjes 10th Alex Poratti, Morgan Rivers, Mary Winslow 11th Pete Firkey, Wayne Richards 12th Tom Frank, Shirley Kent 13th Kate Field 14th Deb Holland, Bill Lounsbury, Emma Parker, Hannah Waligory 15th Brian Hoffman, Zachary Schmalz, Heidi Smith 16th Munroe Shearer 18th Wyatt Bessett-Mauger, Elizabeth Birmingham, Paige Mittl 19th Monica John 20th Rebecca Frank, Sheldon Frank, LindaLou Parker 21st David Dewey 22nd Donna Ehler-Vock 25th Fletch Coolidge, Terry Stein 27th Ben Gilliam, Alice Williams 28th Kaelani Lyn Perkins 29th Bill Adams, Christine Czarny, Elijah Palmer 30th Kurt Tallman 31st Angela Abakah, Carley Goedken, Samantha Poratti

Christmas Poinsettias



Order your poinsettias for Christmas services in memory or honor of a loved one or special event. They will be the same as last year, \$12.95 and come in red, white, pink and a marbled variety. Let Jen know your preferences and your dedication will be remembered in all of the Christmas bulletins.

FCCEJ By The Numbers

\$4495 amount we have made for FCCEJ from the Hannaford program
10 amazing volunteers we have going to minister to the people of Jamaica!
\$6953.15 money raised thus far from the Craft Fest
\$1123.30 TD Bank Affinity Program contribution to FCCEJ



AP Search Committee

In the next few months we will be needing your input to help us in our work of updating our church profile. Watch for questions from us! The members of the committee are Laurie Chipman, Lisa Clark, Eva Cunningham-Firkey, Laura Cunningham-Firkey, Myrna Doney, Marlene Frank, Nicole Frank, Carl Houghton, Joanne Irwin, Mark Mendes [ex officio], and Josh Sharp

First Congregational Church of EJ
1 CHURCH STREET
ESSEX JCT, VT 05452
Phone: 802-878-5745
Fax: 802-872-8236
Email: welcome@fccej.org
www.fccej.org

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
BURLINGTON, VT 05401

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- Phone us at 802-878-5745, OR
- Mail this page back to us at the address above

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