

The Spirit at First
December 2017



WELCOME

Our New Associate Pastor:

Joshua John Simon

November 19th was the culmination of almost two years of study, committee work, interviewing, praying and deliberating. First, the congregation decided to stick with a two clergy model; then Council appointed a diverse and dedicated committee who then spent six months creating a “Church Profile.” The profile included information gathered from hundreds of members and collated into a form given to us from the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ. The AP Search Committee then selected worthy candidates, interviewed some of them and through prayer and discernment chose Josh Simon to be our next Associate Pastor. The AP Search committee then coordinated with the HRC and Finance Committees to ensure that our package followed the Personnel Policies of our church as well as the Salary Guidelines of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ. Council affirmed it all and called a Special Congregational Meeting to vote on Josh. The week-end Josh came to preach, there were multiple settings where over 100 people engaged in one on one dialogue with the candidate. Then, both services heard him preach and lead worship. At the Special Congregational Meeting, people had one last opportunity to ask Josh questions, after which, Josh was asked to leave and then we deliberated as a church body. Everyone unanimously voted [roughly 100 people] to call Mr. Joshua John Simon to be our next Associate Pastor. As he walked into the congregation, applause erupted and hearts sang out in celebration of God leading Josh to partner with us in ministry.

As your Senior Pastor, I run again through this process because it includes so many people and various committees. This process was a congregational acclamation and the entire church has taken responsibility for the decision. This is a gift of our denomination and the process still serves us to this day. Together, more than half of our members participated. In this day and age where people often do not agree and tempers flare so easily, it is a tribute to Christ’s Divine Spirit that throughout this process people worked together and even when disagreement arose, worked it out civilly. One gift our church can offer the wider community is this model of unity even in the midst of diversity. It is God’s way, a Way Christ practiced and a way the Spirit challenges us today.

Let us all look forward to getting to know Josh better as we seek ways to learn from and work with him as we work together to make the world a better place. Thrilled at the dedicated and faithful work, I am

Yours in Christ, Mark

SPECIAL SUNDAYS IN DECEMBER

Communion on December 3rd ~ First Service Pass Elements Out, Second Service Process Up

December 3rd ~ First Sunday of Advent ~ Advent Daily Reflections/Devotionals

Advent calendars and devotions for all ages will be available for you beginning November 19th as you walk through the Advent season. Please take one and help prepare yourself for the birth of Christ and set a few moments aside every day to be at one with God.

December 10th ~ Special 2nd Sunday ~ Friendship Sunday

Our sanctuary is decorated beautifully, our message is one of hope and joy, our gatherings are particularly inviting and full of love for our neighbors and we commit ourselves to helping local families have a good holiday by supporting the Giving Tree Program.....What better season to invite a friend to our church and offer them a slice of our very best. On December 10th, the service will focus on Christian Friendship and the force for good that it brings into our lives. Come and enjoy the advent season. Come and enjoy the beautiful sanctuary. Come, and bring a friend and offer them the wonderful gift of our church.

December 17th ~ Christmas Pageant ~ Both Services

Jesus teaches us to enter into a relationship with God as a child. During the season of Advent and Christmas, we welcome a child into the world that will teach us how to live in peace and make the world a better place. What better way of honoring this lesson and God's initiative with the Baby Jesus than to come and see the ageless story retold by our very own children. They have quite a bit to teach us as we hear the story again through their eyes, excitement and joy.

December 17th, 7:00pm ~ A Quiet Service For Healing

During this Christmas season, we should remember that the Christ child brought healing to the world. His love overwhelmed people and principalities and brought them into contact with the most powerful force in the universe: love. Throughout his ministry, Jesus's healing touch brought sight, wholeness, freedom from disease and hope to people who had been downtrodden, broken and lost. Everyone is invited to bring their wounds and anguish to church this night. Rev's Mark & Josh and the Deacons will offer prayers and the laying on of hands for anyone that wants to ask for God's healing. All are welcome.

December 24th ~ Christmas Eve

The Deacons and Rev. Mark have decided to only have **one Worship Service this morning @ 10am.** During the service, we will sing a lot of the old favorite Christmas Carols and hear the story leading up to Christmas. This is also the fourth Sunday in the Advent season so we will light that candle and prepare the manger for the coming of the sacred baby later that night.

December 24th ~ Family Service @ 5pm

Prepare yourself for a service of stories told by historical characters [our staff in costume and in character!] that were present at the Christmas saga. Along with the stories, we will sing the great old carols and of course light our candles. Be sure to come and celebrate this ancient ritual of the church as we usher in one of the most sacred nights in our Christian tradition. This is a great service to invite a family with young children that have no church home.

December 24th ~ Lessons and Carols @ 9pm

The Service of Lessons and Carols is perhaps the most traditional of Christmas Eve services. Our many choirs will offer their musical treasures both before and during the service. We will all sing plenty of carols and listen to the ancient story that still plants hope into our hearts and love into our community.

The story resonates from decades of hearing it like an old friend coming to tea. Warmth enters our Christmas hearts as we remember loved ones no longer present that once stood next to us singing great old hymns of joy. And we of course pray for a light snow as we sing Silent Night and light the Christ Candle.

Come and participate in this ancient ritual of the church.

December 24th ~ A Service of Carols & Communion @ 11:00pm

As Christmas nears and the hustle of shopping is over, a sacred quietness covers the landscape for a few late evening hours, then one can reflect on the meaning of Christ's birth and how our world, families and selves have been molded and influenced by an event of legend. First Church offers a quieter service where reflection, recollection and a shared meal can restore one's soul and offer solace. Led by the beautiful music of Finally at First, we will sing some of the carols and light our candles from the Christ candle as close to midnight as possible. Come and partake of this ancient rite of the Christian Church. Come and settle into the spirit of Christmas. Come and center yourselves on the very presence of God.

DEACON'S CORNER

Happy Advent and Merry Christmas! As the weather outside turns blustery and cold, we look forward to the warmth of friends and family joining together to worship throughout this month with lots of activities and preparation, all culminating in our Christmas services celebrating the birth of Jesus!

In late October, First Church was excited to host Paul Vasile, a well-known church musician, consultant, and composer. Paul ran a day-long workshop for the local church community, and then led music along with Finally @ First for our two services on Sunday. He was very well received, both by musicians and non-musicians alike, as he spread his message of building, renewing, and re-shaping faith communities throughout music and liturgy. Over the last several decades, there has been a surge in contemporary and global Christian music that is not available in the traditional UCC hymnal. F@F typically draws from this more contemporary music library for second service hymns. It is with this in mind that the Deacons are excited to announce that we are going to be purchasing an additional, contemporary hymnal. This will let F@F expand their repertoire with new songs, new styles of music, and best of all, less paper copies! These hymnals will be in our pews along with the New Century Hymnal, look for them in the next month!

We wish you all a very blessed and joyful Advent and Christmas!

Rick Dooley

Co-chair, FCCEJ Deacons

WELCOMING WORDS FROM JOSH

Dear First Congregational,

Thank you for your support and for calling me to be your next Associate Pastor. I am excited to do ministry with you. From the theme from my first sermon at First Congregational, I look forward to continue the work of building up a community of faith dedicated to spreading God's love to one another and to those in our surrounding community. Over the next days, weeks, and months, I look forward to getting to know all of you more.

We are now in the season of Advent, the season of anticipating the arrival/return of the light of Christ. Each Advent the darkness of the physical world due to early night falls and typically gray December skies remind me that we need the light of Christ which shines bright with hope. I am excited to minister and worship with you this Advent and Christmas season, and to hear from you how you anticipate the arrival/return of the light of Christ.

Thank you,

Joshua Simon



DEVON'S PARTING THOUGHTS

Happy December to all my friends at the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction. I pray you are all enjoying the holiday season.

A lot has happened over the last month We have all had the opportunity to welcome our new Associate Pastor, Josh Simon, and rejoice together as FCCEJ moves forward together with him. We also had the opportunity to say goodbye and Erica and I, having fulfilled our roles as bridge ministers, depart to follow God's call to us in the world.

But before I officially head out, I would like to remind you of all the events going on both with our youth group and the wider ministry of the church.

The youth group is currently raising funds for our April mission trip to Houston, TX. In November we had two fund raising events, our Halloween party, which was more than a little fun, if I may say, and our November pie sale. So, keep an eye out. The youth group will enthusiastically be holding more events to help raise money for the mission trip, and I am sure they will make you all proud when they come back from Houston with new experiences and stories to share with all of you.

Faith on Tap will be continuing, even though I will not be around to help organize it. This is one of the advantages of it being an inter-denominational event. Currently, there are five churches that are participating in Faith on Tap: Covenant Community Church decided to throw their hat into the event in October.

The last Faith on Tap was held November 17th. It is held once a month, usually it is the second Friday of the month, 6:00 pm at McGillicuddy's. I would love to see Faith on Tap continue as a ministry of this church. It saddens me that I will not be able to participate in future gatherings, but know that I will definitely be starting a Faith on Tap in the Lamoille county area.

Along those lines, I must say farewell as I transition from my position here as the Bridge Associate Minister into my new role as the settled minister of the Waterville, Bakersfield and Jeffersonville congregations. While it saddens me to take my leave, I do so with a full heart knowing that I have helped our congregation through our transition from Rev. Ryan's time here into Rev. Josh's, and so I want to thank you all for nearly two years in which I have been able to both learn and share with all of you. I truly feel that I have become a far better minister than I ever hoped to be because of all the love and support I received from you all here at FCCEJ.

So, I bid you all a GRAND FAREWELL, MAY WE MEET AGAIN IN THE FUTURE as I move next door and pitch my tent in Jeffersonville.

Devon Lee Thomas: Bridge Associate Minister



Laurie's Lens

So ... have you created your space in your home... a place to go where you can focus on connecting with God...a place where your bible sits open to the word of God. This can be a table that is visible for all to see and walk past or a place that is out of the daily flow and set apart, so you have more of a quiet space away from the traffic flow of your home. Advent begins on December 3rd and our days are darker and cooler and if you are like me, you are already craving light and warmth. Remember that this space is to become a part of your daily routine...a space you visit every day, reflect and connect with God...by yourself or with other members of your family. Yes ... to find the time! Just like putting Sunday morning church and worship on your schedule so that you can be refreshed for the week to come, growing in fellowship and community with others who believe and encourage each other to walk this walk ... we also need to find our solo time to be at one with our God.

As I write this article I am pulling together items for our Advent Event & Decorating that will happen this Sunday, November 19th, sponsored by CE and the Deacons. I'm looking forward to the great fellowship that will follow our congregational vote for our next Associate Pastor. Preparing for the Advent season and then preparing in Advent for Christmas. So much to do and my to do lists are getting longer and longer...for there is another chapter coming to First Church!

Please make sure to look for the Advent devotionals that will be out on Sunday mornings. Please look them over as there are many different ones ...something for all ages as well as different styles...adults, young adults and youth, for children and families...something for everyone. There are also Advent calendars that give you suggestions of something to do as a family as you anticipate the birth of Christ. Let these devotionals help you take a little time each day and set aside time to be with our God. Time to listen and time to pray, breathing in the breath of God as we prepare ourselves for the coming of God's son and help us all with our own spiritual life.

As always there are many ways that you can get involved and connect with others to deepen and enrich your spiritual life...be a mentor and partner up with a third through sixth grader and read some stories from your bible (celebrating on time at our next potluck after church on December 17th), help the junior and senior high youth at pageant rehearsals, volunteer during Faith Formation time and connect with our younger children, give of your time for the Food Pantry or Thrift Shop....so many possibilities.

God comes to us new each year in the form of a baby...growing in us, surprising us, reaching out to hug us, loving us and brighten our lives in unexpected ways. Even though my grandson, Caleb, is in the state of Washington, Brian and I are so grateful for the joy he brings us as we Skype together and can see him in action. Let your spirit be open to new things...push yourself to be engaged and connected...open your eyes to new possibilities and witnessing the love, light and warmth of our God that is all around us.

Hope, Peace, Joy & Love,

Laurie

Christian Education Director

MUSIC



Save The Date ~ 16th Annual Festival of Choirs!

On Saturday, December 2nd at 6pm the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints located at 73 Essex Way, Essex Junction will be hosting the 16th annual Festival of Choirs. This concert features several local church choirs, including Finally @ First, Heavenly Harmony and the Men at First, in an interfaith, musical performance. Rev. Mark will be doing the welcoming remarks. All are invited to this free event for the opportunity to come together as a community to usher in the spirit of Christmas.

Christmas Caroling!

Come spread holiday cheer! We'll see how many vehicles we can fill after the second service on December 17 to bring FCCEJ greetings and some holiday cheer to church family members who we don't get to see very often. Song sheets provided along with at least one guitar for accompaniment. Bring a snack in case we're out for a while - we'll see how far we get down the list before we're all sung out. Questions? Contact Laura Cunningham Firkey.



SAVE THE DATES



November 26th ~ Christmas Pageant Rehearsals

Rehearsals will start in the evenings for Jr & Sr High youth.

December 17th ~ Christmas Pageant ~ Both Services

Potluck lunch to follow after the 10:15am service.

3rd Thursday Dish Share/Potluck for December has been moved to Sunday, 12/17 due to Food Pantry.

December 8th ~ FCCEJ is a Stop on the EJRP Train Hop

Add the church to your list as you participate in the EJ Train Hop, 6-8 pm, and join us for an evening of trains... from Thomas engines to play with to a train movie to watch. This is our second year participating as one of the stops in the downtown Essex Junction and celebrating our community connections. Also on this night is the tree lighting at the 5 Corners at 6:15pm.



December 9th ~ The Ordination of Joshua John Simon

Now that Josh has gained employment at FCCEJ, he can be ordained in the United Church of Christ. Josh's ordination will take place at the Plymouth UCC Church in Milwaukee WI on December 9th. Once ordained, Josh will be able to be called Rev. Josh and be able to wear liturgical paraments or the colored stoles that hang around your shoulders. He will also be authorized to officiate at all the rituals and sacraments wherever he may go. Rev. Mendes will represent our church and bring greetings on our behalf.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE



So, what's the deal with those buttons Church Members have been seen wearing that say Our Home, or Our Future, or Our Time. Well, if you put them all together in that order its really comes out as "Our Home, Our Future, Our Time." This is the theme that a newly formed Capital Campaign Committee has developed to talk about growing concerns for the conditions of the Church and our other buildings and what we must do to be good stewards of our physical infrastructure.

By now you should have received a letter written by Dave Johnson and Kaki McGeary who have volunteered to co-chair the Capital Campaign Committee. The letter went to all church Members and friends announcing the formation of a Committee to evaluate various building related issues and determine whether or not to recommend to the congregation that a fundraising campaign be launched to address these concerns. This Committee is comprised of volunteers and was assembled at the request of the Church Council and Trustees who are concerned about some troubling aspects of the condition of our buildings. The job of the Capital campaign Committee is to gather and provide all necessary information about the condition of our properties and the projected cost of needed repairs or improvements. The Committee will then get that information out to all Church Members and friends to prepare the congregation for a vote on whether or not to actually authorize the implementation of a Capital Fundraising Campaign this winter. Members will vote on whether or not to authorize such a campaign at the Church's Annual Meeting on January 28.

There will be a lot of additional information provided to you over the weeks ahead, including three special informational sessions on Sunday January 7 and 14, as well as in the evening on Wednesday, January 10th. But you don't have to wait until then to learn more, just walk up to one of your fellow Members wearing a badge and say, "hey, what's up with this Capital Campaign I'm hearing about!"

CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES



Music Time During Faith Formation

Cherubs ~ Our Preschool & Kindergarteners gather in the Youth Lounge, sometimes our junior and senior high youth join them as 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 their music leader.

Faith Formation Sunday School Calendar

Preschool – 6th Grade

December 3rd ~ Holy Communion Sunday ~ Spiritual Friends ~ Intergenerational Worship

December 10th ~ Faith Formation Class time

December 17th ~ All in worship for Pageant Sunday

December 24th ~ one morning service at 10am ~ all in worship

Evening services of 5pm Family, 9pm Carols and 11pm Communion

Bible Partners with 3rd – 6th graders

Our bible partners are slowly finding each other. If you are a 3rd – 6th grader who would like to partner up and become more familiar with your bible, please see Laurie. Whether you are here at church every week or away, you can participate. Continue reading your bible, either from the readings or your Advent devotion and then on Dec. 17th, Pageant Sunday, we will celebrate our reading and time together at our potluck meal after 2nd service worship. Any questions...please contact Laurie.



Hands-On Mission Project Sundays

On November 26th our Faith Formation put together Church World Service hygiene kits that will be delivered to the CWS drop off site at Waterbury UCC. Our December calendar is quite full so our next Hands-On Sunday will be on January 21st. More specific news to come in the January newsletter.



Faith Formation Sunday School Offering 2017

Humane Society of Chittenden County relies completely on outside donations to stay open and help give pets a home in the weeks and months to come.



Your 2017 Total is now up to \$1107.36

\$1 a week can go a LONG way!

Remember to bring your Sunday School offering each week. Faith Formation Sunday School envelopes are in the pews and on the bench in the Narthex with our worship items. Please use them so your offering is not confused with the regular church offering and it will go towards our giving to the Humane Society.

Junior Youth @ FCCEJ

Our 5th & 6th graders meet ONCE a month from 11:30-1:30pm

Mission Focus ~ Meal ~ Fellowship/Games

Mark your calendars!

December 3rd ~ Group Building Games ~ Food ~ Mission Activity

January 7th ~ next Junior Youth





***First Church Youth Programs are Parent Supported!
1 to 3 parents/volunteers are needed at each youth group gathering!***

Youth Group bulletin boards can be found in the staff hallway. Please walk by and sign up or be in touch with one of the staff. Thank you!
All youth and volunteers need to have updated paper work on file each year.

Please be sure to mark your calendar for our upcoming events and Save the Dates!

Reminder to stay active and be engaged!

- Help a neighbor or a friend
- Bring your offering with you for 9am worship and put it in the ‘color me’ envelopes - support the Humane Society of Chittenden County
- Find ways and places to connect with your God & have Spirit time

November 26th & Dec. 3rd ~ Christmas Pageant Rehearsals Begin ~ 6-8pm

Bringing back from 2010...*I wonder as I wander... A Christmas Play* by Karen Mendes



The Jr. & Sr. High youth will be reading through the pageant on November 26th from 6pm to 8pm and parts will be decided on. Please mark your calendars and come join us! If you can't make November 26th, please share with Laurie your interest in a speaking part (small or big) or help behind the scenes and be in touch with her. Adult volunteers are needed to help assist with set, costumes and running of lines at all rehearsals.

On December 10th – rehearsal is from 11:30 – 2:00pm
(preschool – 6th join in for the first 20 minutes to learn their part)

Saturday, December 16th – dress rehearsal - TBA

***Pageant Sunday will be on December 17th during both services - all youth arrive at 7:45am
Potluck lunch to follow after the 10:15am service***

FELLOWSHIP & LEARNING

Advent Daily Reflections/Devotionals

Advent begins this year on Sunday, December 3rd and runs for four Sundays as we approach the birth of Christ on Christmas Eve. Advent calendars and devotions will be available for you to pick up starting on November 19th, for all ages, as you walk through the Advent season. Please take one and help prepare yourself for the birth of Christ and set a few moments aside every day to be at one with God. Also on this day is our Advent Decorating Event that will be held after our second service, beginning with a potluck





Essex Eats Out Community Dinners Continue...

1st Friday of Every Month ~ December 1st

Come - Help – Eat www.essexeatsout.org



JOY (Just Older Youth)

A group for the over 55 crowd (both men & women) meets the first Thursday of each month at 12 noon in the Marvin Lounge. If you have any questions about the group or need a ride please call the office. Please join us on Thursday, December 7 at noon in Marvin Lounge. We will enjoy our annual Christmas Movie and snacks. (We will have several to choose from). Bring a favorite snack to share and a friend.

Coffee Clatter @ Martone's

Every Friday at 8:05 a.m., Rev Mark 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. We meet for one hour ~ join us!



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. This month the date is **Friday, December 15th**. 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 Rev. Mark's delicious jam...yum.



Yoga @ First Now Offers TWO WEEKLY CLASSES!

Jonah is offering two classes this winter on Monday PLUS he has added a Thursday class as well.

Both classes will meet in the gym from 5:30-6:45. All levels from beginner to experienced are absolutely welcome. You can bring your own mat or borrow one of Jonah's. Classes are free but donations are gratefully accepted for FCCEJ.



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, December 16: Women of FCCEJ join us for our annual breakfast Christmas program at 10am at Elaine Helmstutler's home at 12 Pleasant St. We will have a Crazy Socks Yankee Swap, filling one of the socks with candy, a small re-gift, or some funny gift. Wrap the socks or place in a small gift bag. Don't put your name on your gift. Last year we did this and had the most wonderful time discovering how unique pigs can be thanks to Joyce Jacobs. Please bring a breakfast snack to share.

Noontime Book Group

This month The Noontime Book Group will meet on Dec. 21 at Joanne Irwin's home for a pot luck lunch at noon. We will continue our tradition of sharing favorite Christmas short stories, poems or novellas. Just choose one you love, either new or one from your childhood and plan to share it with the group. Please RSVP to Joanne at jirwin1000@aol.com.



Faith On Tap



On Friday, December 15th at McGillicuddy's in Essex Jct, FCCEJ will be continuing our inter-church Faith On Tap with United Methodist Church of Jericho, Essex Methodist Church and Good Shepard Lutheran Church and you are all invited to join us!

This is an opportunity to get to know other people of faith from two different religious traditions in a safe and friendly environment where together we can practice the time honored Christian tradition of getting together over a beer, or a non-alcoholic beverage, depending on your taste. Help us build bridges and more importantly build friendships as these four congregations meet together on a Friday night. This event will be monthly so if you cannot make one, come the next time!

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, **since that is Christmas Day, December 25th we will meet next on January 22nd** 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 currently reading our next book which is "Grounded" by Diana Butler Bass. There are copies available in the office. Join us for fellowship and great discussion!



Christmas Pageant

**December 17th ~ Third Thursday ~ moves to ~
Third Sunday in December**
Family Dish Share on Christmas Pageant Sunday

Due to Food Pantry on the 3rd Thursday this month, we are moving our all church family potluck to 11:30am on Sunday, December 17th after the Christmas Pageant. Join our fellowship time, bring a dish to share and share stories about Christmas Pageants from years past and today!

MISSION OPPORTUNITIES

Missions Moment

The Missions Committee continues to do valuable work each month when we meet. Here is an update on our activity since the last update earlier this year.

In February we gave \$150.00 towards the supplies for Easter Baskets for our homebound members.

In March we gave \$500.00 to House with a Heart.

In April we gave \$500.00 to JUMP for the purchase of gas gift cards, \$250.00 to Lucy's House and \$2100.00 to the Jamaica Mission Trip.

In May we gave \$350.00 to Essex CHIPS for their Healthy Snack Program and \$500.00 to Meals on Wheels (local branch).

In September we matched funds from the congregation in the amount of \$500.00 to the UCC Emergency Fund-this ended up totaling \$5500.00 after all the donations were in. We also gave \$300.00 to the FCCEJ Pastor's Fund for the purchase of Hannaford Gift Cards.

We are still at work on designating recipients for the remainder of our money. Stay tuned for the final update in the future.

Got Coats?



Winter Clothing Drive – Thank you, thank you, thank you! We had a very successful Winter Coat Drive! 210 coats, 28 snow pants and 18 sets of boots in addition to numerous hats, mittens, gloves, scarves, fleeces and vests were collected. On November 16th, in conjunction with the Heavenly Food Pantry distribution, 129 people were outfitted for winter! Also, 10 coats were donated to the Dismas House with the remainder of the winter gear being donated to Sweetwaters for distribution at their

Thanksgiving Dinner they put on for the community! A BIG thank you to our volunteers, Faith Truax, Barb Smith, Grace Jones, Marlene Frank, Muriel Nutting and Mary Winslow. Thank everyone for their generosity in helping our neighbors in need!

The Giving Tree Is Here!

Perhaps you have noticed the Christmas tree that is set up in the narthex. It holds tags for approximately 50 children in Essex Junction and Essex Town. The tags identify a gift for a child and for each child there are three tags. Two of the tags ask for gifts of clothing that the child needs and the third tag asks for a book, game, toy or gift card for the child. There will be a new group of tags this year. Several folks in our congregation have asked for all of the tags for one child. There are red ribbons holding all three tags for a few of the kids. All of the other tags have green or gold ribbons. Please consider taking a tag or two to bring a smile and some Christmas cheer to a local youngster. When you take a tag(s), be sure to sign your name on the sheet by the tree identifying the tag number(s) that you have taken. This is so we can send gentle reminders if we don't see the gifts returned by the due date. Wrapped gifts, with the tags securely attached, need to be returned to the church no later than Dec. 10. We will be distributing the gifts on Dec. 15. Families that we help have expressed how much they appreciate the gifts we give their children and the joy that abounds on Christmas Day.



FCCEJ Volunteer Trip to the Vermont Food Bank in Barre!

A great chance for volunteer work for the holidays! You are invited to volunteer on **Saturday, December 2, 2017 from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm** for a food sort-a-thon at the Vermont Food Bank in Barre, Vermont. This year, we have signed up for 12 slots, aged 14+. This is a popular volunteer activity at First Church because volunteers report that they enjoy getting so much volunteering 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, although we occasionally help with other activities. Those who choose to carpool will meet at First Church at 6:45 AM and return by about 1:00 pm. The Food Bank provides coffee and snacks during the break. We hope you'll help Vermonters in need! Email Cynthia Kelley cynthiak222@gmail.com for the sign up link and more details or questions on this activity.

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 December 27th**. Please contact Peter Schmalz (pnschmalz@comcast.net) if interested. There is also a sign-up sheet in the hallway entering Fellowship Hall. 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 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 rewarding mission!



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

December 8th ~ EJRP Train Hop



The Essex Junction Recreation & Parks Train Hop is on December 8th from 6-8pm this year. This is our second year participating as one of the stops in the downtown Essex Junction and celebrating our community connections. Are you free that night? We are looking for volunteers to be greeters, donate snacks or pop popcorn, set up our kid train sets, etc.

Interested in helping in any way ...please see Laurie. Also on this night is the tree lighting at the 5 Corners at 6:15pm and Santa at the Teen Center.

Heavenly Food Pantry Needs Donations

We are in need of baked beans, tuna fish, cereal and canned fruit to restock our Food Pantry shelves.

The December Food Pantries will be on Monday evening, **December 11th**, 5:30-7:30 and Thursday afternoon, **December 21st**, 2-6pm.

We are all set for EGG CARTONS so please hold onto them for now.



Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop Can Use Fall/Winter Donations

Regular Hours: 10am-3pm Tues & Wed, 4-8pm Thurs

Also open: December 2nd, 9am-12pm

Fall/Winter Donations can be dropped off at the Shop anytime.

Faith Formation Class Leaders for 2017-18

Preschool – Jenny Bourn, Trista Acebo, *Kindergarten* - Sue Conti, _____

First & Second Grade –Alison VanSteensburg, _____

Third & Fourth Grade – Erna Deutsch, Lisa Clark, *Fifth & Sixth Grade* – Laurie Chipman

Junior & Senior High (7th - 12th grade) – Erica Garvey, Devon Thomas



Volunteer for 2017-18 Faith Formation Programs

We would love to add a few more names to our list. If you have interest in helping lead a class, please be in touch with Laurie, Pastor Mark or a member of the CE team.

Faith Formation Class Leaders & Helpers – be a leader or helper in one of our classes from preschool up through senior high youth. Weekly emails go out keeping you connected and sending you plans for the classes on Sunday mornings. All items are gathered for you.

Here are a few more ways you can get involved....

Spiritual Friends – join Laurie on the First Sundays of the month on the 2nd floor and we'll have great conversations with the kids. Read a story, have snack, Godly Play time with playdough mats, Faith Talk circle conversations, etc. A little bit of everything happens on this day and everyone returns to worship for Communion.

Hands-On Mission Sunday Helpers – preschool up through senior high are together for a time of mission hands-on project where all get to work together and hear about a mission that we support.

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.



Ushering & Greeting for Worship Services

Our committee is writing to inform the congregation of a problem in getting people to usher and greet. Lining up volunteers to usher and greet has become a challenge. Phone calls and emails sometimes get no responses. We are asking for your help by volunteering to usher and greet. You can sign up at <http://www.signupgenius.com/go/20f0e4facae2daafe3-ushergreeter> make a note in the friendship book or contact Ann Marie Sullivan 879-6044 ambs6155@comcast.net. One possibility is to change the usher and greeting process and have people step up just before a service to hand out bulletins or have self service where people pick up their own bulletins from a table as they enter. Thank you for your help!



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.



Our Nursery



Parents ~ we ask that you be mindful of our Safe Conduct Guidelines and help us keep to our child ratio (2 children to 1 adult). Please stay in the Nursery with your child if you see that our ratio will be off. If you would like to help in the Nursery on a consistent basis, please be in touch with Nursery staff or Laurie. Our Nursery is one of the first places that our little ones and their parents feel the love of God and learn that the church is a safe place to be. Thank you for your help.

OUR CHURCH FAMILY

December's Special Offering is December 17th for the Christmas Fund

December Birthdays

4th Judy Larrabee 5th Anita Guild 6th Irving Bartlett, Joanne Irwin 7th Tom Helmstutler 8th Russ Kinaman
9th Andrea Taatjes 10th Cohen Ploof, Alex Poratti, Mary Winslow 11th Pete Firkey 12th Tom Frank,
Shirley Kent 13th Kate Field 14th Deb Holland, Emma Parker, Hannah Waligory 15th Frank Grenon,
Brian Hoffman, Zachary Schmalz, Heidi Smith 16th Munroe Shearer 18th Wyatt Bessett-Mauger,
Elizabeth Birmingham 19th Monica John 20th Rebecca Frank, Sheldon Frank, LindaLou Parker
21st David Dewey 22nd Donna Ehler-Vock 25th Fletch Coolidge, Terry Stein 27th Ben Gilliam,
Alice Williams 28th Kaelani Lyn Perkins 29th Bill Adams, Christine Czarny, Elijah Palmer
30th Kurt Tallman 31st Angela Abakah, Carley Goedken, Samantha Poratti



Christmas Poinsettias

Order your poinsettias for Christmas services in memory or honor of a loved one or special event. They will be the same as last year, \$12.95 and come in red, white, pink and a marbled variety. Let Jen know your preferences and your dedication will be remembered in the Christmas bulletins.

Thank You's

Thank you and the members of your congregation for the invitation to participate in the 150th Anniversary Celebration of the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction. I so enjoyed meeting old friends who are members of your church and making new friends at the event. Congratulations on your 150th anniversary and, as was said, "here's to 150 more"! Sincerely, Linda Myers



Dear FCCEJ, Thank you for providing us with the resources to make healthy food for our activities. Your generosity was greatly appreciated. The Vermont Commons School Community (Our own Cameron Starkey goes to VCS and they spent two days here in our kitchen cooking healthy food with the students)

A heartfelt thank you to everyone and all who coordinated a lovely dinner celebration. I appreciate being included and thoroughly enjoyed myself. It was an added benefit to see Carl as the 2nd longest member in attendance! Thanks again, Lori Houghton



Vermont Outdoor Ministry

Many thanks for supporting kids attending camp this summer and keeping OM in VT alive and well. www.hortoncenter.org

Dates will soon be picked for the 2018 summer season. Keep watching the Outdoor Ministry bulletin boards at church! 2018 Camp brochures for Horton Center and Silver Lake CC will be arriving in early January or February.

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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

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