



A Pastor's Ponderings.....

Only in the darkness

Can you see stars.

The Spirit at First December 2018

Martin Luther King Jr.

During a meeting before Thanksgiving, the chairperson asked everyone to express what one thing they were looking forward to this next year. One person mentioned taking a long awaited vacation to a wonderful island paradise, another lifted up the upcoming birth of his first grandchild, another prayed for continued health seeing how they had just been through multiple surgeries and exhausting PT, yet another was hoping to hit the lottery so that they could pay off their debt and purchase some needed and not so needed items of life: all had a concrete idea of what hope meant in their life. All except one person, a middle aged man. He was not the first to go, but rather had some time to think about it and yet, when the sharing arrived to his position, he hemmed and hawed, then said something like, oh, nothing really.....and that was it.

Having that man not have any hopes for the future threw me for quite a loop. It was impossible for me to envision a world without hope. How can someone not have any hope for the future, not have an image of a better life, not envision improved health, healthier family dynamics, a more stable financial position, politics not quite so negative, no place to explore, no room for self -improvements, etc?

If you read books by people who are imprisoned and trapped in utterly hopeless situations, so many of them hope for freedom. Martin Luther King Jr, Ann Frank, Elie Wiesel, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, prisoners of war, Christopher Reeves, Helen Keller, Winston Churchill and a bombed out England, Christians worshipping in small closets in the heart of communist Russia, Armanda Valladares slowly rotting in a Cuban prison, Joan Baynham struggling with an aggressive cancer, parents anxiously waiting for their opioid addicted daughter to agree to get help.....even in the most dire of circumstances, people in all ages, cultures and theologies have grasped for hope like a rope dangling just out of reach. It keeps folks going and ironically grounded. Hope keeps people and movements alive to face another day, another cause, another change to obtain health and wholeness in a world that seems otherwise. How is it that one man could not conjure the foundation of all yearnings?

We all need hope and sometimes hope is the only think that keeps us able to wake up to face another day. Advent and Christ coming into the world embodies hope's primordial presence within us. The prophecies, the babe in the manger, Moses floating down the Nile as an infant, the ark bobbing up and down in torrential seas, Esau travelling to ask forgiveness of his brother, Joseph anguishly weeping in the back room while his family waits outside, Mary and Martha sending for Jesus, small groups of people strategizing in darkened rooms by candlelight.....that Advent hope for Christ is all around us and within us.

Let us thank God for that seed planted so deeply within. Let us be grateful that our faith and tradition lifts hope up so clearly. Let us all run with abandon to the Divine Light that pierced the darkness so long ago and continues to guide lives and societies toward better lives and a healthier world.

Thrilled to be journeying with you, I am

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Mark

SPECIAL SERVICES & EVENTS IN DECEMBER

**December 2nd: Communion at 1st Service will be handed out
Communion at 2nd service will invite people forward**

December 1st ~ Saturday Afternoon Worship, 4:30 pm

If you want to worship in a different way, then check out the new Saturday evening worship service the 1st Sunday of every month at 4:30 p.m. We meet in Fellowship Hall instead of the Sanctuary; the sermon is more of an exploration than a presentation; the music is simple, an acoustic guitar or two; we share two types of communion [Lord's Supper and Fellowship Hour] at the end of the service; prayer encourages everyone's participation instead of one person reciting; the offering is a basket at the back of the hall, not within the service; and the scripture is shared narratively instead of being read word for word. All of these changes make for a distinctive service that many have found refreshing. Come and check it out.



December 16th, Both Services ~ Christmas Pageant

What better way to celebrate the Christmas Spirit and the wonder of childhood than by coming to see the annual Christmas Pageant. Kids will bring the ancient story to life and add their own little embellishments to it. We will laugh and cry. Grandparents will ooh & aah over the performance, Laurie and Josh will direct them with aplomb and in the midst of all this sentimental joy, God's message of hope amidst the darkness will come to life. This is perhaps the best service all year to bring a friend.

December 16th, 7pm ~ Blue Christmas Service

See Josh's Associate Pastor News following for explanation blurb

December 23rd, ONE SERVICE, 10am ~ Sunday Morning Carol Sing

If there is something that people like to do more than anything else during the Christmas season, I would have to say that it is singing Carols. We do that on Christmas Eve but we split up the great old carols amongst three different Christmas Eve services so there are always some that you miss. Since we have an extra Sunday this year during December, we are just going to have one big old carol sing-a-long. Join us!

December 24th ~ Christmas Eve Services

5pm, Family Service Prepare yourself for a service of stories told by historical characters [our staff in character costume!] that were present at the Christmas saga. Along with the stories, we will sing carols and 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.

9pm, Lessons & Carols This is perhaps the most traditional of Christmas Eve services. Our choirs will offer their musical treasures both before and during the service. We will sing many 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 that once stood next to us singing great old hymns of joy. We hope for snow as we sing Silent Night and light the Christ Candle.

11pm, Carols & Communion As Christmas nears and the hustle of shopping is over, a sacred quietness covers the landscape for a few late evening hours, when 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 and settle into the spirit of Christmas.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR NEWS



Welcome to the beginning of the Christian Church new year! We begin every Christian new year with Advent and the season of Christmas. Advent is about waiting for the birth of Christ. Every Advent I imagine living in a world where the story Christ's birth has yet to be told. I want to feel the deep desire and longing for the foretold birth of the Messiah, the Anointed One. In the first century, the people of Israel longingly hoped for someone to bring them hope and to restore the sanctity of the temple and to be removed of the Roman Empire. It must have brought great joy to those who learned that the Messiah, the Anointed One, was born. In the Christmas story, we hear of migrating Shepherds nervous but happy to hear of the birth of Jesus; majestic Angels who tell them to "Not be Afraid;" foreign Magi from the East (modern Iraq and Iran) coming to worship the new born King. Has so much hope and promise ever been place on such a little baby before? Jesus' ministry proved the hope was not misguided. The birth of Christ didn't automatically lead to the sanctity of the temple or to the removal of the Roman Empire, yet the birth has reverberated and has changed society ever since. So, each Advent, I wait expectantly for Christ birth, and I am more and more delighted that he was born—living through the shadows of time I appreciate more and more joy of Christ the King.

This Advent on Sunday, December 16th, 7pm join us for a Blue Christmas Service. The Advent and Christmas seasons can be challenging times for people. We offer the Blue Christmas Service as a healing service. Our service will not hide from the grief we bear that become more acute during the holiday season. We will gather together to find support and hope with each other. This is also a healing service so come and lay your burdens down with us—regardless if your burdens are the death of a loved one, the separation from your family, the discord you might have with a friend/s.

High School Youth Group time in December is dedicated to Christmas Pageant rehearsals. We meet for rehearsals on Sunday, December 2nd, 5-7pm; Sunday, December 9th, after second service; Saturday, December 15, TBA, and then Pageant Sunday is December 16th, both services.

Thanks,

Josh



Laurie's Lens

As I write this article I am preparing to leave the office for a few days and travel to Rochester, NY for Thanksgiving. I am leaving my office not as organized as I would like. When I return we will be only one week away from the start of Advent and our preparing for the birth of Christ in our lives once again. But for now I pause to give thanks for my God, my family, my community of believers, my friends and the many blessings I have in my life. I give thanks for this church and it's continuous outreach to the community, for its progressive thinking and support for the children and youth around us. I feel so blessed to have the job I have, the job I love, the job that gives me strength and helps to fill my soul. This job that continues to be an ever changing and evolving job as we continue to look for ways to give new life and energy to our faith formation programs that keep us moving with the times. I pray. Prayers for the present church, the future church and for us as we move with the changing times and find ways to continue to be the church to all those around us.

My research trip plans continue to move forward as I chat with churches in Connecticut and Jennifer in Middlebury chats with churches in Massachusetts. We will be traveling through those two states around January 19th through February 4th. We are currently working on lining up our places/homes in which to stay. If you have relatives in the area with an extra room, we are making a list of back up locations in case we end up in a winter storm and need a room. I'm also connecting with the west coast and the UCC conference office in Washington and Oregon, as well as the vibrant churches in the Seattle and Eugene cities. Many thanks for this opportunity and for CE's continued support. I am working on the volunteer schedule of who is around on which Sundays to help with our programs. If you have not shared your dates with me, please be in touch.

Family Resource table will continue to be on a table in the Fellowship Hall before and after services. Please stop by and take one or more home with you and use or hand out to others you know.

Come to church. Be energized and uplifted in your faith with others to know you are not alone as you walk your faith journey. Go out into the community, taking the love of God, family and others with you. Build on your faith and be a witness to the good, hopeful and positive things in this world. Show God's love to all you meet.

Blessing & Peace, Laurie Chipman

Advent Daily Reflections/Devotionals

Advent begins this year on Sunday, December 2nd 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 in the Fellowship Hall before or after worship as well as in the office hallway during 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.

DEACON'S CORNER

Season's Greetings from your Deacons! Last Sunday, an intergenerational group of volunteers shared a delicious pot-luck meal and joined us in decorating the Sanctuary for Christmas. It was fun to work together and to begin to feel excitement for the season of Advent, which begins this year on December 1st.

Advent is a busy season. Decorating, cooking, holiday parties, gift giving, charitable giving, school concerts and events, Christmas cards, church pageants, shopping... it is exciting and can be exhausting. We can make conscious choices to slow it down. Choose what is important to you and to your family members. Ask each member. Their answers may surprise you! Choose what brings you joy. Let go of traditions or commitments that no longer serve you and create new ones that are meaningful and feed your soul. Take time to sit quietly and look at your Christmas lights, a candle, or to sip cocoa or listen to music. Or crank the music and dance around your house!

Advent is a time of hope. It can be a difficult time for those of us who are alone, grieving, sick, in conflict, struggling financially... our lives don't match the idyllic images of Christmas that we see everywhere. Jesus came for everyone, especially those in need of hope. Reach out to someone who may need connection. It will brighten both of your days!

During this season, we invite you to come to church and enjoy some moments of peace, reflection, and preparation, as well as laughter and great music. Feel the warmth of our church family here at FCCEJ. Wishing you peace and joy in the season, Carolyn Rushford

The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled
When the star in the sky is gone
When the Kings and Princes are home
When the Shepherds are back with their flocks
The work of Christmas begins:
 To find the lost
 To heal the broken
 To feed the hungry
 To release the prisoner
 To rebuild the nations
To bring peace among people
To make music in the heart

by Howard Thurman

MUSIC

Music At First



The sounds... the season!

Here we are at the beginning of December, and a season of joyous anticipation (Advent), followed by the glory of Christ's birth. The many music groups at First Church are like Santa's happy elves, merrily toiling as we prepare music to celebrate the seasons. Here is the lineup for December:

December 2: Communion Sunday and 1st Sunday of Advent. Sanctuary Choir at both services, offering Advent carols and anthems;

December 9: Sanctuary Choir (1st service); special music by Denise Keating and her daughters, Whitney Noel and Hillary Keating. Finally at First (2nd Service) along with Cherubs.

December 16: Pageant! Children of all ages will share the story of Jesus' birth (both services)

December 23: One service (10am) - Lessons & Carols with Sanctuary, Handbell Choirs & Joyful Noise

December 24: 5pm - Family service with Ed Guild, organist

9pm - Lessons And Carols, featuring Sanctuary Choir, Heavenly Harmony, Men At First, violinist Abigail Evans; pre-worship concert style choral prelude begins at 8:30pm

11pm – Carols & Communion, featuring F@F along with violinist Abigail Evans

December 30: F@F will be at both services

Looking ahead to January -

January 6 - Epiphany Sunday with communion (both services), led by Sanctuary Choir

So many wonderful things to look forward to, and wonderful sounds!

Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love to all -
Carol

December 16th ~Christmas Caroling-see details in the 'Our Church Family' section

SAVE THE DATES

December 16th ~ Christmas Pageant Sunday during both our worship services

August 5-9th, 2019 ~ Vacation Bible Camp 2019

To Mars and Beyond: Explore Where God's Power Can Take You!

Monday – Friday from 9am – 11:45am

Recruiting for: Music ~ Snack ~ Discovery ~ Games ~ Bible Drama Leaders

STEWARDSHIP



Winston Churchill reportedly said that “we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” According to Churchill, our lives are defined less by what we receive, and more by what we give away.

We get more from giving than we do from simply getting. When we give, we do not have less, we have more because when we give, we join in the bond of friendship and family, and in the bond of service to God.

As we enter this season of giving and sharing, your Stewardship Committee sends a big **THANK YOU** to those who have pledged to the 2019 Stewardship Campaign, including 15 who did not pledge last year! Your commitment to the Church is a blessing, and we are grateful for your support which allows us to continue to serve God through our programs and services. If you’ve been meaning to pledge, there is still time! You can download a pledge card from the Church’s website, or email your confidential pledge to financial secretary Pat Seaver at vtri2@aol.com

Christmas is the perfect time to celebrate the love of God and family. We offer you our heartfelt wishes for a joyous Christmas!

Kathy Finnie

Bill Keithcart

Jessica Moos

2018 Special Offerings: December-Christmas Fund

2019 Special Offerings: January-Endowment Fund, February-Outdoor Ministry,
March-One Great Hour of Sharing, April-Pastor’s Fund, May-Per Capita

CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES



Music Time During Faith Formation

Cherubs ~ Preschool - 2nd grade gather in the Gym on Sundays to sing a song or two with Jenny Bourn before moving on to their peer group locations.
Joyful Noise ~ 3rd - 8th graders gather in the Marvin Lounge for songs and music with Jessica Moos before moving on to their peer group locations.

Faith Formation Sunday School Calendar

Preschool – 8th Grade

December 2nd ~ 1st Sunday Spiritual Friends with Preschool & Kindergarteners

First Sunday of Advent ~ Intergenerational Worship

December 9th ~ Music & Peer Group time

December 16th ~ Pageant Sunday ~ All in worship

December 23rd ~ 10am worship ~ intergenerational for all ages

December 30th ~ 2 services ~ intergenerational for all ages



November 25th & Dec. 2nd & 9th ~ Christmas Pageant Rehearsals

Calling all Junior Youth and High School Youth to the first rehearsal on November 25th when parts will be decided. Please mark your calendars and come join Laurie and Pastor Josh! If you can't make November 25th, please be in touch and share your interest in a speaking part (small or big) or helping behind the scenes. We are looking for adult volunteers to help assist with set, costumes and running of lines at all rehearsals.

Rehearsal on Sunday, December 9th is from 11:30 – 2:00pm

Note corrected time from youth calendar

(Preschool – 4th join in for the first 20 minutes to learn their part)

Saturday, December 15th – dress rehearsal - TBA

Pageant Sunday will be on December 16th during both services - all youth arrive at 7:45am

Potluck lunch to follow after the 10:15am service. Youth, please RSVP to Laurie or Pastor Josh.



Acolytes

Acolytes carry the light of Christ into the Sanctuary at the beginning of worship to remind us that God is with us. Then they 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 all those who are in 3rd grade or older to participate in worship. You can acolyte solo or with another friend or parent. Signup sheet is located on the bulletin board before you walk up the steps to worship. Please contact Laurie for more info lchipman@fccej.org

Ring the Bell

All children and their families are welcome to sign up and ring the church bell 15 minutes before worship begins. Signup sheet is located on the bulletin board before you walk up the steps to worship (beside the Acolyte signup). Instructions are at the top of the sheet as to which rope to pull and how many times to ring the bell. We love to have our church bell ring every Sunday morning before worship!



Our Nursery

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. Parents ~ please be mindful of our Safe Conduct Guidelines and help us be good stewards of our child ratio (2 children to 1 adult). Volunteer to stay in the Nursery with your child if you see that extra hands will be needed. Thank you for your help.

2018 Faith Formation Offering ~ Jamaica Children ~ Uniforms & Books



Current Giving Total is \$697.17

Keep remembering to bring your Offering!

\$1 a week can go a long way! Just think about what you spend \$1 on! If every child and youth contributed a \$1 a week we could raise over \$2000 to help Jamaica kids have uniforms & books so they can go to school



and learn to read and write. Bring your offering each week & don't forget to use the children's envelopes in the pews so our counters know your money goes to the Jamaica Children.



All our 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.

Junior Youth by Laurie's office / High School Youth by Josh's office

Junior Youth @ FCCEJ

Mark your calendars!

December 2nd ~ 11:30am – 1:30pm ~ regular youth time

High School Youth Group @ FCCEJ

Mark your calendars!

December 2nd ~ 11:30am – 1:30pm regular youth time

Help usher & greet at 10:15am & 5-7pm Pageant Rehearsal

December 9th ~ 5-7pm Pageant Rehearsal

Saturday, December 15th – dress rehearsal – TBA by 12/2



Pageant Sunday will be on December 16th during BOTH services - all youth arrive at 7:45am

PreK-4th Grade Christmas Pageant Rehearsal

Calling all kids who would like to take part in the pageant this year on Sunday, December 16th at one or both of our morning worship services. On Sunday, December 9th after our faith formation time, please join us in the Sanctuary and sign up for an angel, shepherd, sheep, or magi. We will have some costumes for you to see. All costumes stay at church and you will find them in the Narthex before worship on the 16th. Pick what you would like to be and join the youth as they tell the Christmas story



Rehearsal on Sunday, December 9th is from 11:30 – 2:00pm

There was a misprint on the youth calendar. Please correct the time. Thank you.

(Preschool – 4th join in for the first 20-30 minutes to learn the timing of when they enter and who they follow. Youth will stay for the remaining of rehearsal time.)

FELLOWSHIP & LEARNING

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 6th** at noon for a fun afternoon of good eats and a fun game. Bill Adams will teach us how to play the card game SCAT. We'll share Christmas music, yummy snacks and lots of laughter.



Essex Eats Out Community Dinners Continue...

1st Friday of Every Month ~ December 7th

Come - Help - Eat www.essexeatsout.org

Brand New Bereavement Support Group

Many if not all of us have been touched by the loss of someone we hold near and dear. That loss stays with us and shapes us our entire

lives and reminds us of the love we had for that person. The

journey of grief takes many twists and turns and if one does not deal adequately with their losses, then it has the potential to negatively affect one's daily living forever. Sharon Dettenrieder has led Bereavement Support Groups for decades and will be working with our ordained staff to create a support group where people can go and share their grief journey and draw support from others who are travelling down the same road. Meetings in the Marvin Lounge on the **2nd Thursday of each month, 7-8:30 p.m.**

Next meeting: Dec 13th. Everyone, church and community members are welcome, bring a friend!



Wednesday Night Searchers, 7pm

Check out the bulletin for info on what we will be doing next...

3rd Thursday Potluck Series

The 3rd Thursday potluck this month will be in the Marvin Lounge on **December 20th** from 5:45 to 7pm. Bring wrapped gift that weighs a pound along with your potluck dish. Supper will begin by 6pm and our program will start around 6:30pm. Join us! All are welcome!



The Community of Bridge

There will be a special bridge playing party on **Friday December 21st**, 1:30-4pm. We will play some bridge and eat some cookies. There will be slams and finesses, there will be great conversations and terrible jokes, there will be friends and newcomers but through it all, there will be cookies and a good time. Come and play some bridge with us this month, the winner gets one of Rev. Mark's jams.



Faith on Tap

Meeting People in Meeting Places outside the Church
Come join us for food and drinks at McGillicuddy's Five Corners, 4 Pearl St, Essex Jct
December 21st from 6:00-8:00 pm



Yoga and Meditation @ First!



Jonah Moos is offering class on **Tuesdays** at 5:30-6:45pm in the Fellowship Hall. All levels from beginner to experienced are absolutely welcome. You can bring your own mat or borrow one of Jonah's. Following Yoga, there will be a Meditation time in the Nursery from 7-7:30pm. You can do one or both! 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. All women of the church are invited to join us for interesting programs and wonderful fellowship. Please join us on **Saturday, December 15th** at 9:30. Bring your favorite angel knickknack, ornament or picture to share it's meaning to you. Joanne Irwin will give us some background on angels and will lead a discussion about what angels mean to us. We are also going to do a gift exchange called "Switch, Steal, Unwrap Gift Exchange". It involves using dice. *No gift is safe until after the last dice are rolled and even then, you just never know! Make sure you wrap your gift.* Come and enjoy fellowship and laughter with the wonderful women of FCCEJ.



Coffee Clatter @ Martone's

Every Friday at 8:05 a.m., Revs Mark and Josh 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!

Wednesday, December 19th, Noontime Book Group

The Noontime Book Group will meet at 12:00 on Wednesday, December 19th. This month we will meet at Joanne Irwin's house, 16 Locust Lane, Essex Junction. Please bring a short Christmas story to share with the group. We will also have a potluck lunch this month so bring something to share. Contact Joanne with what you are bringing for lunch. Please join us for friendship, lunch and wonderful Christmas sharing and fellowship.



Ladies Crafting Time 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 Wednesday of each month at **2-4pm, December 26th** for a time of common crafting. All are welcome!



Tuesday Morning Sermon Talkback, 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.

MISSION OPPORTUNITIES

Missions Moment

For almost the past 10 years, Faith Formation has evolved into what it is today, including Hands-On Mission Sundays. We asked Laurie to tell us about how this evolution has taken place.



Soon after Laurie arrived as our Christian Education coordinator in August of 2009, she realized that our congregation, like many others, had a hard time having enough leaders for the classes during school breaks and on holiday weekends. After a discussion with other CE members and staff, they decided to center all group activities in 2010 around the season at the time, the offering that had been chosen or a faith practice like praying or baking pretzels. From 2010-2012, these activities went from being a rotation to stations that the children did in age groups where they would take part in seasonal hands-on activities in the peer rooms and rotate through them.

In the fall of 2013, they were then called Group Activity Days and were turning into more of a full age group activity that would aid in building community among the children and youth and help them all get to know each other better as the children attending are from different schools as well as different towns, such as Colchester, Milton, Jericho, Williston, Essex Town, Essex Junction and Waterbury.

In the fall of 2017, another evolution took place and the name changed to Hands-On Mission Sundays. More and more parents were liking the idea of their children talking about and doing mission activities, so the name fit the activity. In the Spring of 2018, Laurie came to the Missions Committee and asked us, as a committee, if we would like to be more connected and help brainstorm ideas and perhaps be more hands-on ourselves with these faith formation days. We assisted on a few of these days during the last curriculum year.

As faith formation keeps evolving and church life keeps changing and families have more and more going on and the CE staff and committee try to keep families connected and involved, the programs will need to stay fresh and exciting. Laurie says that she is sure in the next few years, Hands-On will likely change once again.

Dismas House ~ Your Good Deed Will be Much Appreciated

Across Vermont there are four Dismas Houses that provide shelter and support for men and women who have served prison terms and are making the transition from life in prison to life outside. For several years now, First Congregational Church members have been serving dinner on the 4th Wednesday of each month to the residents of the Dismas House in Winooski. Our participation in this program is of great value in lessening the feelings of estrangement that burden many who have served prison terms. The residents of Dismas House and the paid staff are friendly and appreciative of our help. The staff includes a paid Director and Associate Director who are at Dismas



House during weekdays, including during the evening meal. Three of our members prepare the fourth Wednesday dinner. One of us prepares an entry, another a salad, and a third, a dessert. After we've taken the food to Dismas house, we usually stay and enjoy the meal with the Dismas House residents and staff.

If you would like to volunteer for the Church's Dismas House Mission, take a look at the sign-up sheet that's on the bulletin board in the hall leading to the social hall. Questions? Please contact Ed Steele, the current facilitator for the Dismas House Mission if you have questions. His contact information is: (802)

871-5897 or edwardmsteele@msn.com



5th Annual Jamaica Cabin Fever Calcutta

The Jamaica Committee is pleased to announce the 5th annual Cabin Fever Calcutta to be held at the Catamount Country Club in Williston on **Saturday, March 9, 2019**. Make sure to save the date! Cocktails will begin at 5:00 PM with dinner at 6:00 PM. Jamie Polli will begin the Calcutta at 7:00 PM.



Early bird ticket sales will begin on December 1st. **All tickets purchased by January 15th will be entered into the drawing for a \$100 cash prize.** If you purchased a ticket last year, you will receive a letter in early December inviting you to reserve last year's ball number. Everyone is welcome to buy tickets early. To purchase tickets, stop by the Jamaica table in the fellowship hall beginning December 16th or contact Sharon Dettenrieder at 802-871-5308 or dettenriedeS@hartwick.edu. Tickets cost \$125 each and include dinner for two and the chance to win the grand prize of \$1000 and other prizes awarded throughout the evening. Checks should be made out to "FCCEJ" with "Jamaica" in the memo line.



Hope to see you there!

Team members are Mark & Nicholas Mendes, Rick & Sam Dooley, Caitlin & Kaki McGeary, Christine Czarny, Dave Dewey, Nolan Boerger, Emma Parker, Peter & Zachary Schmalz, Aliyah Watt, Carolyn Rushford and Sharon Dettenrieder.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Our Home, Our Future, Our Time...

We are making progress! On behalf of the Capital Campaign Steering Committee, we have several exciting project updates to share with you.



The plans for the new vestibule and ADA bathroom near Fellowship Hall have been finalized, and the Trustees are in the process of getting bids from potential contractors. The plan is to begin work on the vestibule and bathroom by April 1, followed by work on the parking lot/site improvements in June. A General Contractor will be hired to oversee this complex and multi-faceted project. We will not be able to use the parking lot entrance while this work takes place, however the Trustees will be working on some new signage and temporary entrance accommodations to minimize the disruption. Stay tuned for more details as we get closer to construction.

The other major work to be completed in 2019 is the Sanctuary Restoration Project, which includes the refurbishing of our historic windows and wooden blinds, plaster repair and a fresh coat of paint throughout the sanctuary (even the pews!). The sanctuary restoration was the number one priority identified by the congregation through our feasibility study, and doing this work will restore and preserve the beauty of **Our Home** for years to come. There will be an opportunity for the congregation to give input into a new sanctuary paint color once we have awarded a contract for the restoration work and we have a better sense of how long that project will take. We have applied for a Historic Preservation Grant to help cover some of our expenses. Grant decisions will be made in early December. Based on the report from historic architect specialist Sally Fishburn, we anticipate that the sanctuary will be open throughout these renovations. We will keep you updated if that changes. For more information about the window and plaster renovation project, Sally Fishburn's full report is available on our website under Capital Campaign Projects.

Last but not least, initial organ repair and maintenance work will take place in spring 2019, either before or after Easter and a contractor has been selected to replace the parsonage parking lot with pavers, which will also occur in the spring.

Thank you all for continuing to support the **Our Home, Our Future, Our Time Capital Campaign**. Our pledge total stands at \$935,616. We appreciate all of the pledge payments made so far, and all of the early pledge payments. As a result, we do not anticipate needing bridge loan financing to complete the projects above. We continue to accept new gifts for the campaign to help us "fill our heart" and reach our \$1.02 million stretch goal. If you would like more information about the Capital Campaign, please contact US.

Wishing you and your loved ones an advent season filled with hope, peace, joy and love.

Kaki McGeary and Dave Johnson, Co-Chairs

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop News

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

Mark these dates on your Calendar

Open Saturdays Dec 1st & 15th 9 am to 1 pm

The shop is looking for donations of holiday sweaters, men & women's winter coats & boots, winter hats/gloves, and women's shirts. Donations are taken any time in our drop off box.



Heavenly Food Pantry

Next Heavenly Food Pantry days are Monday, December 10th, 5:30-7:30pm
and Thursday, December 20th, 2-6pm

We are in need of fruit juice, boxed mac n' cheese and sample size toothpaste tubes. They are perfect to give out with a toothbrush. Please ask your dentist the next time you have your teeth cleaned if they would donate a case!

We have met some wonderful members of our community who have had food drives in their neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, etc. Many, many thanks goes out to these community partners!



The Giving Tree Is Here!

Thanks to all for taking tags; wrapped gifts, with the tags securely attached, need to be returned to the church no later than Dec. 12. We will be distributing the gifts on Dec. 19.

Families that we help have expressed how much they appreciate the gifts we give their children and the joy that abounds on Christmas Day. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Elaine Raymond at 879-7350.

Bible Partners with 3rd & 4th graders

We are always looking for volunteers who would like to partner with a 3rd or 4th grader (single or in pairs) and encourage them to read from their Bible each week. This is a great way to get to know others in our congregation and widen our faith family. Looking for more information? Please contact Laurie.

OUR CHURCH FAMILY

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. Please place your order by Sunday 12/16, your dedication will be remembered in the Christmas bulletins. Please remember to take them home as well and enjoy them after the Christmas Eve services.



2019 Altar Flowers

The chart for altar flowers is up in the hallway leading out of Fellowship Hall. The donation is \$34/Sunday and you can write your name and also who or what event you would like remembered/honored. Contact Jen with any questions welcome@fccej.org



Craft Fest Thank You!



We are pleased to let everyone know we raised almost \$8,000 from this year's Craft Fest. This year was one of our most successful. The silent auction had the best year ever. Our guardian Angel, Diana was watching over us! I'm giving a big thank you to everyone who helped with Nearly New, volunteered as greeter, helped in the kitchen, baked goodies, donated to nearly new and made delicious dishes. A big thanks goes to the committee of Mary Gratton, Val Gabert, Elaine Raymond, Maureen McKenzie, Ann Gray, Phyllis Willey and Cathy Shearer. I especially want to thank Carl Werner for all his assistance in setting up, cleaning and taking down. Thank you to the Youth Group for the amazing job they did decorating fellowship hall. Thank you to the Boy Scouts who helped bring decorations from the Thrift Shop to the church. Thank you to Jen Dooley for helping with all the printing. Lastly to Rev. Mark for his support.

This event helps the church monetarily, provides a place for people to buy gifts for their families, gives us fellowship and assists the Thrift Shop. Plus we have between 200 to 300 people visit our church. WOW!

We are truly blessed to be part of this amazing church. Merry Christmas, Linda Bogardus

Silent Auction Thank you's: AutoZone, Bibens-Ace Hardware, Bouchard-Pierce Appliances, Bow Meow, Carol Daigle, Central Beverage, Chapin Orchard, China Garden, Clean & Clear Auto Detail, Cynthia Kelley, Darkroom Gallery, Essex Automotive Services, Essex Cinemas, Essex Colonial Mart Deli, Essex Equipment Rental, Essex Family Fun & Entertainment Center, Essex Paint & Carpet, Essex Physical Therapy, Fairgrounds Beverage, Finest Image, Gadue's Dry Cleaning, Grand Buffet, Greene Mountain Nutrition & Smoothies, Haircuts Plus, Hammer Fit, Hoagies, Jan Hopper, Jon's Darkroom & Frameshop, Judy Roy, Lester Nutting, Linda Bogardus, Lisa Clark, Lowe's, Maplehurst Florist, Marilyn James, Mark Mendes, Martone's, MetroRock Vermont, Mimmo's Pizza & Restaurant, Mindy Bero, Mountain View Animal Hospital, Nancy Milne, Nate's Automotive, Nest Bakery & Café/Firebird Café, New York Cleaners, Nomad Coffee VT, Northfield Savings Bank, Oil N' Go, Palmer Lane Maple, Penny Williams, Phoenix Books, Phyllis Willey, Planet Fitness, Ray's Seafood Market, River Road Beverage & Deli, Rocky's NY Pizza & Ice Cream, Salon Arcadia, Sandy Pines Kennel, Snowflake Chocolates, Sport Central, Structures Salon, Sue Conti, Sue Wood, Sweet Clover Market, TD Bank, Terri Livak, The Essex, Vermont's Culinary Resort & Spa, The Links at Lang Farm, The Sports & Fitness Edge, The UPS Store, Triple Loop/Costume Shop, Turner Toy & Hobby, Twincraft, UVM Athletics, Vermont Ballet Theater School, Village Green Florist, Wise Buys, X-Ray's Barber Shop, Yankee Pride

December Birthdays

4th Judy Larrabee, Doug Olufsen 5th Anita Guild 6th Irving Bartlett, Joanne Irwin 7th Tom Helmstutler, Zachary Parker 8th Russ Kinaman 10th Cohen Ploof, Alex Poratti, Mary Winslow 11th Pete Firkey 12th Tom Frank, Shirley Kent 13th Kate Field 14th Deb Holland, Emma Parker 15th Frank Grenon, Brian Hoffman, Zachary Schmalz 16th Munroe Shearer 18th 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 28th Deb Watt 29th Bill Adams, Christine Czarny, Elijah Palmer 30th Kurt Tallman 31st Angela Abakah, Carley Goedken, Samantha Poratti



Got Coats?



Thank you for your generous donations to our Annual Coat Drive. Through our community efforts, we were able to collect 219 winter coats, as well as hats, mittens/gloves and scarves. 112 coats were distributed at the November 15th Food Pantry distribution, with the remaining coats going to the Dismas House and Sweetwaters' Thanksgiving Coat Distribution. A big thank you to Barb Smith, Faith Truax, Grace Jones and Muriel Nutting for all their hard work to make this event possible. Thank you again for helping our neighbors in need.

Dear Church Family, Thank you for the lovely yellow rose!

It is brightening up my table! Joyce Jacobs



Thank You to my church family for the beautiful yellow rose which was delivered on my 87th birthday. It helped brighten up a dark rainy November day! Malcolm LeVanway



Greetings to all, It doesn't seem possible that four and a half months have passed since we made our move to Stamford, Connecticut. In some ways it is like coming home, as Dave and I are both graduates of UConn and in fact were married at the Congregational Church right on the campus at Storrs. We are now located at Brighton Gardens in Stamford. It is a very nice informal facility for residents needing assisted living. Dave and I are very comfortable in our 2 rooms (and a bath) living space on the 2nd floor at the end of the hall. Our meals are served in a large common room where I've learned the names of probably 75 to 100 persons and enjoy greeting them individually when appointments and other responsibilities aren't pressing. There are probably 75, at least, more to learn. I've made this my retirement project! I'm sorry I haven't been able to write individually but I wanted all to know how much we miss you and our regular routine of church on Sundays. Would love to hear from you, or better yet to see you.

Dave & Suzanne Eaton

Brighton Gardens

59 Roxbury Road, Apt. 219

Stamford, CT 06902

Wishing all of you well. Enjoy the upcoming celebrations and holidays. Thinking of you with love, and hope FCCEJ will continue to grow and spread its special influence on the whole community. God bless you in your special mission. With love, Dave and Sue Eaton



Christmas Caroling

Join us on Sunday 12/16 in the afternoon as we bring Christmas cheer to church families who aren't able to join us for worship very often. We will provide lyrics for Christmas favorites. Harmony singers, melody singers - all are welcome. Contact Carol Spradling (cspradling@fccej.org or 881-8353).

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