



## The Spirit at First March 2017

A Pastor's Ponderings.....

Time is my most valuable resource. We are all busy and pulled in so many directions: jobs, kids, school's extracurricular activities, sports, enjoying nature, family obligations, clubs, civic life, social advocacy and the ever increasing time we spend with social technology - surfing the web for bits of information and unbelievable videos of animals, idiots and geniuses. Reflecting on Lent and how it was used in the life of the church as a time for reflection and centering oneself on God's calling for our lives, I came to the conclusion that just about the last thing people need to re-connect with God is more time consuming programming, even if it's about God and in the church!

As a pastor, this is hard to admit. I love over programming a season in the name of God! So we will just have our regular Wednesday Night Searchers group studying a great book on deepening your spirituality: something that I dare say most of us could use in this over programmed, hectic, anxiety ridden culture of ours. The book is *Soul Fest: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. It will feed your soul and draw you closer to God if you want to open yourself to spend two hours a week with some friends in the Marvin Lounge. There are copies in the church office.

Instead of having a bunch of separate evenings out to listen to special guests, I have decided to bring insightful and spiritually challenging messages to three of our Sunday morning services during Lent, a practice that half of our members do every week! Gov. Douglas, Imam Islam Hassan and Rabbi Amy Small will come and preach to us as to how we should be living out our faith in today's world. I simply cannot wait to hear what Amy and Islam they have to say as we share in the worship of God with the other Abrahamic faith traditions. And Gov. Douglass is one of the most insightful people I know and an incredible speaker. I would encourage all of you to come and welcome these great leaders into our midst. Likewise, I would encourage all of you to come to church during Lent. It can only help your lives.

Lastly, we will provide the three traditional Lenten services plus one. The traditional three services are Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. All three of them will be presented in a way that embraces the love and peace God offers to us through Christ without the old traditional washed in the blood, sin filled guilt of older times and traditions: traditions that many folks no longer feel represent the heart of God and authentic spirituality. Ash Wednesday is March 1<sup>st</sup> at 7:00 p.m. The plus one service is a healing service offered to all who could use a quiet worship service and or a service where God's presence is focused on your or a loved one's health and wholeness. The healing service will be April 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7:00 P.M. Naturally everyone is welcome at all of these services and I can attest to you that they will also deepen your relationship to God and make you better able to face each day.

One of the most important things you can do during lent is to take some time to reflect, pray and just sit quietly. It might be during your ritual walk or exercise time or even whole driving, but all of us are called to enter into a conversation with God on a daily basis and reflect on our relationship to God and Christ's ways of love. There does not need to be guilt since God just simply wants a relationship with you. Try it and let me know how it goes.

May God bless you, your families and our church as we seek to make the world a better place.

Peace,  
Rev. Mark

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## SPECIAL SUNDAYS & OFFERINGS

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### **March 1, 7 pm ~ Ash Wednesday**

Ash Wednesday is the start of the season of Lent in the Christian Church, a season of reflection: a time when new members learned about the faith and prepared to join the church. Prayer, penitence, sacrifice, fasting, taking on new tasks of charity and the like were ways to center your attention on God and prepare for Easter. Discovering God comes in many different ways, indeed Abraham Joshua Heschel in his book *Man Is Not Alone* states that each of us discover God in a unique way. Because of that belief, the Ash Wednesday service will not be focused on our unworthiness, but rather our sacredness. Instead of focusing on our humble beginnings of mud and our deeply flawed ways, we will focus on being *star dust* and the sacredness of belonging to our divine Creator. Everyone is welcome at 7:00 P.M. on Wednesday March 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **March 5, First Service Only ~ Special Guest Preaching: Rabbi Amy Small**

We are thrilled to welcome to our pulpit Rabbi Amy Small. The relatively new Rabbi at Ohavi Zedek Synagogue in Burlington will be here to offer us insight into ways she thinks we should be engaging the world as people of faith. It is a great gift to welcome a new and faithful perspective into who God is calling us to be in today's world, especially from a community that we have had an interfaith relationship with for decades as clergy and church. Due to Rabbi Amy's schedule, she is only able to preach at the First Service.

### **March 12, Both Services ~ Second Sunday Special AA Themed Worship**

Our Second Sunday Specially Themed Service will focus on the spiritual journey and ritual of Alcoholics Anonymous and other addictive programs. These programs are the most effective precisely because of their spiritual aspect; their well-defined steps toward wholeness come right out of scripture and are grounded upon solid and traditional Christian practice. Come and celebrate one of the most successful spiritual communities in our country and across the world. All of us, whether we struggle with addiction or not, will find a powerful witness to the work of the spirit and the wholeness that comes from following God.

### **March 19, Both Services ~ Special Guest Preaching: Governor Jim Douglas**

We are thrilled to welcome former Governor Jim Douglas back to our pulpit on March 19<sup>th</sup> to offer us insight on how best the church can challenge and participate in the wider culture. Gov. Douglas is a member of the Middlebury UCC Church and has many connections to members and friends of First Church. Luckily, he is also incredibly insightful and a speaker that you will not want to miss as he shapes his message for our congregation in today's day and age.

### **April 2, Both Services ~ Special Guest Preaching: Iman Hassan**

We are also thrilled to welcome Imam Islam Hassan to our pulpit on April 2, 2017. Islam Hassan is the spiritual leader of the Islamic Society of Vermont in Fort Ethan Allen and has been incredibly active in interfaith activity, offering a peace filled and powerful message in which people of all faith can learn and grow in the faith. His measured words and passion for making Vermont a great place to raise a family offers all of us an alternative message than what we hear in the press. Come and hear this valued spiritual leader bring us a message of how best our church can work to help bring about God's love in this world.

## April 2, 7pm ~ Healing Service

People and families are hurting these days. There are issues of health and life transitions, national insecurities, dysfunctional families, broken relationships, addictions, mental issues, hidden psychological or physical pain and the like. On the evening of April 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7 P.M. the Deacons and clergy of this church will pray for your health and wholeness. They will lay hands on you and ask the very presence of God to enter your life in a unique way and help you. Come for yourself. Come for a loved one or friend. But come and sit quietly with your God.

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## ASSOCIATE MINISTER THOUGHTS

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Once again we approach the Lenten season. This means as Christians we come to a time where we are invited to take the opportunity to reflect on the things we can do to improve ourselves. How can we be more receptive to the plight of others? How can we be more open to Christ's word, and how can we better understand God's will?

I feel that our congregation has much to be proud of as we look back on one hundred and fifty years of striving for God's good in Essex Junction. But if there is anything our history and also our special historical service this month can teach us, it is that with every small improvement, with every small step forward, we are able to build a better understanding and enter into a deeper relationship with our congregation, our community and our God. So, think of some small thing you can do to improve the life of another, or even to better your own life. Strive to actualize it over the Lenten season and see if it feels right with you. Small steps forward make a difference.

Now in my role as Bridge Associate the new thing for this month has been our Bible study, which I have called Rocking the Credo. It is a study revolving around a few fundamental stories in the Bible, which we flesh out so that you all can have the opportunity to decide for yourselves what significance they have to you. We have been meeting on Wednesdays at 12pm and we have had a good turnout for the first two sessions with around six to eight people attending when they are able. As of now we have four more sessions to go. If the study is popular, I hope we will all see value in continuing something on a more regular basis.

Now, what were the youth to up this last month? They made a lot of sandwiches. We raised over two hundred dollars making Super Bowl subs on the 5<sup>th</sup>. I need to give a heartfelt thank you to Laura Cunningham Firky for helping us to organize this event. We then made bag lunches for COTS the following week and delivered them despite the SNOW!!! Next month, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of March, we will have a rock climbing overnight at Petra Cliffs. So, if that is something your child would be interested in, it costs just \$25 to go.

So February has been very good on my end. I am very proud of our youth and I am very impressed with our Bible study attendees who bring a wealth of insight to our group, and even school me in a thing or two.

I pray that Lent will be just as formative for you all,

Blessings,

Devon Lee Thomas: Bridge Associate Pastor



## Laurie's Lens

Lent arrives on Ash Wednesday, February 13<sup>th</sup>. This is the time when I try to be more intentional about my daily devotions, prayer time and reconnect with old friends. Have you found the UCC's daily devotions that arrive in your inbox daily? Check it out at [http://www.ucc.org/daily\\_devotional](http://www.ucc.org/daily_devotional). When I am in the office, I am also enjoying a daily devotion book that was put together by our curriculum writers for Feasting on the Word. I was hoping to set up a meditation room on the third floor again this Lent, but the repairs to the flooring are not finished yet...so when things are complete and the room can be used I'll get the word out that the Meditation Room is ready for visitors. Lent can also bring time for fellowship and reconnecting with others in our faith community...so join in the Sunday Supper on March 5<sup>th</sup> in area homes or the Faith Formation Family Dish Share on Thursday, March 9<sup>th</sup> (more information about these is located in this newsletter).

Pretzel Sunday will arrive on March 12<sup>th</sup>, the second Sunday in Lent. This is a day on the church calendar that lets us reflect on our prayer time and our connection with God. We will talk about the history of the pretzel, its shape and why they are a symbol for Lent. Have you ever seen a pretzel that has lost its shape or is broken? We too can be like a pretzel and your prayer life and connection to God helps us be reshaped and whole again. This simple shape of the pretzel, arms folded in prayer, can help us remember to pray. The three holes in the pretzel were said to represent the Trinity: God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. All the kids will get a chance to roll out a pretzel or two before they move on for some class time. Everyone will get a chance to eat a fresh pretzel whether it be in class or during our fellowship times that follows our worship services.

The children will be learning and talk about Lent over the next few weeks as we move closer to Easter. They will learn about its meaning, the number of days and how to count them down, the symbols and the stories of Holy Week. They will hear about God's love as we move through Lent to Palm Sunday and then on this day they will 'walk through' Holy Week and sit at a table for an agape meal and remember Jesus' love for us and his last meal with his disciples in the upper room. Join us and move closer to Jesus this Lent.

According to the Bible, Jesus' death and resurrection occurred around the time of the Jewish Passover, which was celebrated on the first full moon following the vernal equinox. For Christians, today, Easter Sunday falls on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox (or the first day of spring). If the first full moon occurs on the equinox, Easter is the following Sunday. So ... Easter Sunday can fall anywhere between March 22 and April 25<sup>th</sup>. Once you know when Easter Sunday is...you count back 40 days, not including Sundays, and you will arrive on Ash Wednesday.

Enjoy your walk through Lenten and remember to stop and pray when you see a pretzel.

Blessing to you on your Lenten faith journey,

Laurie, Christian Education Director

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## MUSIC

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With the warm weather we've been having, I feel Spring is right around the corner. Easter will be here before you know it, but before that happens, there's plenty going on in the music department at First Church. Mark your calendars for March 19th at 3:00 ....Talent Show.....never too late to sign up. It does not have to be musical, storytelling, poetry or skits are welcome.

The Currier Bells are busy practicing, they will be ringing in the near future. As well as the Cherubs and Joyful Noise.

As always, F@F is up front most Sundays and doing an amazing job.

Heavenly Harmony are working on something pretty special.

The Sanctuary Choir is busy rehearsing this year's Cantata. It is called Come Walk With Me, it tells the story of Jesus's life and last days. It is a lovely work of music, something you will not want to miss. We will be performing on Palm Sunday at both services.

Before you know it....the tulips will be up.....Catherine

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## HOSPITALITY

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The Hospitality Committee hopes you enjoyed your authentic 1867 (well, OK - they were a mix but they were yummy!) corn muffins (including a gluten free option too) as one of our first celebrations of the church's 150th anniversary. We would also like to point out a fine collection of containers on the back shelf - please check to see if one or more might belong to you. And last, but not least, please welcome Jackie Parks as incoming chair!

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## DEACON'S CORNER

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Having just attended my first Deacon's meeting this week, I observed that FCCEJ is blessed to have a diverse, energetic and conscientious group of people serving as Deacons. There is a lot of excitement about the coming Lenten season, and the various church services that come with it. Our clergy have a lot of interesting sermons, guests and activities planned for us to take advantage of. It is commonly said, "God helps those who help themselves" – while we can debate the truth or accuracy of this phrase, it reflects nicely my desire to get more deeply involved in the life of our church. I am pleased to have the opportunity to be a Deacon, both to support the church's mission and also enrich my personal spiritual life. If you are not currently volunteering here at FCCEJ, I encourage you to consider sharing your energy and talents – you might be helping yourself as well as helping the church!

Pete Schmalz

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# CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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## Lent Begins on March 1<sup>st</sup> ~ Ash Wednesday

Lenten devotions have arrived! Come pick yours up during the week or on Sunday morning. Learn about the season of Lent and help count down the 40 days of Lent. New this year is our *Lent in a Bag* family devotion that our Junior Youth Group help to put together. Some bags have already been collected, but we have more just waiting for you here at church in Laurie's office and in Fellowship Hall on Sunday morning. Personal devotional books are also here.

There is something for everyone. Come walk closer with God during Lent.

## March 9<sup>th</sup>, 5:45-7pm ~ Faith Formation Family Dish Share

Come join the fun and fellowship at this monthly potluck supper! Bring the family or just yourself and a dish to share. Organized to help our families with children to meet others here at First Church. Enjoy a great meal and a group building activity. Next Dish Share will be May 11<sup>th</sup>!

## Music Time During Faith Formation

**Cherubs** ~ Our Preschool & Kindergarteners gathering in the Youth Lounge, sometimes our junior and senior high youth join them 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 – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

*March 5<sup>th</sup>* ~ Communion Sunday ~ Spiritual Friends

*March 12<sup>th</sup>* ~ Pretzel Sunday & Class time

*March 19<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup>* ~ Lenten Class Time Rotation

*April 2<sup>nd</sup>* ~ Communion Sunday ~ Spiritual Friends

*April 9<sup>th</sup>* ~ Palm Sunday & Lenten Class Time Rotation

## Faith Formation Sunday School Offering 2017



A BIG thank you to all our offering presenters who joined us during worship on February 19<sup>th</sup> and to all our children and youth who made our worship service such a wonderful offering of God's amazing love.

**A NEW Place** ~ Alan Sousie, Board Chair of ANEW Place (formerly Burlington Emergency Shelter)

**Humane Society** ~ Lauren & Cameron Starkey (Cameron is a volunteer & a counselor at camp PAWPAW this summer)

**JUMP** ~ Carolyn Rushford, former board member

The votes were totaled and the results are: JUMP = 32; A NEW Place = 43; Humane Society = 74  
You will be hearing more about the *Humane Society of Chittenden County* who relies completely on outside donations to stay open and help give pets a home.

**Your 2017 Total is now up to \$ 80.15**

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 also welcomed Vicki Smith, Executive Director of King Street Center and presented her with a check for \$894.64 that they were so thankful to receive and will use for their new programs that they are creating for the children at the Center!

***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!*

**Junior Youth @ FCCEJ**

**March 12<sup>th</sup>** ~ 11:30-1:30pm ~ Mission Focus ~ Lunch ~ Fellowship  
*Our 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> graders meet ONCE a month at this same time.*

We will begin our time in Fellowship Hall during our Pretzel Sunday coffee hour.  
Looking for a couple volunteer parents and a meal. See Laurie.



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**SAVE THE DATES**

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**April 16<sup>th</sup> ~ Easter Sunday**

**May 14<sup>th</sup> ~ Mother's Day & Graduation Sunday**

**June 4<sup>st</sup> ~ Pentecost Sunday & Ice Cream Social ~ one service at 9am**

**Vacation Bible Camp 2017**

August 7-11, Monday – Friday from 9am to 11:45am  
***Hero Central: Discover Your 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

**Station Leaders:** Bible Drama~Barb Smith; Crafts~Jenny Bourn; Games~Jessie Moos; Music~Laura C-F



**Snack:** Judy Allen & Ginny Coe; *Still recruiting for a Discovery Leader*  
**Group Leaders:** Youth (sixth grade or older), Young Adults/College, Adults  
**Watch for our VB Camp Wish List coming in the April Newsletter!**



### **UCC Outdoor Ministry Camps**

Summer is one day closer, and now you can register for your best week of the summer! Horton Center registration is now open, take a look at the schedule, as there is a session for everyone. With thanks to our Outdoor Mission Group and volunteer Deans, we are offering favorite sessions such as Grandparent & Grandchild, Family & Friends Weekend, Middler Camp, and others. Women's Weekend will be offered with an extra day due to popular demand. Our new offerings include a Family 4th of July half week, Leader in Training, Archery Camp, and Senior High Hike Week. We can't wait to branch out and connect through Christ with you this summer at Horton Center!

[www.hortoncenter.org](http://www.hortoncenter.org)

Attend Horton Center camp with Laurie Chipman in Gorham, NH. *Laurie is counseling this week!*

*July 9<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> for 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> graders @ Horton Center Camp*

### **Vermont Outdoor Ministry Week**



Enjoy a fun week at Rock Point Camp in Burlington, VT!

July 30<sup>th</sup> – August 4<sup>th</sup> for youth going into 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade

*Laura Labrie (College Street UCC) and Dave McGowan (Waterbury UCC) will be our Deans and lead this week of camp! And Laurie Chipman will be stopping by and checking in throughout the week.*

To registration for this camp go to Horton Center website. [www.hortoncenter.org](http://www.hortoncenter.org)

VT UCC OM Team is also recruiting volunteer counselors, a lifeguard and a nurse for this camp!  
Interested? See Laurie!

### **September 10<sup>th</sup> ~ Rally Day ~ back to two worship services**

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## FELLOWSHIP & LEARNING

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

Continuing every other week (3/1, 3/15, 3/29). 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, March 2:** A discussion of the new vision for Essex Junction with George Tyler, village President and Robin Pierce, Community Development Director and Zoning Administrator. Bring your questions and comments and join us with your lunch.



### **Essex Eats Out Community Dinners Continue...**

1<sup>st</sup> Friday of Every Month ~ March 3rd

Come - Help - Eat [www.essexeatsout.org](http://www.essexeatsout.org)

### **March 11<sup>th</sup>, 5:30pm ~ 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Cabin Fever Calcutta**

Join us for an evening of fellowship and fun at the Catamount Country Club as we raise funds to send the Intergenerational Mission Team to Jamaica in July 2017 to build a school garden. By purchasing a Calcutta ticket, you are supporting this international project.



Back by popular demand is the "wine grab". Purchase a wrapped bottle for \$20, and perhaps you will be the lucky winner of the premier bottle.

5:30 PM – Social Hour and Wine Grab

6:30 PM – Buffet Dinner, dessert provided by Mission Committee – Delicious!!

7:15 PM – Early Bird Drawing and Calcutta



Our committee has secured some great prizes this year. The top prize is \$1000. Other cash prizes include \$100 to the Early Bird Drawing winner, and \$100 each to the holders of the first, twenty-fifth and seventy-fifth balls called. Other prizes include hotel and restaurant packages as well as a "tablet". Tickets are \$125 and include one Calcutta Ball and dinner for two. All proceeds benefit the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction's international, intergenerational mission trip to Jamaica. For tickets, see one of the team members at the Jamaica table in Fellowship Hall or contact Sharon Dettenrieder at [dettenriedeS@hartwick.edu](mailto:dettenriedeS@hartwick.edu).

## March 12th ~ Pretzel Sunday

Everyone looks forward to the smell of pretzels! CE sponsors this great Sunday each year...pretzels for fellowship time after each of our worship services, but we can't do it without our volunteers....

Kitchen volunteers are high school youth and adults from college age and up ... mixing and baking pretzels early on Sunday morning and for a few people to help with clean up after coffee hour. There are three shifts ~ 7:30am to 9:45am (mix up dough...divide, roll & bake some pretzels); 9:30am- 10:30am (watch the ovens); 10:30-11:30am (help kids roll pretzels, bake & watch ovens); 11:30am -12:15pm (clean up crew). See Laurie for questions and to sign up!

We are looking for a few more 5lb bags for white flour. Please have all items to the church by Thursday, March 9<sup>th</sup>. Signup sheets will be in Fellowship Hall on Sunday morning one more time on March 5<sup>th</sup>.

Come join the fun on this Lenten day! The children and youth will start their time in Fellowship Hall rolling pretzels before they move off to class, have their circle time and eat pretzels for snack as well as hear the pretzel story.

## Noontime Book Group



The Noontime Book Group will meet in the Marvin Lounge on **March 16th** at 12:00pm. This month we will be reading *The Shack* by Wm. Paul Young. This is the story of a man whose young daughter has been mysteriously kidnapped and never found. A few years later he receives a note, presumably from God, telling him to meet him at an abandoned shack. Still grieving, he decides, against his better judgement, to go, and he spends a life changing weekend with God. It is a provocative, somewhat controversial book that puts God and the Trinity in a whole new perspective. This story is coming out as a movie this month, and we will plan to go as a group to see the movie as part of our discussion. Stay tuned for more details. Join us with your lunch to discuss this great book! Copies are available at your local library and we have a few here at the church.

## 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 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday from 1:30 – 4:00. In February that is **Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup>**. 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.



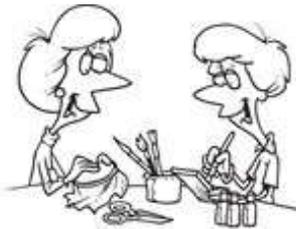
## **Mondays -Yoga Classes are Going STRONG!**



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. **Saturday, March 18:** Easter Cards with Andrea Sharp. It's that time again to put together our Called to Care Easter Baskets. We'll make the cards this month and finish the baskets in April. Please join us for this worthwhile project.



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

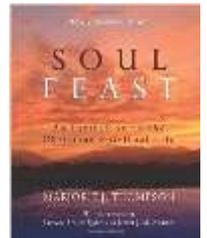
## **Tuesday Morning Sermon Talkbacks, 8:30 – 10am**

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 just beginning our next book which 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 jump into the reading. Come and bring a friend for great fellowship and discussion!



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## STEWARDSHIP

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Please note this list of the 'Special Offerings' for those who do not have envelopes as a reminder: **March 26**, One Great Hour of Sharing; **April 16**, Pastors' Fund; **May 14**, Per Capita; **June 4**, Strengthen the Church; **Sept 10**, Seminary Sunday; **Oct 1**, Neighbors in Need; **Nov 19**, Food Pantry; **Dec 17**, Christmas Fund



## **Hannaford Card Program Update**

For those of you who regularly purchase Hannaford Cards from us to use at your local Hannaford Supermarket-thank you, to date we have made \$5,100 from the program! For those of you who reload your cards instead of purchasing new ones each time, there is a new guideline for the reloads. If your card sits with a zero balance for more than 30 days, it becomes 'inactive' in their system and at that point cannot be reloaded. There are two ways to get around this, leave \$0.01 on your card or \$1.00 if that is easier OR you can just purchase a new card from us each time and then you do not need to worry about remembering to ask them to not zero the card or when the last time you used it. Whatever is easiest for you-we want this to be an easy program to participate in as it does realize a good deal of money for the church for relatively no effort! Many thanks for your participation and if you have any questions, see Jen.

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## **MISSIONS MOMENT & OPPORTUNITIES**

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### **Missions Moment : Update Social Advocacy Committee**

The Social Advocacy Committee is a new group formed here at FCCEJ as a branch of our Missions Committee. This group has been created to look at advocacy issues that our church could make public in an effort to help spread Christ's love and justice in our local community and express to the congregation and community our church's emphasis to speak out for good. This is a new venture, so the group is starting slowly with some intentional conversations about the process and types of issues to look at for possible action by the group. Meetings have been once or twice a month between services. The group is small at this time, but would welcome anyone who has a wish to help those who may be marginalized in the society we live in. Please talk to Reverend Mendes, Linda Lou Parker or any member of the Missions Committee for more information. If you would like to know the date of the next meeting, please email Linda Lou at [vttechie@yahoo.com](mailto:vttechie@yahoo.com). Thank you!

### **Mission Leadership Opportunities Available**

The Mission Committee hears reports, coordinates special initiatives, distributes money to local organizations and oversees a wide variety of Mission oriented ministries at First Church. With mission at the heart of Christ's call to love our neighbor, this ministry is vitally important in keeping our focus as Christ's followers. The Mission Committee is seeking two individuals to help the church oversee two vitally important ministries within the church. If you are interested, please let Rev. Mark or Sandy Tallman know. The two positions are....

**Mission Possible Coordinator:** Mission Possible started from a partnership between the Christian Education and Mission Committees. Together they came up with concrete ways that the church, especially our young families and children could learn about the faith by volunteering to help others. The two committees partnered with various social service agencies and arranged for times to volunteer: Dismas House, Respite House, Vermont Food Bank, etc. The Coordinator checks in with the volunteers who lead each initiative with the social service agencies to make sure everything is working fine. They step in to help as needed. This position requires minimal phone time, a periodic report to the Missions Committee and a willingness to step in to help if there is a problem in one of the partnerships. It is honestly not a lot of time.

**Dismas House Coordinator:** Dismas House is one of the social service agencies that we partnered with through the Mission Possible Initiative. Dismas House helps those released from prison to transition to society through housing, counselling and interpersonal skills. Our part of the program is simply to provide a meal on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of every month for about 15 people and then deliver the meal and eat with the residents. The residents are incredibly grateful! This position would solicit volunteers from the church who would like to help cook the meals and deliver them. Talking to people on Sunday morning or having a sign up sheet or placing the opportunity on the Facebook page would most likely provide enough volunteers.

Please think about if you are called to one of these two ways you can volunteer to spread some cheer and spread God’s love.....



### **2017 Jamaica Mission – School Garden Project**

In July, the FCCEJ Jamaica Mission team will travel to St. Thomas, Jamaica to work collaboratively with the local Morant Bay Rotary Club, the local 4-H Club and students, teachers, and parents of the White Horses Primary and Infant School to build a school garden. The garden will include trees and vegetables and will help to feed children in the school canteen, 60% of whom arrive at school hungry each day. With the help of local 4-H and Rotary programs, children and their parents will also be learning about agriculture and ways to prepare the foods grown. Excess produce can be sold by the school to help support school programs. Long term goals include building a greenhouse for horticulture and learning how to process at least one of the products (breadfruit) for flour.

The garden will be created on acreage currently owned by the school. One of the major expenses will be fencing to secure the garden from animals and theft. The Jamaica Mission project will support this financially as we are able, based on our fundraising. Trees are being donated by a Jamaican Trees that Feed program. An irrigation system will be installed, much of which is being donated in-kind by a Jamaican businessman who owns the resort where our team will stay.



Our team will be helping to install the fencing and plant the garden. We are excited to have the opportunity to work side by side with the children, staff, parents and non-profit members in creating a sustainable source of food, education, and potential income for this community! We’re also grateful about being able to collaborate on this project with our church, the Essex Rotary, the Morant Bay Jamaica Rotary, 4H, and the school. We look forward to an ongoing connection with these groups and the school garden project!

### **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](mailto: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 March 22<sup>nd</sup>**. Please contact Dan Fortier ([danny.fortier@gmail.com](mailto:danny.fortier@gmail.com)) or Peter Schmalz ([pnschmalz@comcast.net](mailto: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!

### **April 8<sup>th</sup> 8am – 12pm ~ Volunteer Trip to the Vermont Food Bank in Barre**



Food Sort-A-Thon at the Vermont Food Bank in Barre, Vermont. Volunteers 14 and older are invited to join us for this fun way to help this important cause. This year, we have signed up for 19 slots, which is our biggest volunteer goal ever. We are hoping to invite some community members to join us. So ask some of your friends and neighbors if they would like to participate in some worthwhile volunteering! This is a popular

volunteer activity at First Church because volunteers report that they enjoy getting so much done in a short period of time. This volunteer activity is a fast paced sort-a-thon where we fill boxes with food for senior citizens. We carpool from First Church at 6:45 AM and return by about 1:00 pm. The Food Bank provides coffee and snacks during the break. If you are interested or have any questions, please email Cynthia Kelley [ckelley222@gmail.com](mailto:ckelley222@gmail.com), and I will send you the sign up link and more details on this activity.

There is a new online sign-up process for each volunteer.

Let's make this the best Vermont Food Bank volunteer trip ever with new friends from the community!

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# VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

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## 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, **March 13<sup>th</sup>** from 5:30-7:30 and Thursday afternoon, **March 23<sup>rd</sup>** 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.



## Acolytes

Our schedule is blank...it needs your names! Sign up and be an Acolyte who carries the taper and brings 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. See the calendar on the bulletin board as you walk up to worship and sign up for a future day also.



## Ring the Bell

Have you heard the church bell ring lately? 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 sign up sheet. On the sign up sheet it will tell you which rope to pull and how many times to ring the bell.



## Our Nursery

We welcome Allie Harris & Kathryn Locke as our paid staff in our Nursery! Please stop by the Nursery and welcome them! Due to Allie's work schedule, she cannot be with us all Sundays, so we are lucky to have found Kathryn as well who is a Junior Elementary Ed major at UVM from Danville, VT. 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 encourage volunteers & parents to sign up and help during our 10:15am service, as we could have many as 10 little ones on a given Sunday.



## 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. We are always looking for more volunteers. Is this you? 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 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 4<sup>th</sup> graders after Children's Message on the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 & SH Youth group gatherings. You can also sign up and provide a meal for them.

**Nursery Volunteers for 2<sup>nd</sup> Service:** Be a friendly face to join our paid Nursery staff person during 2<sup>nd</sup> service when our number of children can be as high as 10.

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## OUR CHURCH FAMILY

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### Special Offering for the Month of March: March 26<sup>th</sup>: One Great Hour of Sharing



### March Birthdays

1<sup>st</sup> Dan Fortier 2<sup>nd</sup> Dave Johnson 3<sup>rd</sup> Bart Frisbie, Dorothy Knox, Cameron Starkey, Beth Volker, Violet Wright 4<sup>th</sup> Bruce Blackman, Ethan Gibbs, Sarah Tallman 5<sup>th</sup> Carol Hutcheon 6<sup>th</sup> Bill Bickford, Donna Burnett, Sam Dooley, David Leach, Makaylah Moos, Beth Warren 7<sup>th</sup> Norm Faunce 8<sup>th</sup> Parker Bero, Jen Dooley, Neil Hutcheon, Betty Marthaler, Peyton Webster 9<sup>th</sup> Molly Birmingham, Nicholas Phillippo, Amanda Sinkewicz 10<sup>th</sup> Lisa Clark, Renee Stapleton 11<sup>th</sup> Liam John, Noah Richards 12<sup>th</sup> Ryan Gackenheimer, Josh Sharp 13<sup>th</sup> Dan McMaster, Lucca Montelongo 14<sup>th</sup> Doris Farnsworth 15<sup>th</sup> Tatyana Szymanski 16<sup>th</sup> Jeremy Brennan 17<sup>th</sup> Faith Truax 18<sup>th</sup> Kinue Aboukhalil, Siobhan Pettingill 19<sup>th</sup> Cathie Goodheart, Charlie Kremer, Tyler Vock 20<sup>th</sup> Robert Field 21<sup>st</sup> Toni Taylor 24<sup>th</sup> Emmerson Stapleton 25<sup>th</sup> Caitlin Wark 26<sup>th</sup> Bill Jones, Sean Palmer 27<sup>th</sup> Tom Shearer 28<sup>th</sup> Cornelia Abakah, Maisie Baker, Robert Deal 31<sup>st</sup> Eva Cunningham-Firkey

## Thank You's



Dear First Church, Delicious! What would we do if good people in the community didn't bring us goodies to treat all the families we serve. Your chocolate chip cookies were such a treat! With gratitude, Sharon Keegan, VNA Respite House Administrator

Dear First Church Family, Thank you for the lovely yellow rose that was delivered to me on my birthday. It still looks fresh and pretty! Thank you, Jo Haines

My family and I want to thank the church for all the kindness shown us on the passing of my husband, Ernie. Thanks to the clergy especially for the hours spent by Rev. Mark at the hospital. Thanks to the men's and Sanctuary Choirs and Marie Johnson and Beth Paul for the special music and to John Mauger for his wonderful solos. Thanks to Jen for her help in the office and to Mary Ellen Grove, Mary Richer, Arlene Bickford and Muriel Nutting for serving at the reception. Special thanks for all the hugs I received from members, since our loss. I am so privileged to be part of this church. Sincerely, Rose Drost

### **Special Offering for Outdoor Ministry**

Many thanks to those of you who gave to this special offering on February 19<sup>th</sup>. A total of \$587 was collect to help support our Vermont UCC Outdoor Ministry program will be taken next Sunday. By giving you help the program through scholarship for campers to attend and the resources needed to make a week of camp a fun and wonderful experience for all. Our VT UCC week at Rock Point camp in Burlington is July 30<sup>th</sup> – August 4<sup>th</sup> on the beautiful shore of Lake Champlain for youth going into 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and will help with scholarship for kids to want to attend Horton Center in NH. It is never too late to give (just mark your check for VT UCC OM)...for a special week in God's creation of sharing, connecting, making friends, growing, learning about God in different ways an experience that we pray to have available for everyone!

### **FCCEJ By The Numbers**

**\$5,100** amount raised from the Hannaford Card Program to date

**246** people served by the last two food pantries

**\$980** amount raised for the Endowment in January

**58** number of Eagle Scouts who completed their review through FCCEJ in '16-'17



### **Quilt Square Instructions for 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Wall Hanging**

In talking to a First Church quilter, it was discovered that we need to clarify our instructions. The First Church quilter told us that we needed to specify if the size of the quilt square was the "finished" or "unfinished" size and also that 10 ½ inches is a standard unfinished quilt square. So here's the clarification – the quilt square that is submitted should be 10 ½ inches allowing for a finished size of 10 inches (1/2 inch seams on all sides) It was also discovered after the 150<sup>th</sup> newsletter was distributed with the instructions that we omitted an important item from them – so here's the omission – initials or name of person or group making the square should be placed on the front of the quilt square in some manner. Call or email Ann Gray if you have questions – 878-4088 or [grayann8@aol.com](mailto:grayann8@aol.com)

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