

*The First Congregational Church
of Essex Junction
United Church of Christ*



*A Welcoming Community, Accepting and Serving All
in the Spirit of Christ*

“We covenant one with another to seek and respond to the Word and the will of God. We agree to walk together in the ways of the Lord, made known and to be made known to us. We hold it to be the mission of the Church to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all the world, while worshipping God, and striving for truth, justice, and peace. As in the past, we depend on the Holy Spirit to lead and empower us. We pray for the coming of the kingdom of God, and we look with faith toward the triumph of righteousness and eternal life.”

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Facebook: [First Congregational Church of Essex Junction UCC](https://www.facebook.com/FirstCongregationalChurchofEssexJunctionUCC)



Open and Affirming means that we welcome everyone to First Church including our GLBTQ brothers and sisters.

**The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction
United Church of Christ
December 25, 2016
Christmas Day**

A Welcoming Church,

Accepting and Serving All,

In the Spirit of Christ.

Order of Worship

Prelude

Medley of Carols

Ray

An Extravagant Welcome

*No matter who you are
or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome in this place.*

Welcome Greeting and Announcements

Our Ministers will welcome everyone to church and highlight significant events in our shared life, then the Deacon on Duty will welcome everyone and invite people to sign the Friendship Book.

Musical Introit

Call to Worship

Leader: Come, let us thank God for sending baby Jesus to be born among us.

People: THANK YOU GOD!

Leader: Come, let us thank God for the great gifts we received this Christmas.

People: THANK YOU GOD!

Leader: Come, let us thank God for warm homes, loving families and this church.

People: THANK YOU GOD!

Leader: Come, let us thank God for the beauty of a snowy Vermont Christmas.

People: THANK YOU GOD!

Leader: Come, let us continue to celebrate Jesus' birthday.

Deacon's Prayer of Invocation

Children's Message

After the Children's Message, children will remain in the worship service for the special Blessing of the Bears service. As they return to their seats, let us sing...

**Jesus loves the little children, all God's children of the world.
Whether young or old or new, Jesus loves us through and through
Teaching us to love all creatures in the world.
God has made us all a rainbow, Colors dancing 'round and 'round.
In our hair and skin and eyes, big and little, every size,
God has made us all a rainbow dancing 'round.**

Christmas Carol of Choice

Pastoral Prayer Silence for Personal Prayer and Unison Lord's Prayer [trespasses]

A Time of Silence

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the
kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.**

Congregational Musical Response

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

**And you, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way, with painful steps and slow,
Look now, for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing;
O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!**

Offering Our Gifts to God

Invitation, Offering, and Prayer of Dedication

Musical Selection

Carillon Toccata

Wagner

*Singing Our Praise to Our God

We Three Kings of Orient Are

**We three kings of orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and Fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star
O star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.**

Christmas Carol of Choice

Christmas Meditation.....Rev. Mendes

Christmas Carol of Choice

THE BLESSING OF THE BEARS

Unison Prayer of Blessing

Lord, creator of all things good, we lay before you the things we love best. We treat with reverence our treasures because they remind us of you. They are sacred, for in them you reside, living close to our hand, under our ear, and next to our heart. Thank-you God for stuffed animals and special items: may we never take for granted what you have given us. And may we always praise you for the gifts of life. Amen.

Litany of Blessing

Leader 1: Gracious God, Creator of the universe in all its diversity, we bring to you the things we love the best: our stuffed animals and special items.

People: Bless them as a sign of your love.

Deacon: Where we go, they go; what we do, they do. Even when we are not together, we are like twins. Even when they are old and worn, we hold them close to our hearts.

People: Bless them as a sign of your love.

Leader 2: When we touch them, we are calm. When we talk to them, we tell them everything.

People: Bless them as a sign of your love.

Deacon: The things we love the best do not ask us to do anything. They are just there, always waiting for us, always ready for us, always happy to see us. Like you, dear Lord, who never fail us.

People: Bless them as a sign of your love.

Leader 1: When we cherish the things we love best, may we remember Jesus' love for us. We thank you for giving us our special belongings.

People: Bless them as a sign of your love.

Deacon: Lord God, holy source of all grace, may your divine blessing rest upon these things we love the best. And upon each of us who today have brought them for your blessing.

People: Bless them as a sign of our love.

The Blessing

Rev. Mark will direct folks to bring their stuffed animal or special item to the altar and will then put a sign of love on each of them as a blessing, after which each owner can return to their seat.

Closing Prayer of Blessing

***Closing Carol**

Joy to the World!

#132

Pastoral Benediction

***Sung Community Benediction**

Go Now In Peace

**Go now in peace. Never be afraid.
God will go with you each hour of every day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.
Know God will guide you in all you do.
Go now in love, and show you believe.
Reach out to others so all the world can see.
God will be there, watching from above.
Go now in peace, in faith and in love**

Christmas Celebration

After the benediction, we will all gather around the altar and celebrate Christmas together by eating some goodies and sharing our stories of Christmas and enjoying each other's company.

***Postlude**

Birthday of a King

Neidlinger

***Please stand if you are able.**

Worship Participants

Deacon: Anne Harris

Greeters: Matthew & Sara Kellogg

Ushers:

First Church's Prayer Ministry

Lisa	Bruce Parker	Keenan Weischedel
David Tibbetts	Annette	Tim Frazier
Emily Carroll & family	Peggy	Jaime Real
Andy Tager	Richard	Michael
Louise Kolvoord	Roger Kalar	Leigh Davidson
Suzanne	Jennifer McClintock	Ruth Legendre
Emily Schuere & family	Sharon Kennedy	Don Foss
Campbell Miller	George Jackson	Cathleen & Lilianna
Donna	Carol	Ed Constantine

Please let us know if you would like a name added to our Prayer Ministry, you can write it on the Friendship Pad, call or email the office or send us a note, welcome@fccej.org



Please take your poinsettias home with you today or bring them to someone that you know would enjoy the cheer!

Pledge Envelopes Pick Up

Please pick up your pledge envelopes for 2017 in the office if you asked for them.



2017 Flower Chart is Up in the Fellowship Hall Hallway

Please feel free to sign up for your special dates to remember loved ones or honor events in your family's life. Please remember to put a check next to your name if you would like to keep your flowers, otherwise we will distribute them to brighten someone's day!



Jamaica Bound 2017 Fundraising-SAVE THE DATE

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.

Annual Reports for 2016 are now Due

If you are the chair of a committee or are designated by a committee or a group to do your annual report, please email it to Jen as soon as possible, welcome@fccej.org

The Poinsettias on the Altar are Given by:

Laurie & Brian Chipman in celebration of family

The Dooley Family in memory of Dorothy & Joseph Pine and Harry Dooley

Marsha Duell in memory of Rufus Duell

Norma Edwards in memory of Lloyd Edwards

Diana & Richard Higgins & family in memory of their parents & grandparents

The Shearer Family in memory of Steve Shearer

The Starkey Family in memory of Mr. & Mrs. Gorden Starkey Sr.

Carolyn Toof in memory of loved ones

Jean Tucker in memory of loved ones

FCCEJ remembers its beloved members who have passed in 2016, Kay Stewart, Phyllis Gray, Emily Packard, Marilyn Walcott, Marjorie Faunce, Nancy Potvin, John Kirsch, Bob Ennis, Dick Shephard, Steve Wark, and Jennifer McClintock

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Take A Picture of Your Family!



Send us a current picture of you and your family for our Church Directory, holiday time is a great time to get the family together and have that pic taken! Email it to welcome@fccej.org

Giving Tree

Thank each of you who put a smile on a child's face or a feeling of joy in the hearts of their parents through our Giving Tree mission. This year we provided gifts to 63 children from Essex Town & Junction, ages three months to 17. When parents are first contacted about gifts for their children or when they pick the gifts up before Christmas, they often express how difficult it is for them to find the words to adequately thank the members of our congregation for the generosity shown to their children. It is a reason for us to celebrate the spirit of giving here at FCCEJ!



Worship at First Church

Welcome to worship services at First Church! In all our services we strive to build closer relationships to a loving God, with each other, and with the world. We draw inspiration from Scripture, especially the life and teachings of Jesus. We hope you will find a spiritual home in one of our two different worship services.

Our Early Service at 8:30 a.m.

Our early service is a bit more traditional. It tends to be quieter and features classic hymns, the Sanctuary Choir, and organ music. Sunday School is not in session during this service. We are working to provide paid Nursery Care but currently have a self-serve nursery area where the service is projected.

Our Later Service @ 10:15 am

Our later service is a bit more contemporary. This worship features our Finally at First praise band, and more contemporary songs of worship. We offer a Sunday School program that commences after the Children's Message until 11:30am.

Nursery Room is available.

Communion

Our church has an "open" communion table which means that everyone is welcome to come and celebrate Christ's meal of love. We use grape juice and gluten free bread for the elements. We welcome children at the table as well but also recognize that each family is free to determine how to interpret the communion tradition.

*** * * SIGN-UPS * * ***



Ring the Church Bell

Sunday mornings at 8:15 & 10:00 am (15 minutes before worship). Families are welcome to sign up on the bulletin board to ring the bell.

Acolytes

<http://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c054fa4a82fa5fc1-acolytes>

Sign up on line or on the bulletin board downstairs to acolyte at worship service on Sunday morning. Acolytes (3rd grade and older) bring the light of Christ into the Sanctuary at the beginning of worship and carry it out at the end of worship to remind us that God is with us wherever we are. This is a great way to participate in worship with a friend or solo.



* * * **SAVE THE DATES** * * *



January 8th, 11:30 am ~ New Member Class Offered

No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey you are welcome in this place and welcome to become a member.

On Sunday January 8th there will be a New Member Class offered for anyone who would like to discover more about our church and/or join. If you will need child care, please let the church office know so that we can make arrangements, 878-5745.

2016 Faith Formation Sunday School Offering
King Street Center ~ Total is now up to \$ 894.64

Remember to bring your Sunday School offering each week and don't forget to use one of the envelopes in the pews so that it will be put towards the Sunday School offering. \$1 a week can add up quickly!

Today, Dec 25th will be the last day that your offering will go to King Street Center

* * * **Opportunities To Volunteer & Donate** * * *

Baking for The Vermont Respite House in January

Once again, Mission Possible is baking treats for the Vermont Respite House in January. The Vermont Respite House is a facility that provides supportive end of life care for residents in a home-away-from-home setting at its new location 3113 Roosevelt Highway, Rte. 7 in Colchester. We would like to deliver 6 dozen treats on Sunday January 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th. People prefer to bake at home and deliver them to the Respite House or bring them to church for me to deliver. There is a poster on the bulletin board in the hallway between the front door and the Fellowship Hall with slots to sign up for a week to provide treats. For further information, please contact Gail Babinger at gail@babinger.net. Thank you.



Food Pantry dates in January are

MONDAY, January 9th & Thursday, January 26th

We are in need of boxes of cereal, tuna fish, fruit juice and regular size jars of jelly to restock our cabinets.

We could also use your empty egg cartons again!



THIS WEEK: December 25th - 31st

TODAY: 1:00 - 2:00 pm Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall
3:00pm Worship Service / Sanctuary

MONDAY: 12:00 noon Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall
1:30 - 4:00 pm Food Pantry Stocking / FH & Gym
5:30 - 6:30 pm Group Victory / 3rd Floor-5/6 Class

TUESDAY: **8:30 - 10:00 am Sermon Talk Back / Marvin Lounge**
12:00 noon Brown Bag / Marvin Lounge
12:00 - 6:00 pm Edwards Reception / Kitchen & Fellowship Hall
7:00 - 9:00 pm Stewardship Committee / Fellowship Hall
7:00 - 9:00 pm Trustees Meeting / Marvin Lounge

WEDNESDAY: 12:00 noon Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall
2:00 - 4:00 pm Michael Louis Yandow Funeral / Sanctuary
5:30 - 7:00 pm Finally @ First / Sanctuary
6:30 - 7:30 pm Currier Bells / Gym
7:00 - 8:00 pm Boy Scouts / Fellowship Hall

THURSDAY: 12:00 noon Brown Bag / Marvin Lounge
6:30 - 7:00 pm Heavenly Harmony / Sanctuary
7:00 - 8:30 pm Sanctuary Choir / Sanctuary

FRIDAY: 12:00 noon Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall

SATURDAY: **9:00am - 12:00pm Nepali Community Worship & Meal / All Building**
1:00 - 2:00 pm Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall

MINISTRY AT FIRST CHURCH

Church Administrator: *Jen Dooley* [welcome@fccej.org]

Music Director: *Catherine McMaster* [cmcmaster@fccej.org]

Christian Education Director: *Laurie Chipman* [lchipman@fccej.org]

Bridge Part-time Associate Pastor: *Devon Thomas* [dthomas@fccej.org]

Youth Team *Devon Thomas & Erica Garvey* [egarvey@fccej.com]

Senior Pastor: *Rev. Mark Mendes* [mmendes@fccej.org]

Music Ministry

Cherub Music: *Kim Hamilton* [khamilton@ccsuvt.org]

Currier Bell Choir Director: *Carolyn Harris* [899-6759]

Finally @ First Director: *Rick Dooley* [rickdooley5@gmail.com]

Heavenly Harmony Director: *Catherine McMaster* [ourvinn@hotmail.com]

Junior Choir Director: see Catherine if interested

Men At First Director: *Bill Bickford, Jr.* [bill.bickford@aol.com]

Sanctuary Choir Director: *Catherine McMaster* [cmcmaster@fccej.org]

Committee / Church Officer Contacts

President, Chair Human Resources Committee: *Brenda Crocket* [881-5253]

Vice President, Chair Finance & Pastoral Relations: *Tom James* [879-1247]

Treasurer: *Ann Gray* [878-4088]

Asst. Treasurer: *Dan Petherbridge* [879-0261]

Financial Secretary: *Pat Seaver* [879-4445]

Clerk: *Andrea Sharp* [879-0580]

Christian Education: *Jenny Bourn* [802-309-7441] & *Marlene Frank* [872-9126]

Deacons: *Mark Chadurjian* [310-2399] and *Rick Dooley* [578-0229]

Hospitality: *Judy McCullen* [878-9794]

Missions: *Susan Kremer* [233-9932] & *Sandy Tallman* [879-0665]

Music: *Judy Larrabee* [236-0604]

Nominating: *Carl Wermer* [879-7650]

Stewardship: *Alison Wermer* [879-7650]

Trustees: *Kevin Meilleur* [238-4041]

Ushering: *Michael Sullivan* [879-6044]

Recognized Groups at First Church

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop [879-6552]

Heavenly Food Pantry Contact: *Valerie Gabert* [879-0109]

Called To Care Contact: *Beth Volker* [879-4708]

Nepali Christian Community Contact: *Dan Raut* [310-4371]

Craft Fest Committee Contact: *Linda Bogardus* [lbogardus@myfairpoint.net]

mission
M O M E N T S
U N I T E D C H U R C H O F C H R I S T

December 25, 2016

Christmas Day

Isaiah 9: 2-7

A Great Light

Welcome to Christmas on Sunday. This is the calendar year that doesn't let the pastor breathe after Christmas Eve services. No relaxing around a fire and sipping eggnog or resting on their laurels after another year's round of candle lighting and choir feeding. No, instead the alarm needs to be set and a sermon manuscript readied and stole hung carefully for the morning of Christmas. Being a pastor, as they say, is not all "cakes and ale." And it is, of course, more than that. It's also the many things that get done that no one ever hears about, like leaving the Memorial Day family picnic to be with a woman whose husband died at home; or finding a home for an indigent elderly church member; or visiting a man on death row who had wantonly gunned down three people.

Some pastors have complained that nobody ever calls them when they're having a good day. Then a message like Isaiah's comes along and it happens to be Christmas, which is, as everyone knows, the birthday of Joy. And here we are with Isaiah, just as we were on the second Sunday of Advent, and this time he is proclaiming, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." James Thurber wrote, ""There are two kinds of light - the glow that illuminates, and the glare that obscures." As startling as light bursting into darkness can be, this light in this darkness does not obscure. It does not drown in brightness the truth of suffering and the reality of sorrow. Instead it glows so that everything beautiful, even on the difficult days, is illumined with what is authentic and powerful. What binds us together with Christ in his humanness is his frailty and vulnerability as a baby born in a manger. It is not that we don't see suffering because we are so enamored of the shininess of Christmas but because it is in this scene that we see beauty, himself, lit from within. A beauty covered in straw, illumined by love and glowing with the pulse of possibility. Merry Christmas everyone!