

*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.”

**One Church Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452**

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Website: www.fcej.org

Facebook: First Congregational Church of Essex Junction UCC



Open and Affirming means that we welcome everyone to First Church including our GLBTQ brothers and sisters.

The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction
United Church of Christ
December 24, 2017
Fourth Sunday of Advent

A Welcoming Community,

Accepting and Serving All

In the Spirit of Christ

Prelude

Pastorale
He Shall Feed His Flock
The Christ Child

Karg-Elert
Handel
Hailing

An Extravagant Welcome

No matter who you are
or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome in this place.

Welcome Greeting and Announcements

Our Ministers will welcome everyone to church and highlight events in our shared life, then the Deacon on Duty will welcome everyone and invite people to raise significant celebrations to the congregation or introduce yourself or guests. We encourage everyone to sign the Friendship Books.

Musical Introit

See The Little Baby

Swift

Call to Worship (from the hymn, *Return, My People*)

Leader: Return, my people, Israel, with penitential tear; just as prophets did foretell the advent of Emmanuel, God's reign on earth is near! God's reign on earth is near!

People: Fear not, beloved, hearken now: our God has done great things! Your vindication shall pour down like rain upon the barren ground. You bring glad tidings. You bring glad tidings.

Leader: Then to the faithful of the earth the call of God rings clear: "Return, my people, claim your worth, preparing for your Savior's birth; my reign on earth is near. My reign on earth is near."

People: Let us prepare for Christ's birth together.

*Deacon's Prayer of Invocation

*Opening Carol

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

#116

Lighting the Fourth Advent Candle

Children's Message

*Please return to your seats after the message, there are hands-on items in the Narthex.
Manu is in the Nursery with audio and the service is streamed to Fellowship Hall.*

**What child is this, who laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary.**

**Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary.**

**Bring gifts of incense, gold, and myrrh; come, join in jubilation;
The Holy Child, though meek and mild, has come with god's salvation.
Raise, raise the song on high, the mother sings her lullaby;
Joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the child of Mary!**

Pastoral Prayer & Unison Lord's Prayer ("trespasses")

Prayer Requests Offered within the Community

A Time of Silence for Personal Prayer

Unison Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the
kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.**

Congregational Musical Response.....*Comfort, Comfort O My People* #101

**"Comfort, comfort O my people, tell of peace," thus says our God;
Comfort those whose hearts are shrouded, mourning under sorrow's load.
Speak unto Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;
Tell them that their sins I cover, and their warfare now is over.**

Offering Our Gifts to God

Invitation, Offering and Prayer of Dedication

Anthem *Ave Maria*

Gounod

Doxology.....*As With Gladness Folk of Old* #159

**As with gladness folk of old, did the guiding star behold;
As with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious Lord, may we ever more your splendor see.
As they offered gifts most rare, at the manger plain and bare,
So may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to you, our heavenly king.**

Gospel Reading..... John 1:1-18

Advent Meditation

Waiting for the Light

Rev. Josh Simon

***Closing Hymn *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* #144**

**Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the Christ-child bring;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinner reconciled!"
Joyful, all you saints arise, join the triumph of the skies;
with the angel host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"**

**Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time the Savior comes, off-spring of the Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh, the God-head see; hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased on earth with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.**

**Hail the Bearer of God's peace! Hail the Sun of righteousness,
Light and life our Savior brings, risen with radiant, healing wings.
Mildly laying glory by, born that we no more may die,
Born to raise us all from earth, born to give us second birth.**

Benediction

Pastoral Benediction

***Sung Community Benediction**

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You

#4

*Postlude:

Swiss Noel

Daquin

*Please stand if you are able.

Deacon: Lori Giannuzzi
Ushers & Greeters: Linda Bogardus & Sylvia Nyhagen

The Poinsettias on the Altar are Given by:

Carol Bishard in loving memory of Thomas Michael Hunn

Carol Bishard in loving memory of Bruce Bishard

The Chipman Family for family near & far

The Dooley Family in memory of Dorothy & Joseph Pine and Harry Dooley

Norma Edwards in memory of Lloyd Edwards

Diana & Rich Higgins in loving memory of their parents and grandparents

Joanne Irwin in memory of loved ones

Connie Marshall in loving memory of her father, Edward Rhame

Betty & Lily Marthaler in honor of great-grandma's, Betty & Lillian

The Parker Family in loving memory of Erica Ann

The Polanshek Family in loving memory of John Polanshek

June Silverman in memory of Ron and loved ones

Sally Turner in loving memory of family

*FCCEJ remembers its beloved members who have passed in 2017
Ernest Wilfred Drost Jr., Rachel Herbig Jarvis, William F. Meyer,
Daniel Kevin McMaster, Hazel Ruth Billheimer and Doris 'Dodie' Farnsworth*

First Church's Prayer Ministry

Carol Mauger	Jack Lucas	Les
David Tibbetts	Judy Janwich	Mike Heston
Cathleen & Lilianna	Lilly and Donald	Jaime Real
Shelley Marshall	Alexa	Don Mable
Shirley Boucher	Roger Kalar	Acacia Moore & family
Donna	Ruth Legendre	Emily Schueren & family
Sharon Kennedy	Mickey McKenzie	Campbell Miller

Please let us know if you would like a name added to our Prayer Ministry, you can write it on the Friendship Pad, call or email the office or send us a note, welcome@fccej.org

* * * **TODAY** * * *

2018 Flower Chart is UP TODAY!

In the hallway out of Fellowship Hall, choose a date to remember loved ones or honor a special date in your family! \$34 for the flowers and you can take them or leave them for us to find someone who needs some love!



TODAY ~Pick up Your Pledge Envelopes

If you ordered envelopes with your pledge to FCCEJ they are in the Fellowship Hall on one of the tables.

TONIGHT ~ Christmas Eve Services

5:00 pm ~ Family Service

9:00 pm ~ Lessons and Carols ~ *There will be a mini-concert of pre-service music joyfully presented by Heavenly Harmony, Men at First & Sanctuary Choir beginning at 8:45pm*

11:00 pm ~ Carols & Communion



Early Bird Calcutta Tickets On Sale

Early Bird Tickets for the Cabin Fever Calcutta on March 10, 2018 are on sale until January 15th. By purchasing an Early Bird ticket, you are entered into a drawing for a \$100 cash prize, to be awarded the night of the Calcutta. Stop by the table in Fellowship Hall and get yours today.

*** * * Children, Youth & Family Announcements * * ***

Faith Formation Sunday School Offering 2017

Your 2017 Total is now up to \$1146.61

Humane Society of Chittenden County relies completely on outside donations to stay open and helps give pets a home while waiting for their new homes. *On January 21st you will be voting for your 2018 Offering Choice on our Hands On Mission Sunday! Join us!*

Keep remembering to bring your offering
\$1 a week can go a long way!

Bring your Faith Formation Sunday School offering each week and use the envelopes in the pews. It is really important to use them so we know where you want your \$ to go.



Faith Formation Sunday School Calendar

Preschool – 6th grade

December 24th ~ 10am worship only ~ all in worship

December 31st ~ all in worship

January 7th ~ Holy Communion Sunday ~ Spiritual Friends ~ Intergenerational Worship

January 14th ~ Faith Formation Class time



Junior Youth @ FCCEJ

Our 5th & 6th graders meet ONCE a month from 11:30-1:30pm
Mission Focus ~ Meal ~ Fellowship/Games

January 7th ~ Junior Youth Group ~ 11:30-1:30pm



High School Youth Group

Our FIRST BIG High School Youth Group event is January 12th-13th. This will be a High School Youth Group Lock-in Kick-off with Pastor Josh. All high school youth, 9th-12th, are invited to attend. Arrive to the church at 7pm on Friday, Jan 12th and leave 9am on Saturday, Jan 13th. Please, wear clothes comfortable for painting.

For part of our time, we will paint the Youth Lounge.

Parsonage Painting Party

January 19, 20, and 21st. The parsonage needs to be painted before much needed new carpet is installed. We are going to paint and eat snacks, so we need painters and/or snack providers. Sign-up sheet next to Josh's office (blue office).



* * * **Opportunities To Volunteer & Donate** * * *

Dismas House Meal Volunteers Needed!

Looking for volunteers to provide dinner for 10-15 residents & staff.
Great opportunity to grab a couple friends
and serve on Wed, Dec 27th.



**Next Food Pantry days are Monday, January 8th, 5:30-7:30pm
and Thursday, January 25th, 2-6pm**

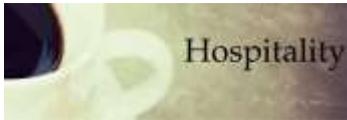
We are in need of baked beans, tuna fish, cereal, jam & jelly and
canned fruit to restock our cabinets.

In Need of Long Red Toboggan Sleds to Borrow

For our clients to bring their Food Pantry bags home
in the winter-the shopping carts don't work well!



Hospitality Needs YOU!



The Hospitality Committee is extremely low on members and
helpers. Unfortunately, this has and will result in coffee hour
not taking place after each Sunday service on a consistent
basis. If you are willing to volunteer your time to support the
hospitality work, please contact Jackie Parks, Hospitality Chair at 324-9206. Thank you.

Thanks From The Giving Tree!

Again this Christmas season, the many families who received gifts for
their children through the Giving Tree program have expressed so often
how very grateful they are for the generosity of our congregation. One
mother stated that our gifts mean that her children would wake up on
Christmas morning with their voices filled with excitement and
joy. Another stated that our gifts would be the only ones that her child would
receive. It can be difficult for us to imagine what it must be like to struggle to celebrate
the spirit of giving at Christmas. Thank you to each of you for bringing joy to so many
during this season of Christ's birth.



Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop

Regular Hours: 10am-3pm Tues & Wed, 4-8pm Thurs
First Saturday, January 6th 9am-12pm

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

Special Christmas & Nearly New Section

Winter Potluck, January 15th, 6pm, Marvin Lounge

*** * * SAVE THE DATES * * ***



“Our Home, Our Future, Our Time”
Capital Campaign Information Meetings

Sunday, January 7th & 14th @ 9:45 & 11:30 (after both services)

Wednesday, January 10 @ 6pm

Please join us for a Capital Campaign Information Meeting to learn all about the proposed capital projects and budget! Childcare will be available. A preliminary list of proposed projects was developed by our Trustees, with lots of input from Church Council, committees, and the congregation during a feasibility study last fall. Our church has been working with John Alden and his architectural firm Scott & Partners to develop more detailed plans and cost estimates. We look forward to sharing this information at the January meetings, and hearing your feedback! Also be sure to mark your calendars for our **Annual Meeting on January 28**, when the congregation will be voting on whether to move forward with the campaign!

January 28th ~ Ask the Pastor Sunday Worship/Annual Meeting ~ 10am
worship/11:15am meeting

February 17th ~ Praise-a-Palooza : Soup and Songs of Praise

FCCEJ and Finally @ First are thrilled to again be hosting this fun evening for all ages! Mark your calendars for Saturday night, February 17th and join us at 5:30pm for a Soup Dinner followed at 6:30pm by an evening of praise music by local worship bands. Join us in welcoming bands from area churches and our very own Finally @ First. A free will offering will be taken. Bring a friend!



March 10th ~ Jamaica Bound Calcutta

March 11th ~ Pretzel Sunday

April 1st ~ Easter Sunday

May 14th ~ Mother's Day & Jazz Sunday

THIS WEEK: December 24th– 30th

- TODAY:** **10:00am Worship Service-One Service / Sanctuary**
1:00 - 2:00 pm Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall
5:00 pm Family Service / Sanctuary
9:00 pm Lessons & Carols / Sanctuary
11:00 pm Carols & Communion / Sanctuary
- MONDAY:** 9:00 - 4:00 pm Nepali Community Worship / Sanctuary & Fellowship Hall
12:00 noon Brown Bag / Marvin Lounge
5:30 - 6:30 pm Group Victory / Youth Lounge
- TUESDAY:** **8:30 - 10:00 am Sermon Talk Back / Marvin Lounge**
12:00 noon Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall
- WEDNESDAY:** 9:30 - 11:00 am Tai Chi / Fellowship Hall
12:00 noon Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall
5:30 - 7:00 pm Finally @ First / Fellowship Hall
7:00 - 8:30 pm Boy Scouts / Fellowship Hall
- THURSDAY:** 10:00 - 11:30 am Art Class / Gym / Third Floor
12:00 noon Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall
5:30 - 6:45 pm Yoga with Jonah / Gym
6:15 - 7:00 pm Heavenly Harmony / Sanctuary
7:00 - 8:30 pm Sanctuary Choir / Sanctuary
- FRIDAY:** 12:00 noon Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall
- SATURDAY:** 9:00am - 12:00 pm Nepali Community Worship / Sanctuary & Fellowship Hall
1:00 - 2:00 pm Brown Bag / Fellowship Hall
1:30 - 4:00 pm Marie Johnson-Organ / Sanctuary

MINISTRY AT FIRST CHURCH

Church Administrator: *Jen Dooley* [welcome@fceej.org]
Interim Music Director: *Marie Johnson* [mdjkiln@gmail.com]
Christian Education Director: *Laurie Chipman* [lchipman@fceej.org]
Associate Pastor: *Rev. Josh Simon* [jsimon@fceej.org]
Senior Pastor: *Rev. Mark Mendes* [mmendes@fceej.org]

Music Ministry

Cherub Music: *Jenny Bourn* [jennybourn4@gmail.com]
Currier Bell Choir Director: *Carolyn Harris* [899-6759]
Finally @ First Director: *Rick Dooley* [rickdooley5@gmail.com]
Heavenly Harmony Director: *Marie Johnson* [mdjkiln@gmail.com]
Joyful Noise: *Jessica Moos* [jessicamoosvermont@gmail.com]
Men At First Director: *Bill Bickford, Jr.* [bill.bickford@aol.com]
Sanctuary Choir Director: *Marie Johnson* [mdjkiln@gmail.com]

Committee / Church Officer Contacts

President, Chair Human Resources Committee: *Brenda Crocket* [881-5253]
Vice President, Chair Finance & Pastoral Relations: *Carl Wermer* [879-7650]
Treasurer & Historian: *Ann Gray* [878-4088]
Asst. Treasurer: *Dan Petherbridge* [879-0261]
Financial Secretary: *Pat Seaver* [879-4445]
Clerk: *Alison Wermer* [879-7650]
Christian Education: *Jenny Bourn* [802-309-7441]
Communications: *Kevin Dorn* [878-3696]
Deacons: *Rick Dooley* [578-0229] *Mike Bottamini* [879-0763]
Hospitality: *Jackie Parks* [324-9206]
Missions: *Sandy Tallman* [879-0665]
Music: *Judy Larrabee* [236-0604]
Nominating: *Carl Wermer* [879-7650]
Stewardship: *Kathy Finnie* [878-3696]
Trustees: *Kevin Meilleur* [238-4041]
Ushering: *Michael Sullivan* [879-6044]

Recognized Groups at First Church

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop [879-6552] *Sue Wood* suewood@myfairpoint.net or
Linda Bogardus at lbogardus@myfairpoint.net
Heavenly Food Pantry Contact: *Valerie Gabert* [879-0109]
Called To Care Contact: *Beth Volker* [879-4708]
Nepali Christian Community Contact: *Dan Raut* [310-4371]
Craft Fest Committee Contact: *Linda Bogardus* [lbogardus@myfairpoint.net]

Sunday, December 24, 2017

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:26-38

Birthing a Promise

Is nothing impossible? Clearly Christmas time calls forth flagrant impossibility! Virgins conceive, old ladies are pregnant, angels appear and disappear. Not to mention all those characters—shepherds, sheep, choirs of angels stamped into figurines. Though there probably won't be a cute porcelain reproduction of a pregnant Elizabeth under your tree. Where is Elizabeth anyway, whose pregnancy is also described as miraculous, in all our Advent and Christmas storytelling?

Elizabeth is described not only as “old” but also barren. It's in her body that God begins this rhapsody of excitement building to Mary's song. In her is planted the “seed” of the great announcer of the new age—that realm-of-God-guy, the caller forth of hope—John the Baptist. Does she have a role in our annual Christmas pageants? Probably not. Elizabeth is like many older women in our world. She is invisible and an emblem of decline.

When a congregation gets small enough, it is also sometimes described as “aging.” Did you ever think that older people, especially older women, offer more than a few important ingredients to your congregation? They have time. They have the energy. They have skills and are willing to teach them. They have great stories to tell. They knew everybody when they were twelve. Who else always shows up; and who will make sure the lights are on and the tables set? How many of our churches have a female Treasurer who used to be the finance person for the school board? Who are the retired teachers, nurses and doctors, lawyers and business owners sitting in our pews? Old ladies! None of them is likely to have a budding John the Baptist within them, but some of them may tell you quite plainly, if you are lucky, when the rough ways will be made smooth and the high brought low.

Murphys, California is a small town (population around 2000) in the foothills of the Sierra Mountains. It's a place people drive to for the weekend or the summer, full of interesting little towns, old Gold Rush stories and beautiful scenery. It also has a UCC church with a membership of under 200 and about 80 in worship. In a conservative part of the state they are open and affirming, progressive and host an LGBT youth group for the county. Its membership is “older” and active, welcoming to all. They make sure everyone who comes is fed. The town of Murphys has a median age near 60. This past summer they hosted a community potluck and discussion of white privilege. Sometimes aging doesn't mean lifeless.

Sometimes it means new life, welcoming the birthday of joy!