

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



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

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

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**The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction  
United Church of Christ  
March 1, 2017**

**Ash Wednesday Service**

*Lent is a time when we re-examine our relationship to the Divine. We take the time to reflect on our great and all encumbering need to have God at the heart of our lives. Lent encourages us to slow down and see God in our daily lives as well as in the guiding light of the earth in her seasons. Come, let us enter into a journey where our “dust” may be experienced in the fullness of God’s presence both now and into eternity.*

**The Order of Worship**

Prelude

Welcome, Introduction and Opening Words

Call to Worship

Leader: From the primordial mud of creation, God partnered with humanity to bring life to the earth and give order to the universe.

**People: Created first, we shared the stage at the beginning of the world and helped to name all the creatures as God’s magical powers brought form and substance to the meaningless materials of the earth.**

Leader: From the first days until the present, the good soil has continued to nurture us with food, minerals and a foundation upon which all we know is built.

**People: We continue to partner with God in growing food, building homes and trying to shape the world into a community of peace for all creatures.**

Leader: From life to death and beyond, the dust of the earth reminds us of our relationship to God and our ultimate hope in meaning, eternity and love.

**People: We rely upon our God and treasure our relationship with our Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer.**

Leader: Come, let us sing of our God and pray for a meeting with the Divine tonight.

Hymn

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You

#4

All your works with joy surround you, earth and heaven reflect your rays,  
Stars and angels sing around you, center of unbroken praise.  
Field and forest, vale and mountain, flowery meadow, flashing sea,  
Chanting bird and flowing fountain, teach us what our praise should be.

Mortals, join the happy chorus, which the morning stars began;  
Boundless love is reigning o'er us, reconciling race and clan.  
Ever singing, move we forward, faithful in the midst of strife,  
Joyful music leads us onward in the triumph song of life.

Scripture: A Muddy Beginning.....Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-23

Reflections.....Understanding God as Partner

Litany of Partnership

Leader: From the first breath of the universe, you have called us into a mutual relationship of need. We need you for life, guidance and love. You need us for companionship, caring for creation and spreading your love.

People: As beings created from holy mud, we accept the cost and joy of partnering with you as we build your earthly community. Come and allow the touch of your dust to enliven us anew to your presence.

Hymn of Partnership    *God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens*    #556

God, who stretched the spangled heavens infinite in time and space,  
Flung the stars in burning radiance through silent fields of space  
We, your children, in your likeness, share inventive powers with you;  
Great Creator, still creating, show us what we yet may do.

As each far horizon beckons, may it challenge us a new,  
Children of creative purpose, serving others, honoring you.  
May our dreams prove rich with promise, each endeavor, well begun;  
Great Creator, give us guidance till our goals and yours are one.

Scripture: God's Earthly Bounty..... Psalm 65:9-13

Reflections.....Earth's Good Soil Yields Life

Litany of Abundance

Leader: God created a wondrous earth with soil that grows grains, fruits and vegetables with flavors beyond compare. God invites us into the creative process as we provide for the people of the earth. There is enough for everyone if we but partner wisely.

**People:** As stewards of your garden, we accept your call to create and grow good food. We get our hands dirty and revel in the smell of the spring soil, we plow your fields, we prune your trees, we grow your vegetables and each taste brings delight to our senses and sustenance to our bodies. Come and allow the touch of your dust to enliven us anew to your presence.

Hymn of the Abundance      *Come, O Thankful People, Come*      #422

Come, O thankful people come, raise the song of harvest home;  
All is safely gathered in as the winter storm begins;  
God, our Maker does provide for our wants to be supplied;  
Come, to God's own temple, come, raise the song of harvest home.

All the blessings of the field, all the stores the gardens yield,  
All the fruits in full supply, ripened 'neath the summer sky,  
All that spring with bounteous hand scatters o'er the smiling land,  
All that liberal autumn pours, from its rich o'er flowing stores.

These to you, our God, we owe, source from whom all blessing flow;  
And for these our songs we raise, grateful vows and solemn praise.  
Come, then, thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home;  
Come to God's own temple come, raise the song of harvest home.

The Sacrament of God's Abundant Table

*Tonight, we will observe communion by intinction which means that everyone who is able is invited forward to partake of the fruit of God's good earth. There will be red seedless grapes and rich brown gluten free bread. Absolutely everyone is welcome at Christ's table.*

Scripture: 2 Kings 5:1-19.....Naaman's Proclamation and Need for Soil

Reflections.....Finding God's Presence in the Earth

Litany of Grounding

Leader: God cleansed Naaman of his leprosy and taught him about divine power. Naaman proclaimed God's glory and stayed grounded in faith in the good earth.

**People: From the grounding we receive from the earth, our souls are nurtured and grow as if we were plants of the vine. Come and allow the touch of your dust to enliven us anew to your presence.**

Scripture: John 9:1-12.....A Man Born Blind Receives His Sight

Reflections.....The Miraculous Mud of Healing

Litany of Healing

Leader: God's spit mixed with dirt to make a miraculous mud that gave sight to a blind man. God's soil contains healing nutrients of life.

**People: The rich soil and what comes out of it is the scientist's playground of medicines and cures. From balms to life saving cures, nutrients in our soil and what grows out of it offer us possible cures for cancer and other diseases. Come and allow the touch of your dust to enliven us anew to your presence.**

**Hymn of Healing**

***There is a Balm in Gilead***

**#553**

**There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole,  
There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin sick soul.**

**Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain,  
But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.**

**There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole,  
There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin sick soul.**

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14.....The Dust of the Earth Rises

Reflections.....A Message of New Life

Litany of New Life

Leader: The dry bones of Ezekiel remind us that life comes from God and is renewed even in the dried bones of death. Jesus comes from death to life to offer eternity to us all who might otherwise be buried in darkness.

**People: Nature uses our bodies to replenish the earth with the ingredients that gave us life. Like new growth in the wake of a forest's death, Jesus offers us life anew even into eternity. Come and allow the touch of your dust to enliven us anew to your presence.**

Hymn of New Life

*In the Bulb, there is a Flower*

#433

**In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed an apple tree;  
In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!  
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,  
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.**

**In our end is our beginning, in out time, infinity;  
In our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity.  
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,  
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.**

The Application of God's Ashes (forehead or top of hand)

Leader: Come and allow the touch of your dust to enliven us anew to your presence.

"Remember that you are God's dust,  
and to God you shall return."

**People: God shaped and molded us out of the ingredients of the good earth. The rich soils feeds us, heals us and grounds us in the very presence of God. The law of gravity keeps us, like a magnet, ever connected to the source of all being. We long for the day, when like Christ, we rise from the dust to walk and play, talk and eat with our God and Creator in the garden of beauty and abundance beyond measure.**

Leader: May the star dust on our forehead and hands remind us to whom we belong. May we always feel the presence of God and may our faith be renewed daily as we stand on Holy Ground. Amen and Alleluia.

Closing Song from Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young.....Stardust

Pastoral Charge and Benediction

"All are from the dust,  
and to dust all return."  
Scholastic.com



Lenten Services & Spirituality

Special Worship Services: This year we will be having four separate services in Lent.

March 1, 2017 @ 7:00 p.m. Ash Wednesday

April 2, 2017 @ 7:00 p.m. Special Healing Service

April 13, 2017 @ 7:00 p.m. Maundy Thursday

April 14, 2017 @ 3:00 p.m. Good Friday Prayer Vigil begins

Starting on Good Friday, April 14th at 3 p.m. and going until Easter Sunday, April 16th, at 7:00 a.m. in one hour slots, people can sign up to be in the church sanctuary by themselves or as a family or even as a couple of friends. People pray, read scripture, sing hymns, sit and think, enjoy the silence. We offer a prayer list for people to pray for and or scripture texts to read. At each hour, the next person bangs on the front door and changes places.

April 14, 2017 @ 7:00 p.m. Good Friday Service

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

We are thrilled to welcome to our pulpit Rabbi Amy Small. The 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 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.