

FCCEJ CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF SERVICE TO GOD AND COMMUNITY

Formation & Evolution of the Church's Sunday School

The foundation of the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction (FCCEJ) was the Sunday School, organized and conducted by David H. Macomber in 1859. This Sunday School was located in the public school on Park Street in the building called Anna Early House – the former home of the Discovery Museum, currently housing the Chittenden County Supervisory Union.

When the First Congregational Society of Essex Junction was formed in 1867, Mr. Macomber was one of the required signers of the constitution. His Sunday School was absorbed by the Church and he remained superintendent until 1909.

For the next 50 years, the Church School continued to be directed by a superintendent, whose job was to choose the curriculum, set the schedules, and recruit church members as volunteer teachers. By 1958, the Church had formed an Education Committee to find these teachers. By 1963, the Committee name had been changed to Education Council and their job expanded to planning the curriculum along with finding teachers. In 1966, a part-time religious education director was hired. Since then the School has had at different times both volunteer coordinators and hired staff overseeing its operation. By 1981, the Education Council was branching out into adult education. Today, Christian education at First Church, for our children and families, is under the direction of a full-time staff member, Laurie Chipman, along with our Christian Education Committee.

In the beginning, although the Church School was part of First Church, it was self-supporting operating under the direction of the Church School Superintendent with its finances separate from those of the Church. In 1960, the Church School financials showed receipts of \$1,461.99 and expenses of \$1,305.79. In addition, the School had a savings account balance of \$873.45. Eventually, the School budget became a part of the overall Church budget.

There has always been a mission component of the Church School's activities. Review of the School's financials show that in 1955, \$100 went toward Missions. In 1958, that amount was \$124.80. There was no indication of what the mission was in the 1950's, however, in the 1960's, the School was making Thanksgiving baskets for the needy and supporting *One Great Hour of Sharing* (a multi-denominational group providing hunger and disaster relief and clean water resources worldwide). In the 80's and 90's, the School made birthday cards for residents at Woodside, valentines for shut-ins over the age of 80 and residents at the Respite House, and sent Christmas gifts to a Native American reservation in South Dakota.

This mission tradition continues today. Students in the Church School, now called Faith Formation, are annually given three organizations from which they choose one to support.

From 2010-2016, yearly mission collection has ranged from \$748-\$1,194. Both local and international groups have been supported – Ronald McDonald House Charities, COTS, Heifer International, King Street Center, Heavenly Food Pantry and the Curtis Bottom Basic School in Jamaica.

By Ann Gray