



The Spirit at First February 2017

Ponderings.....

There seem to be hidden and not so hidden mine fields in our culture these days. Since before and more poignantly after the election, people are a bit testy. Families, long time friendships, church members, work companions and people on the street react quickly to perceived slights or voiced differences. In my twenty five years of ministry, even with such issues as abortion or GLBTQ equality or race relations, I have never experienced such divisive derision.

It has caused me to ponder where Christ would be in all of this clamor.....

Jesus would want us to feed the poor, visit those in prison, heal the sick, and work to release the captives.

Jesus would want us to pray more and think about God more.

Jesus would be on the side of justice and rail against the political establishment and the stranglehold they righteously jam down our throats in the name of pilfered ideals that in the end line pockets and keep the status quo in place.

Jesus would be trying to connect people who had lost their way back to a God who loves them with reckless abandon.

Jesus would be on the side of the poor and oppressed, calling people and nations to do more for those who are the most vulnerable among us.

Jesus would want us to be more humble.

Jesus would want all people to get along better than we are.

Jesus would challenge us to be servants.

Jesus would want us to love our enemies, not demonize and separate people into camps, types or special interest groups.

Jesus would want us to talk less and listen more.

Jesus would want us to live in peace with our neighbors.

Jesus would want us to care for ourselves in body, mind and spirit.

When we live in these ways in today's culture, we begin to be countercultural. When we refuse to get caught up in worldly divisions or political manifestos, we begin to separate ourselves from "normal behavior." When we seek to break down well built and tended walls of race, clan and class, we are seen as outside the system. When we refuse to enter into the race and instead seek ways to engage people honestly, fairly and without prejudice, then we are acting in ways that some do not understand. And yet, Christ calls us to these ways. I am convinced that the church needs to act in ways that are humble, forgiving and loving. This does not mean we give up the fight for good or justice, but it means we fight differently. All views, sentiments and political opinions are welcome as we seek to put them into the larger and more powerful context of God's calling in Christ Jesus. And we do this in our congregation, honoring everyone because Jesus invites us into a journey where all are really welcome, where everyone's voice really matters, where humility, service and sacrifice are the hallmarks of an effort to make the world a better place. In this time and place, we continue to fight for what we believe in, but let us march forward in a way that does justice to the man who lived, taught and died on a cross for that way of love. Then we can say with confidence that they will know we are Christians by our love.....

Trying to live into that vision like all of you,
I am yours in Christ, Rev. Mark

SPECIAL SUNDAYS & OFFERINGS

Communion

1st Service: sacraments passed out to congregation; **2nd Service:** come up to receive sacraments

February 12th ~ Historical Anniversary Service

On February 12th, we will experience a taste of what church would have been like when our 22 charter members first got together to worship God in the congregational way. There will be some room for wiggle room as we fail to take the cushions off the seats and not allow Rev. Mendes to preach for an hour! However, you will want to come and experience the changes and even dress for the occasion. There will be a handout in church a couple weeks beforehand so that you can adapt your attire to better suit the taste of 1867! It should be fun and educational at the same time, all while we worship the Living God.

February 19th ~ Children, Youth & Outdoor Ministry Sunday

We love children and youth at First Church and we put our money where our mouth is! We hire Laurie as a full time employee to oversee the most active UCC program in the state AND we offer half the time of a full time Associate Pastor to oversee and conduct both a Senior and Junior High Youth Group AND its been rumored that our Senior Minister not only likes children and youth but spends time with them and focuses on them on a Sunday morning! We are going to honor this sacred trust with our children and youth on Sunday February 19th at the Second Service. Our children and youth will help lead the worship service as we highlight them and our commitment to Outdoor Ministry. Come and invest some of *your* time on our children and youth.



Laurie's Lens

Where do you see God? Where do you go to connect with God? Do you stop and listen for God's still small voice? Do you know that God is with you everywhere you go? Are we a disciple too? How are we supposed to act? How do we care for our neighbor? Why do we light/extinguish the candles in worship? Does God love everyone?

These are just a small sample of some of the questions I hear come up in our Faith Formation classes and listening to or being a part of the conversation that happens with our children and youth as they talk about these are so enlightening and promising. Our children and youth know God and believe in God. Yes, they question many things...which is healthy and good...and I am so glad they feel comfortable doing so and feeling that this is a safe place to ask those questions.

If you are not a leader or helper in a classroom this year, then your chance to interact and see our children and youth is on February 19th when they will lead us in worship during our 10:15am service. Mark your calendars and plan to join us on that day as well as on February 12th when they will be practicing their part, also our 150th Celebration Sunday. Everything from shaking your hand and greeting you when you arrive to reading scripture, singing, leading us in prayer, taking the morning offering... and much more! This special Sunday is also the day when they will be voting where their offering for 2017 will go. Three choices will be presented during worship and following the service in our Fellowship Hall each will get 10 foam hearts to place their votes. They can decide to put them all into one or divide them up if they like all three choices.

We also will be celebrating Outdoor Ministry and our UCC camping program. Have you sent a child or youth away to a UCC camp before? Think of Vacation Bible Camp, but out in God's creation for a week ... sharing, connecting, making friends, growing, learning about God or even finding God for the first time. We have a few youth here at First Church who have...what about you?! I went to OM camp as a kid, a youth and as an adult I go...reconnecting with God, feeling refreshed, supporting OM camp as a counselor or a dean for the past 15 years. VT UCC is planning a week at Rock Point camp in Burlington on July 30th – August 4th on the beautiful shore of Lake Champlain for youth going into 5th to 8th grade. Last year Ethan Benton, Katie Tallman and Dan Forcier counseled ... are you interested?

A special offering to help support VT UCC OM through scholarship and programming be taken on February 19th. Come share in the fun youth filled worship on February 19th! Join us in celebrating God's great outdoors! Come in your hiking boots, fishing cap/vest, mud boots, jeans, sunglasses, comfy jeans, sweatshirt...you decide! Wear what will help you celebrate nature and our connection to God. I'll be wearing my jeans and OM camp shirt!

Blessing to you on your faith journey as we walk together with God!

Laurie, Christian Education Director

ASSOCIATE MINISTER THOUGHTS

Happy New Year and try to smile! It looks good on you!

New years can be rough because you realize just how much there is still to do ahead of you. As children of God, we have been striving for over two thousand years to see peace on earth So, there is still a lot to do. I take heart that our community of faith here in Essex is strong and vibrant. I take faith from the knowledge that together, despite what the year may bring, we will be able to find a path to God's will together. I pray that God will shine upon us, and I pray that we will be able to find the strength to stand up for what we feel is God's truth. This is the constant challenge we are faced with every day of our lives, so, I will stop preaching now and start reporting.

This month marked the start of some fundamental changes in the fabric of our church. First, I would like to thank all of you who were present at Ernie Drost's funeral. I was honored to be invited to co-officiate with Mark, and my prayers go out to Rose and the Drost family and, of course, I pray that Ernie is kicking back with the Lord above.

We have also had a lot of people move on from committees, and we are having new people join. This means that the leadership of the church is getting mixed up. I know that some of us are used to this. I am not, I'm still relatively new in this regard. But I look forward to seeing new faces, perspectives and approaches to the daily actions of the church.

As far as things go in regards to the office of Associate Pastor, the major thing to report is that there will be a new Bible study series starting in February 1st at 12pm. It is called!! **ROCKING THE CREDO!!!** And I shamelessly admit that I stole this idea from my dad, the newly installed minister at Good Shepard Lutheran Church . . . God bless him This series is meant to give people the opportunity to build up their own theology, so, perhaps you think of yourself as a Trinitarian, or perhaps you call yourself a Unitarian, but you don't really know why. And maybe you're just not sure who, what or where you are spiritually. Maybe you think that the creation story is the most important part of the Bible, or perhaps you don't think that Christians need to know the "Old Testament" or Hebrew Scriptures, at all. Well this Bible study is meant to challenge you on those assertions, and it is meant to give you all the introductory information you need to come to an educated conclusion as to why those beliefs may be important to you and are important in the Christian tradition. So the first session will be a walkthrough of the creation story. You don't need to own a Bible; we have plenty at the church. You just need to show up to the Marvin Lounge. So, there is that.

On the Youth end of things, Erica and I are starting with a new curriculum for youth groups. We will be spending each Sunday of the month on a given topic. The first Sunday is social justice, the second is fun, the third is mission and the fourth is life skills. And if we have a fifth, we go back to fun.

One of the more immediate things that we have done is to combine the meeting times for Jr. and Sr. High youth groups, and this is important for parents to know. Jr. and Sr. High youth are meeting Sundays at 5pm now. I think this is a good idea. A lot of our youth know each other despite being in different grades and we have a mature group of young – young adults here; so, I feel confident the Jr. High youth will be comfortable with the Sr. High youth. This month we started things out with a social justice discussion on privilege and talked about some of the benefits we receive as Americans living in Vermont. We followed that up the next

week by exercising some of that privilege by having fun at Get Air . . . It is good to be an American. Next on the agenda is mission and making college care packages. So, I hope you parents with children in college were able to get in touch with us so we could send your children some goodies. That, then, is a pretty complete summary of what I have been up to this last month. It has been a good month, and I thank God for that and pray for many more good months to follow. I am sure that with the help of the congregation here at First Church Essex, we will make our God proud.

Devon Lee Thomas: Bridge Associate Pastor.

MUSIC



What a wonderful Christmas season we had here at First Church. Many thanks to all the musicians and choirs, you all did an outstanding job.

Now my thoughts are turning to the coming months. Lent and Easter in particular. The Sanctuary Choir will be singing a new cantata on Palm Sunday. We will begin rehearsals soon, and I will keep you posted as to when we will start. This is a beautiful work of music, a little different, but very exciting.

If you have ever given thought to joining us, this would be the perfect time. It takes about 8 or 9 weeks to rehearse, an hour or so each Thursday night. Please feel free to contact me, or just come into the choir loft any Thursday night at 7:00.

Looking forward to the coming months.....Catherine

February 12th ~ Join the Music Discussion

Many of you love the music at First Church and for good reason; it is unbelievably good. Under Catherine's direction and with the talent and leadership of our many directors, we have six fantastic groups that offer glory to God and warmth to our hearts. Catherine will be resigning at the end of May and we need to enter into a search process. This will be a vital task as we look to shape our future music program. We need your input and help. Would you prefer one person doing it all or two or does that matter? Do you want our program to reach out into the community more intentionally or remain a group focused on our own worship? The Human Resource Committee needs your input as they shape the position and job description. Everyone is invited to meet Sunday, February 12th after each service or you can e-mail Rev. Mark with your comments. Looking forward to seeing you there!

Praise-a-Palooza : Soup and Songs of Praise

FCCEJ and Finally @ First are thrilled to again be hosting this fun evening for all ages! Mark your calendars for Saturday night, February 18th and join us at 5:30pm for a Soup Dinner followed at 6:30pm by an evening of praise music by local worship bands. Join us in welcoming bands from area churches and our own Finally @ First. A free will offering will be taken. Hope to see you all there!



CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

Super Bowl Sunday Subs



Ready for the Big Game? You'll need some sustenance, so how about supporting the church youth by ordering a Super Bowl Sub? The package come with a bag of chips, a drink, and a piece of fruit. The prices are very reasonable, and the youth have a great time putting together the sandwiches for you! If you haven't already ordered in advance by the time you read this you can put in a walk-up order and we'll try to get it made. The youth can also use donations of sliced turkey, sliced ham, lettuce, tomatoes, green peppers, and other fixings - please see the sign-up sheet for more details. Thanks for your support!

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.



Joyful Noise ~ 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 music leader.

Faith Formation Sunday School Calendar

Preschool – 6th Grade

January 29th ~ Ask the Pastor Sunday – be thinking of a question to ask Pastor Mark

Faith Formation Class time for Preschool – 2nd grade

February 5th ~ Communion Sunday ~ Spiritual Friends

February 12th ~ Faith Formation Class time

February 19th ~ all children & youth in worship to lead service

February 26th ~ Multi – Age Activity Day



Lego Donations (Not Duplo) Needed for New Curriculum!

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

February 5th ~ 11:30-1:30pm ~ Mission Focus ~ Lunch ~ Fellowship

Our 5th & 6th graders meet ONCE a month at this same time.



Faith Formation Sunday School Offering 2017

Vote for where this offering will go to on February 19th!

All children and youth will be leading us in worship on this special Sunday during our 10:15am worship service ~ Children, Youth & Outdoor Ministry Sunday!



Total is now up to \$ 57.15

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!

We will also celebrate our 2016 offering total of \$894.64 for King Street Center!



Sign-Up Table in the Gym on Classroom Sundays

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 connecting with Laurie anytime.

*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

January 29th ~ Ask the Pastor Sunday – be thinking of a question to ask Pastor Mark

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

dthomas@fccej.org

egarvey@fccej.org

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



March 11th ~ Cabin Fever Calcutta

Are you looking for something different to do this winter? Join us for the third annual Calcutta to be held on March 11th at the Catamount Country Club. Our returning emcee, Jamie Polli, promises an entertaining and enjoyable evening with lots of great prizes. Cash prizes include \$1000 for the Calcutta winner as well as three \$100 prizes and restaurant gift certificates. Additionally, there will be an opportunity to purchase raffle tickets for even more prizes. Tickets for this event will be available each Sunday in Fellowship Hall at a cost of \$125. Each ticket entitles the bearer to two dinners and one Calcutta ball. All proceeds will benefit our next intergenerational mission trip to Jamaica in the summer of 2017. Make checks payable to FCCEJ. Thirty-nine people purchased Early Bird tickets and will be entered into the drawing for a \$100 cash prize. That drawing will take place at the Calcutta. Tickets are also available from: Cameron Starkey, Carolyn Rushford, Christine Czarny, Collin Parker, Dave Dewey, Dave Johnson, Lauren Starkey, Mark Mendes, Marion Wrightington, Nicole Frank or Sharon Dettenrieder. Invite your friends to join you. You won't want to miss this evening of fellowship, fun and delicious cupcakes created by our own members.

Time: 5:30 –6:30 PM Cash Bar and Wine Pull

Buffet Dinner: 6:30 PM

Early Bird Ticket Drawing: 7:15 PM

March 12th ~ Pretzel Sunday

March 12th to April 9th ~ Sunday School Lenten Rotation

April 16th ~ Easter Sunday

May 14th ~ Mother's Day & Graduation Sunday

June 4st ~ Pentecost Sunday & Ice Cream Social ~ one service at 9:30am

Vacation Bible Camp 2017

August 7-11, Monday – Friday from 9am to 11:45am

Hero Central: Discover Youth Strength in God!

VB Camp is a week of energy and excitement of seeing God's Love in Action! All are encouraged to join up and be a part of this fun week!

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 or older

College Students & Adults: Group & Station Leaders





Summer Outdoor Ministry Camps for 2017-Vermont UCC

The Vermont UCC Outdoor Ministry Team is hosting one week of summer camp in Vermont for UCC kids and youth at Rock Point Camp in Burlington, VT.



July 30th –August 4th for youth going into 5th - 8th grade

To registration for this camp go to Horton Center website.

The VT UCC OM Team is recruiting volunteer counselors for this camp! Interested? Contact us!



Here are two other weeks we encourage you to look to Horton Center, Gorham, NH

July 9th – 15th for 7th – 9th graders @ Horton Center Camp

July 17th – 24th for 4th – 6th graders @ Horton Center Camp

Visit them to see the full listing of camps at www.hortoncenter.org

VT UCC Outdoor Ministry Team

Laurie Chipman (First Congregational Essex Junction), Leslie Desrosiers (College Street), Nancy Fowler (Barre Congregational), Laura Labrie (College Street), Dave McGowan (Waterbury Congregational), Kurt Shaffer (Interim at Warren Congregational), Jim Thomas (VT UCC)



Do you have an interest in Outdoor Ministry ... you too can join the VT UCC OM Team!

September 10th ~ Rally Day ~ back to two worship services

FELLOWSHIP & LEARNING



NEW Six Week Bible Study Series ~ ROCKING THE CREDO!!!

Starting on February 1st at 12pm and it will meet every other week. This series is meant to give people the opportunity to build up their own theology, so, perhaps you think of yourself as a Trinitarian, or perhaps you call yourself a Unitarian, but you don't really know why. Maybe you think that the creation story is the most important part of the bible, or perhaps you don't think that Christians need to know the "Old Testament" or Hebrew scriptures, at all. Well this bible study is meant to challenge you on those assertions and it is meant to give you all the introductory information you need to come to an educated conclusion as to why those beliefs may be important to you and are important in the Christian tradition.

JOY (Just Older Youth)

This group for the over 55 crowd (both men and women) will meet the first Thursday of each month at 12 noon in the Marvin Lounge. Bring your lunch and we will eat together and then have a program or just do something fun. If you have any questions about the group or need a ride please call the office. **Thursday, February 2:** Please join us with your lunch at noon for our monthly meeting.





Essex Eats Out Community Dinners Continue...

1st Friday of Every Month ~ February 3rd

Come - Help – Eat www.essexeatsoout.org

Noontime Book Group



The Noontime Book Group will meet on **February 16th** at 12:00pm. This month we will be reading “Small Great Things” by Jodi Picoult. Picoult tackles the profoundly challenging yet essential concerns of our time: prejudice, race, and justice in this riveting novel about a veteran labor and delivery nurse at a Connecticut hospital with more than twenty years’ experience. During her shift, Ruth begins a routine checkup on a newborn, only to be told a few minutes later that she’s been reassigned to another patient. The parents are white supremacists and don’t want Ruth, who is African American, to touch their child. The ensuing events are gripping and keep the reader on the edge of their seat. Join us with your lunch to discuss this great book! Copies are available at your local library.

Coffee Clatter



Every Friday at 8:05 a.m., Rev Mendes and Devon welcome everyone to come and talk about any subject you would like. We talk politics, camping, travel, church life, community issues....any and everything that comes up. Last week we had a lengthy discussion about what percentage of time the clergy should spend being prophetic or pastoral or as the church’s administrator. We meet for one hour and then go on our way. Join us for some friendship, fun and support.

The Community of Bridge



Love to play bridge? Well, there are a lot of folks at First Church who do and they get together every month to play for a few hours: every 3rd Friday from 1:30 – 4:00. In February that is Friday, February 17th. There are always some delectable snacks, free coffee and good conversation. All skill levels play and are welcome as we laugh and enjoy each other’s company. Join us! The winner takes home one of Rev. Mark’s delicious jams.....yum.

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!

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 unless otherwise advertised. All women of the church are invited to join us for interesting programs and wonderful fellowship. **February 18:** Valentine Gratitude Notes – Pass around note for each person there and write something we appreciate about each person.



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, **February 27th** this month, for a time of common crafting. All are welcome!

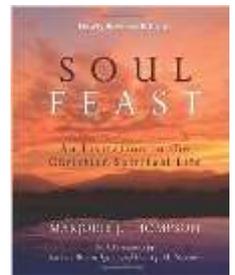
Tuesday Morning Sermon Talkbacks, 8:30 – 10am

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

We are midway through our next book, “Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion” by Abraham Joshua Heschel until February 15th. The next book is “Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Night” by Marjorie Thompson. We have the books available in the office if you would like to pick one up and get an early jump on the reading. Come and bring a friend.



DEACON’S CORNER

It’s always a little bit sad to come into church in early January when it has been “de-Christmas-ed.” It can feel like the festivity and excitement in the air has been replaced by business-as-usual. For FCCEJ, though, there is much to look forward to!

The well-received Contemplation and Meditation service will be followed by other unique services once a month throughout the year. There are new members to get to know, many opportunities to volunteer, and Lent and our upcoming 150th anniversary celebration around the corner.

There is also a growing number of ways you can form deeper connections with your fellow members. Why not come to yoga on Mondays, Sermon Talkback on Tuesdays, or Searchers on Wednesdays? There’s a book group, Sundays Suppers, JOY (Just Older Youth) and even a movie group. Choose this year to get to know your church family better and try something new.

STEWARDSHIP

Please note this list of the 'Special Offerings' for those who do not have envelopes as a reminder:

January 29, Endowment Sunday; **February 19**, Outdoor Ministry; **March 26**, One Great Hour of Sharing; **April 16**, Pastors' Fund; **May 14**, Per Capita; **June 4**, Strengthen the Church; **September 10**, Seminary Sunday; **October 1**, Neighbors in Need; **November 19**, Food Pantry; **Dec 17**, Christmas Fund

Pledge Updates

2016 End of year summary: 33 pledge units were overpaid Total overpaid = \$24798.30
99 pledge units were paid in full, 88 pledge units were underpaid Total underpaid = \$18893.66

2017 Pledge Drive data: We have 225 pledge units for 2017. Total amount pledged=\$326,106.00

Average pledge = \$1456.00 Median pledge = \$1200.00

Many thanks to all who pledged for 2017. We look forward to seeing 2017 unfold as we work together to bring Christ's message into our community.

Free Money for Our Church, TD Bank is Giving It Away!

Your Stewardship committee would like to remind you about the AFFINITY PROGRAM we participate in with TD BANK. The highlights are:

- The bank will donate money into our church's account
- It doesn't cost us anything
- We don't have to do anything (well, almost nothing).

The details: **Any** account holder at TD Bank (church member or not) simply indicates that they want to be part of the AFFINITY group with the First Congregational Church. At the end of each year the bank will deposit into our church account a percentage of the BANK profits as a donation. It doesn't cost account holders anything, It is a rare opportunity that really is as good as it sounds.

- **Any** account holder can join, doesn't cost account holders anything,
- Eligible accounts include:

Business: Checking; Consumer: Checking, Savings, Money Market, CDs, and

IRAs

- **Absolute** confidentiality for all participants (no information whatsoever is given to First Church)
- We don't have to buy, redeem or remember to do anything.
- The bank does all the work!!

Please consider opening a new account or asking any account holders you know to join our group. For more details please contact TD Bank directly. Angela Trapani, 878-6904 or angela.trapani@tdbanknorth.com

MISSIONS MOMENT & OPPORTUNITIES

Missions Moment : Jamaica Trip Update

The organization of the Jamaica Trip continues to be in full force at this time. There are currently seven people on the team and still room for more. If you are interested please contact either Carolyn Rushford (cjrushford@comcast.net) or Sharon Dettenrieder (dettenriedes@hartwick.edu). In early February, Carolyn and Sharon will travel to Jamaica to determine the work projects for the team. They have made contact with a Rotary Club in Jamaica which has expressed interest in working with the team on projects that focus on maternal/child health and literacy, both of which are major issues in this part of Jamaica. Carolyn and Sharon are looking forward to meeting with this group. They are also exploring any church connections they may have in the area. Following this trip, the team will know what donations of material goods to take with them in July. The team has been awarded a grant of \$1000.00 from the Rotary Club of Essex, which has been matched by Rotary District 7850 that encompasses Northern Vermont, northern New Hampshire and southern Quebec. To raise funds, the team sold stock in the fall and those who purchased stock will be invited to a luncheon of Jamaican cuisine in the fall of 2017 at which the team will describe their work projects and the personal impact of the trip for each team member. The team is currently selling tickets to the Third Annual Calcutta (for more information, please see the article in this newsletter from the Jamaica Bound Mission Team). Remember, if you are interested in joining the team, please reach out to either Carolyn or Sharon. Thank you!



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.

Baking for The Vermont Respite House in January

During the month of January, the Mission Possible Committee has coordinated a cookie baking project for the Respite House in Colchester. Thank you to Amy Trimble, Nancy Milne, Jackson and Holly Parker, Beth Terry, the Marthalers, Kelley Charland, Lynn, Addison Kasmarek, Donna and Sarah who have volunteered to bake cookies and a special thank you to Nancy Milne who is delivering the cookies to the Respite House. All of those who are participating are doing their part to bring a little bit of home to the residents of the Respite House and their visitors.



Gail Babinger, Mission Possible Committee

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 February 22nd**. 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 February Food Pantries will be on Monday evening, **February 13th** from 5:30-7:30 and Thursday afternoon, **February 23rd** from 2-6pm.

Don't Forget the Red Tent

The Red Tent Project has become even more important as we enter a period where funds for women's health and marginalized immigrant groups may be significantly cut back. Donating woman's hygiene products to JUMP, which serves some of our most vulnerable neighbors, is one positive way we can show that we will continue to support those who will be facing increasingly difficult times. Look for the Red Tent in the Fellowship Hall on Sunday mornings during the next few weeks as we renew our commitment to help in this way. Women's hygiene products may be placed in it on Sunday morning or at any time during the week in the Marvin Lounge.



. Let's make the Red Tent overflow to show our continued love and support for all women.

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop Needs You!
An Invitation to Brainstorm About the Thrift Shop



Many of us in the congregation, and now a few community folks, have volunteered at the Thrift Shop for many years. It has been a vibrant ministry of the church. Recently we have lost volunteers due to health concerns or other personal demands of family and time. Many of us who work there now are relatively new volunteers. We would like to come together at a pot luck dinner on Feb. 6, at 6 PM to discuss the best way to move forward. We especially need to look at our current leadership and get feedback and guidance from those who have been longtime volunteers. Some areas to discuss are: how can we communicate well to every volunteer when needed, how can we train new volunteers, would a new register counter serve us better, do we need to paint or rearrange the shop for better display of what is there, who will clean, who will take unusable items to Goodwill, etc.? Please come to the dinner on Feb. 6, to discuss the exciting opportunities we have before us. We welcome all who are interested in the Thrift Shop.

Volunteer & Support our Faith Formation Programs

Have you been a part of First Church for 6 months? Would you like to connect with the children or youth and see how Sunday School ... now Faith Formation has changed over the years. Please touch base with Laurie and she can help you decide which of our programs are the right fit for you.

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 join our paid Nursery staff person during 2nd service when our number of children can be as high as 10.

OUR CHURCH FAMILY

Special Offering for the Month of February: February 19th: Outdoor Ministry

February Birthdays

1st Barb Blanchette, 2nd Clint Russell, Tyler Warren, 4th Sydney Bashaw, Ethan Benton, Jo Haines
6th Megan Couture, Kathy Finnie, 8th Maggie Parks, 9th Jason Field, Ethan Goedken 10th Angus Hutcheon
12th Anna Charland, Peter Gray, 14th Mark Benton, Abigail Evans, Nancy Parker, 15th Cindy Longwell,
Rachel Wood, 16th Emily Ehler, Allen Potter, 17th Sharon Beebe, Joy Raut 19th Betty Garrapy, John
Mauger, George Paul, 20th Elijah Edwards, Sullivan Martin, 21st BJ Bell, 22nd Molly Bourn, Duke Ehler,
Sue Holden, John Kinney, Mason Smith, 24th Cheryl Ahokas, Sharon Dettenrieder 25th Robert Davis, Bob
Kent, 26th Val Gabert, Matt McGeary, 27th Braeden Koch

Thank You's

Dear First Church, I want to thank you, all fellow parishioners, and community for the support and kindness afforded us during the time of passing of wife and mother, Jennifer McClintock. We are so very appreciative and are truly in awe of the helping hands, prayers and inspiring words we received. Truly yours, Brian with Holly, Celia & Mary



Dear First Congregational Church Members, Thank you for all of the amazing gift donations. You have made an enormous impact on the lives of our Essex families this holiday season. We truly appreciate all of your hard work and generosity. Have a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year! Sincerely, Essex Elementary Student Support Team.

Thank you to my Church Family for the gorgeous birthday rose that arrived on December 27th! Blessings, Alice Williams

FCCEJ By The Numbers

\$323,606 record amount pledged to FCCEJ for 2017!
63 number of children we sponsored for the Giving Tree
189 gifts that you bought for the families on the Giving Tree
\$894.64 2016 amount raised by the children & youth for King Street Center



Our Nursery

We welcome Allie Harris as our paid staff person in our Nursery! Please stop by the Nursery and welcome her! Due to Allie's work schedule, she cannot be with us all Sundays, so we are looking for another person to join the Nursery staff team. If you know of anyone who might be interested (8:15 to 11:30am) or is willing to be a backup sub, please be in touch with 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 encourage volunteers to sign up and help during our 10:15am service, as we could have many as 10 little ones on a given Sunday.



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ESSEX JUNCTION

WARNING FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, January 29, 2017 11:15 a.m.

To the members of the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction,

GREETINGS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST:

The Annual Meeting of the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction will be held in the Sanctuary of the Church, at 11:15 a.m. on Sunday, January 29, 2017 to take action upon the articles below.

ARTICLE I: To hear and act upon the report of the Church Officers, Committees and Recognized Groups of the Church.

ARTICLE II: To elect all Church Officers and Committee members required by the By-Laws of the Church and others as may be necessary.

ARTICLE III: To act and vote upon the proposed budget for 2017.

ARTICLE IV: Shall the members authorize the Finance Committee in conjunction with the Church Council President to borrow money and sign notes pledging the credit of the Church, if needed, to meet the current expenses of the Church?

ARTICLE V: To transact any other business which may properly be brought before this Annual Meeting.

On behalf of the Church

Andrea Sharp, Church Clerk

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
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ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

Please help us clean up our mailing list! If you no longer wish to receive our newsletter, or would like to receive it electronically instead, simply:

- E-mail an “unsubscribe” message to welcome@fccej.org , OR
- Phone us at 802-878-5745, OR
- Mail this page back to us at the address above

Inside...

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