



SPIRIT@FIRST *monthly newsletter*

First Congregational Church of Essex Junction

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In This Issue...

- *Your Pastor's Ponderings*
- *Associate Pastor News*
- *Laurie's Lens*
- *Music Director's Musings*
- *Communications*
- *Capital Campaign*
- *Youth Ministry (Camps)*
- *Faith Formation*
- *Missions (Hannaford Cards, Heavenly Cents, Heavenly Food Pantry)*
- *Volunteer*
- *Birthdays*
- *Teleworship & Fellowship*
- *8th ONA Anniversary*
- *Ministry Directory*

Your Pastor's Ponderings

Oftentimes when I pen a newsletter article, I lose myself in the dizzying unrolling of time, month after month, year after year, thinking aloud of God, faith, community and how they impinge upon our wider culture and lives. However, every so often a month changes everything: marriages, deaths, new jobs, moving, economic downturns or blessings, 9-11 and now more than any other in my life: the coronavirus pandemic.

Life has changed. The world has changed. The Church has changed.....in one month.

Like life has always been and ever shall be, it can change in a heartbeat. The future is always and simply unknown. The coronavirus has brought this relief into a sharper focus, but this truth is always the case. I do not know where the path leads but I do know a few things.

1. In the midst of difficult times, Christ's Church has always been a source of hope and goodness, seeking to help others and spread both love and justice. In war and famine, disease and destruction, God's people have entered the darkness and offered the Good News of peace, hope and sacrifice for a better world.

We are called to bring light to the current darkness with love.

2. Christ Church survives! As societies, cultures and nations die and change, the Church of Jesus Christ has always survived. It changes, sometimes drastically, but the Spirit of God grounded in Christ's Church and our hearts greets each new day with an integrity and intentionality of hope that looks to the future.

We are called to re-dedicate ourselves to the movement of God At FCCEJ

And seek new ways to allow Christ's spirit to move through us.

3. The heart of the Jesus's movement has always been community. Despite some focusing on their own personal salvation, Christ's movement has always been about the other, the neighbor, the faithful followers, the wider community. The heart and most accurate way of judging any church is how they care about and lift up each other and connect with other churches to do the same forever widening circles of God's children.

We must continue to build community and support each other; considering we are charged with isolating ourselves, this will be a challenge but one we can accomplish with thought and care of each other. AND to expand our understanding of community to include those who are outside of our church community.

If we are able to live out these three ways Christ's Church has handled difficult times in the past, then we will continue to live out the gospel and strengthen our church despite the newness and difficulties. What does this mean in our day to day lives and ministry?

1. Care for the poor, homeless, imprisoned, lonely, oppressed and addicted.
2. Stand up for justice as people take advantage of these chaotic times.
3. Find positive ways to claim life and love every day.
4. Play more.

5. Be grateful each day for our many blessings.
6. If you are not at risk, volunteer for our food pantry.
7. Ask Doug (our church administrator) for a church directory and call folks to say hi and see if they need help
8. Call your neighbors and do the same.
9. Read More.
10. Sing or play an instrument to the glory of God out on your porch
11. Keep your pledge up to the church.
12. Continue / Begin watching our church's streaming services and devotions
And invite your friends and neighbors to do the same!
13. If you need help to live, tell Rev. Mark or Rev. Josh or Doug in the church office
14. Create some Zoom gatherings for fun: cocktail hours, dinners, desserts, mornings
15. Get outside and go for a walk and talk to God on the way.
16. Pray more
17. Write letters to friends, family members, and church folks.

Doing these simple things will help us to be a light in the midst of darkness, strengthen the ties that bind us and deepen the already loving community of faith we call home. May God be with you all during this time and bless you in abundance beyond measure. Honored to be a part of this journey with you, I am

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Mark

Associate Pastor News

Ministry through technology is new for almost everyone. I've created a brief explanation of the different technology we are using. Facebook has two options: a Facebook Page and a Facebook Group. FCCEJ uses both. The Facebook Page is called First Congregational Church of Essex Junction. You can access it directly at this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/firstcongregationalej/>

Anyone can like and follow our Facebook Page. The Facebook Page is basically another type of website. It's a great way for those who have never had contact with our church to find out about our church. Like our website, fccej.org, it might be the first contact a person might have with our church. You will find links to our upcoming live worship and you will find Mark and I's weekday devotionals. You will also find other events.

The Facebook Group is called First Congregational Church of Essex Junction (Discussion Group). Not everyone can be a member of our Facebook Group. We generally let people into the Facebook Group, for safety reasons, if we know them. You can access the Facebook Group directly at this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/fccej/>

This Facebook Group is for people who have a familiarity with our church community, and it serves as a way to build the relationships we have with each other. It is the place where we encourage you to leave words of inspiration, pictures of babies, your kids playing, new pets, and other parts of your life you would like to share with your church community. It is also where we can provide information about needs that might come up, like when we need help with the food pantry.

We are using Zoom to host our committee meetings, Saturday interactive worship, Sermon Talk Back, and Thursday morning Coffee Clatter. You will be able to find the Zoom meeting ID information in other parts of this newsletter.

YouTube is a video hosting platform. We use YouTube to live stream our Sunday morning worship services and other non-interactive worship services that take place in the life of the church. You can find the YouTube account by going to fccej.org. There is a purple square underneath the Home page's slide of church photos.

Please stay safe and stay physically socially distant. 😊
Josh Simon, *Associate Pastor*

Laurie's Lens



Our world has changed. Many things are not the same. Family life has increased. Many of us are working from home. We are making time to go outside for fresh if for no other reason than to get ourselves out of our chairs and away from the computer screen. Easter still came. But my day was way different than every other year. I did feel blessed to sit at home in the pajamas for 6am Sunrise service. I put on my apron, like I would have if I was at church for Easter breakfast, and cooked our breakfast. Brian and I dressed up and sat down for breakfast before service started. We were still eating when service began, but soon moved to our living continuing to watch the service on our tv. Later in the day I went out for a walk on our road. I met a couple out doing the same. As we passed each other, walking on either side of the road, I greeted them with a 'good morning'. I was about to add 'Happy Easter', but they didn't turn to acknowledge me. It felt really odd. This experience has happened a few times for me, maybe you as well, since this pandemic started. I took a breath and started talking to God in my head, that rolling conversation that just starts up. Asking God to please help the people I would meet to smile, be cheerful and speak to me! Well... the next few people I met, every one of them acknowledged my 'good morning' and smiled when I continued to say, 'Happy Easter'. They even said 'Happy Easter' back to me. It is so comforting to know that God was with me on my walk, but also was in the people that I met on Easter. I pray you are finding God in the people that you are meeting and finding ways to 'be church' in your homes, in your neighborhood or even volunteering as we practice safe and social distancing in this our new 'normal'.

Our Easter season continues until we arrive at Pentecost on May 31st. I hope you are experiencing the risen Christ in your daily lives. Christ has risen indeed!

I am sending out a weekly Faith @ Home email to all parents of nursery up through senior high, as well as to our youth. If you are not receiving a copy and would like to, please send me an email lchipman@fcej.org. [Make you add my email to your address book so that my emails arrive in your inbox and not your junk folder.](#)

Please read the COTS Walk article in the Youth Ministry section and help support COTS and our walkers.

Blessed to be in ministry with you,
Laurie Chipman, *Christian Education Director*

Music Director's Musings

In our homes, we meet to worship,
far away from sacred space.

By the Spirit, Christ is with us,
making this a holy place.

In these days of social distance,
we are called to meet apart.

Still we pray for one another,
hold each other in our heart.

* If this time indeed is holy,
we must keep it truly so.

Even in our isolation,

God's rich blessings overflow.

We avoid the world's distractions,
set our minds on things above:

Patience, kindness, goodness, mercy,
faith, joy, peace, abiding love.

R. G. Huff

Well, wow. Life could not be more different right now. Church could not be more different right now. And our music is adapting to. Like real troopers, our choir is creating home recordings of their voices, and I've shifted my job from directing a group with my hands, to mastering tracks created on phones, laptops, and tablets; mixing those recordings down into the hymns you are now hearing on Sundays.

Have you ever felt tempted to join one of our choirs, but didn't have the time, perhaps? This may be the right opportunity to join us! We meet by Zoom (accessible by computer or regular phone), on Thursday evenings, for friendly conversation and singing. Reach out to Carol if you are interested in lending your voice to our Sunday worship.

I brought you this poem last month, but I think it really does bear repeating now that we know more about the possibly extensive timeline of social distancing. I wish you peace and safety in these uncertain times.

Carol Spradling, *Music Director*

Communications Committee

Check out the updated Church website and be sure to give Andrea Sharp a big round of applause for all her work on that! You will find a new “Home Page” with access to Heavenly Food Pantry details and new information regarding Building Use including Weddings and other occasions. One of the highlights of the change is that it is easy to join online worship on Saturday and Sunday. On the internet, go to www.fccej.org. This is our “Home Page.”

To join **Sunday** worship, scroll down and you will see this:



Click on the purple box labeled “Watch Worship”. That will bring you to our “YouTube” channel. Click on the box that reads, “Sunday Worship” for the date you want. Past services are also stored here, for you to watch at any time. To join **Saturday** worship, scroll down further on the Home Page until you see this:

- Saturday at 4:30 pm via ZOOM [meeting here](#)

Click on the word “here” and that will take you to the worship Zoom meeting. We hope that you enjoy these changes and stay tuned for more website updates. Please contact the church office at 878-5745 or email welcome@fccej.org if you have any questions.

Our Home, Our Future, Our Time Capital Campaign Update

Even as the coronavirus has changed our church life in many ways, the Sanctuary Restoration Project is still underway, and we are nearing the finish line. The scaffolding is GONE, and the plaster work is nearly complete and much of the sanctuary has been painted. Our painters continue to work on the trim in the sanctuary and will then move on to the pews. Of course, so much is up in the air and out of our hands. We will make adjustments to our timelines in order to keep everyone safe and healthy. We will be back in our beloved sanctuary soon enough – and it is going to be beautiful.

Upcoming Campaign Projects: We continue to move forward with plans to add new interior door locks on classrooms and offices, as well as plans for a new controlled-access security systems (including keyless locks on exterior doors and new locks on all classroom/office doors). These improvements will be paid for with funds from our \$47,000 federal grant. The Church Street Entrance will also be updated with new, wider doors to accommodate the new security system and locks. Campaign funds will be used for that portion of the project. We anticipate that this work will take place in early June after we switch to one service.

Pledge Payments: In these challenging times, we know that many folks are dealing with financial uncertainty and hardship and taking care of yourself and your family is the top priority. So, this message is intended for those who are not facing a financial hardship right now. IF (and only if) you are in a position to help, your continued pledge payments - for the annual stewardship drive and also for the capital campaign - can play an important role in helping First Church weather this storm. For the capital campaign, early pledge payments will help us avoid the need to access the bridge loan and help minimize (or even eliminate) interest expenses. We have paused new campaign expenditures for now, however some projects were already in motion before this crisis began and we have reached the end of our cash on hand. That said, our bridge loan remains available if we need it. Thank you all for your continued support.

Dave Johnson & Kaki McGeary, Capital Campaign Co-Chairs

Youth Ministry

Graduation Sunday is June 21. Send Pastor Josh (jisimon@fccej.org) your graduates (high school/undergrad/grad school) baby/young picture and their graduation/most recent picture, include where they're graduating from and what they plan to do in the future.

Junior Youth

5th - 8th graders - Faith, Fellowship & Games - Gathering on Zoom @ 11:30am – 12:30pm

Mark your calendars: May 3rd & 17th - Regular Zoom time & Virtual COTS Walk on May 3rd

COTS' mission is to end homelessness. This year the 31st Annual COTS Walk is on May 3rd and is a virtual walk. Support COTS and support our Junior Youth who were going to walk it in person. Go to www.cotsonline.org. We have registered online as the 'FCCEJ Walkers'. The process is fast, easy and secure. Click register for the walk and then either click on join a team or click on donate. Help us reach our goal of \$500 and help COTS reach their \$235,000 goal. Every dollar raised through the COTS Walk supports shelter and services for families and individuals in crisis.

All walkers are encouraged to participate in the *Calendar of Virtual Activities*. Click on the current date or go back and have fun with the activities that you missed. So they have created activities like building your own fairy house, playing Twister or Jenga, or traveling through time to learn about how people lived 100 years ago. All of our activities create an opportunity to connect with the mission of COTS and learn more about our work in the community.

COTS is Vermont's largest provider of services for Vermonters who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, or marginally housed. The focus at COTS is on finding solutions to END homelessness — not simply creating shelters for people who are experiencing homelessness.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis your support is more critical than ever. Our homeless neighbors are especially vulnerable — many guests in shelter are elderly or have compromised immune systems. You cannot shelter at home when you are homeless. Even if you can self-quarantine in a shelter, you are still in very close proximity to other shelter guests, often several to a room in bunk beds. COTS shelters remain open.

Find ways and places to connect with your God & have spiritual time ~ a walk in the woods, quiet time without an electronic device in your hands or in front of you, praying in color, etc.

High School Youth

For updates and information contact Pastor Josh

UCC NYE trip to Purdue University

July 20-26, 2020

This trip has been pushed out to July 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will share more information on this trip when it becomes available.

Camps



@ the Lake UCC Camp at Rock Point

For those going into 5th – 8th grade in the fall of 2020

Sunday, July 26 at 2pm to Friday, July 31st at 4pm

Registration is OPEN! Go to <https://hortoncenter.org/camps/>

Scholarships are available – partial and full

Previous campers ~ Erik Frivoll & Izzy Owens

Laurie Chipman is now a Co-Dean with Pastor Ed Sunday-Winters

@ the Lake description:

Join our community of friends at Rock Point as we explore the shores of Lake Champlain, enjoy the beauty all around us, go swimming, paddle boarding, hiking, have campfires, sing, worship, play, participate in community service and enjoy

the amazing sunsets! Note: Campers arrive and depart directly from Rock Point Camp, <https://www.rockpointvt.org/camp>. Episcopal Conference Center in Burlington.



Decision has not been made yet to cancel the 2020 summer season. You can still register campers. Reimbursement policies are in place. More camps & updates on Outdoor Ministry on the Horton Center website. Take a leap and sign up for camp! www.hortoncenter.org



Vacation Bible Camp @ Home

KNIGHTS OF THE NORTH CASTLE

Quest for the King's Armor

Armor UP with Truth, Justice, Peace, Faith & Salvation

August 10th – 14th

REGISTER Now and send us your form. The VB Camp Team has starting meeting by Zoom and we know we'll be sending out an email to all families to make sure you receive the up to date information for camp week. Please mail in your registration to the church for to lchipman@fccej.org

Leadership Team: Assembly Leader ~ Jessica Moos; Bible Drama ~ Allison VanSteensburg; Recreation ~ Jenny Bourn; Craft & Mission ~ Sue Wood; Science/Discovery ~ Justin King; Snacks ~ Judy Allen & Ginny Coe; Media/Photos ~ Doug Olufsen; Music Leader ~ Laura Cunningham Firkey; Tech assistance – Jonah Moos.

VB Camp Wish List – Coming soon!

For questions and more information ~ email lchipman@fccej.org

Faith Formation

Faith Formation Calendar

PreK – 8th grade

Watch for our FCCEJ Faith @ Home emails being sent by Laurie to all youth, parents (nursery – 12th grade) and volunteers. If you are not receiving them and/or would like to be added to the list, please send Laurie an email lchipman@fccej.org and she will add you on. These will go out weekly by Wednesday with conversations topics, activities, music links, ways to connect and faith-based information to help you on your faith journey.

2020 Faith Formation Offering

Current total is: \$117.20 (most recent donation received on March 15th, 2020)

Vermont Adaptive Sports www.vermontadaptive.org

Even though we are not meeting at church on Sundays, you can still give by mailing in your offering. Just make a note in the memo line of the check and write 'Faith Formation Offering' or 'VT Adaptive Sports'. Remember just a \$1 a week can go a long way! Put your money aside and then pass it to your parents and have them write a check to the church.

Earn an allowance? Practice dividing your money 3 ways:

+ Save (in a bank) + Give to the church/offering + You (spend/save/give to an organization)

Missions

Dismas House Needs Our Help

When members and friends of the Church were going to Sunday services before the coronavirus crisis struck, we would pass around the pews a sign-up sheet for volunteers who wanted to prepare food for Dismas House residents. Each sign-up sheet covered a four-month period. We took food to Dismas House once a month, on the fourth Wednesday. Because Sunday services are now taking place online, passing sign-up sheets around the Church is no longer an option.

As an adjustment to current conditions, we will seek volunteers one month at a time and it will be done through email contacts and the Church's monthly newsletter.

Church members and friends have long been supporters of the Church's Dismas House Mission. Please continue that support. Dismas House residents still need our help and now, more than ever, are grateful for our help.

For information about the Church's Dismas House mission, please contact Ed Steele, the facilitator for the program. He can be reached at (802) 871-5897 and edwardmsteele@msn.com

Hannaford Gift Cards are still available!

The church receives \$5 for each \$100 Gift Card we sell, and we appreciate this fundraising now more than ever! *Want to get started?* Contact Pat Seaver at vtri2@aol.com and she will mail a card to you. Let her know how much you would like to add to the card and send a check to the church. Be sure to put "Hannaford Card" on the reference line of your payment. *Need a refill?* Contact Pat Seaver at vtri2@aol.com and give her your name, the amount of money to be applied, and the last four digits of the gift card. Note: if you bought your card somewhere other than the church, you would need to provide the full length of digits. You will receive an email when funds have been added to your card. Please allow 1-2 weeks for processing as the cards are done in batches. Questions? Please call Doug Ovitt in the Church Office at 802-878-5745 extension 100.

Please make checks payable to "FCCEJ" (or use online Bill Pay) and mail to this address:

Attn: Financial Secretary, FCCEJ, 1 Church Street, Essex Junction, VT 05452

Please include "Hannaford Reload" and the date on the subject line of your email or check memo.

FCCEJ selected as Hannaford Fight Hunger Bag Program beneficiary

For the month of May, our Heavenly Food Pantry will receive a \$1 donation from each purchase of the \$2.50 reusable Fight Hunger Bag at the Hannaford store located at 21A Essex Way, Essex Junction VT.

Heavenly Cents

The Thrift Store was closed for most of March. We will reopen soon, but our schedule is apt to be different. Now is a good time to box up spring and summer items as we seek donations for when we reopen!

Heavenly Food Pantry continues to operate monthly on the 2nd Monday ~ 5:30-7:30pm and 4th Thursday ~ 2-6pm. The n Pantry dates in May are Monday, May 11th and Thursday, May 28th.

Safely receiving food: Due to current health directives, the shopping process will be modified, and food will be delivered to vehicles in the Church parking lot. Clients will stay in their vehicles, where a volunteer will gather family information and bagged food will be placed in car trunks. This way, exposure will be strictly limited for both clients and volunteers.

Donations: The Pantry's most needed items are baked beans, tomato soup, chicken noodle soup, corn, peas, bar soap, and dish soap. Tangible donations can be placed in the blue tote outside of the church's Church Street entrance. Or, during 9am-Noon, Tuesday-Friday, the church doors might be unlocked during which time donors may place non-perishable food inside the metal cabinet within the foyer of our Church Street entrance. (The cabinet has a large "Food Pantry" sign affixed to it.) We also keep a wheeled, wire basket within our vestibule/foyer at our Parking Lot entrance (inside, not outside.)

Questions or Concerns? Please, email welcome@fccej.org or call the church at 1 (802) 878-5745 extension 100.

Thank You! Heavenly Food Pantry would like to thank everyone who has contributed food or money lately. We appreciate your willingness to support our mission to help our neighbors. We also appreciate and thank the volunteers who have come forward to pre-pack bags and/or help with our new "curbside" distribution.

Altar Flowers: We continue to take altar flower requests. The following dates are vacant. Should you wish to buy flowers for the church in memory of a loved one or special event, please email welcome@fccej.org; or call 1 802 878 5745 extension 100 and leave a message that states 1) your name, 2) the reason for your flowers (e.g. "in memory of Jim"), and 3) the date on which you wish to dedicate said flowers. Here are the date vacancies:

May 31 / June 7 / June 14 / June 21 / June 28 / July 5 / July 12 / July 19 / July 26
August 2 / August 9 / August 16 / August 23 / September 6 / September 13
September 20 / September 27 / October 4 / October 11 / October 18 / October 25
November 1 / November 8 / November 15

Church Booth Helpers

Summer is Coming! Assuming that COVID-19 has moved on and our quarantines are lifted, the First Congregational Church is trying to organize a booth to sell food at both the July 4th Festivities and the EJ Block Party on August 1. Do you flip a mean burger? Do you have a great Michigan sauce? Have you attended these events and thought, "I wish someone were selling (fill in the blank)?" Do you have another good idea of a food product we could sell? If so, please contact Cathy Shearer (10cshearer@comcast.net) to share your ideas and culinary talents.

Birthdays

MEILLEUR, Sena 05/01; PETTINGILL, James 05/01; SHARP, Steve 05/01; MITTL, Steve 05/02; SCHNEIDER, Jane 05/02; FOSS, Donald 05/03; GIANNUZZI, Anna 05/03; NUTTING, Lester 05/03; HOY, Jacob 05/04; GRAY, Don 05/05; PARKS, Grace 05/06; RUSHFORD, Carolyn 05/06; CUNNINGHAM-FIRKEY, Laura 05/07; BLAKE, Pam 05/08; KINNEY, Anna 05/08; DROST, Rose 05/09; DUELL, Marsha 05/09; BOTTAMINI, Mike 05/10; HARRIS, Allie 05/10; BAKER, Chris 05/11; HOY, Jennifer 05/11; KEATING, Denise 05/11; OWENS, Gretchen 05/11; PARKS, Jackie 05/11; PETTINGILL, Anniella 05/11; LINDHOLM, Eric 05/13; CALHOUN, Jordan 05/14; HIGGINS, Rich 05/14; JOHN, Alex 05/14; BEEBE, Wayne 05/19; EHLEER-VOCK, Kyle 05/20; FRANK, Marlene 05/20; HOY, David 05/20; BICKFORD, Arlene 05/24; RELYEA, Becky 05/24; CARLSON, Maryann 05/25; RICHER, Mary 05/25; WOOD, Susan 05/25; STAPLETON, Orion 05/26; WARREN, Mary Anne 05/26; BASHAW, Dan 05/27; MCKENZIE, Maureen 05/29; WERMER, Leo 05/29; JAMES, Tom 05/30; PALMER, Amanda 05/31; PETTINGILL, Alyssa 05/31

80th Birthday Roses "Thank Yous"

- ◇ I have joined an "exclusive club," and especially enjoyed receiving a beautiful yellow rose from the church. Many thanks!! **Lilo Kinaman**
- ◇ Thank you for the Easter begonia. Hope you and your family stay well. Happy Easter! **Rose Drost**
- ◇ Thank you for the beautiful yellow rose that arrived on my birthday. **Betty Garrapy**

Teleworship & Fellowship Services

The Noontime Book Group will meet on Monday May 18 at 11:30. This will be a Zoom meeting hosted by Rev. Josh. If you have questions about getting on Zoom, contact Joanne Irwin or Rev. Josh. We will discuss Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens. Set in the lowland marshes of the North Carolina coast, this novel is the story of a little girl abandoned by her mother, then her siblings and finally her abusive, alcoholic father when she was only six years old. She not only survives but learns to thrive. Part coming of age story, part love story and part page turning mystery this book explores important themes of our time including poverty, justice and turning loneliness into positive energy. Even if you are not able to join us every month for our Book Group, join us this month while you are at home. Where the Crawdads Sing is available at local libraries, online for purchase and on Kindle. It will be a good discussion, with time for fellowship, friendship and lunch if you wish. Join Zoom Meeting via <https://zoom.us/j/93408447557>
OR Dial by your location: +1 929 436 2866 US (New York)

Teleworship & Fellowship Services Links

Below is a summary of our various services and activities. We recommend that you review our worship bulletins ahead of time. They serve as primers for your participation; and all are welcome to participate! To access our worship bulletins, visit this link: <https://www.fccej.org/v5/category/bulletins/>

- Sunday Worship at 9:30am. Live Stream.
 - <https://www.facebook.com/firstcongregationalej/> OR
 - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCuXmhD4K1JGklxOIDMDdZbw> OR
 - visit our website and click the “Facebook” menu tab at the top of the page www.fccej.org
- Fellowship Hour, after Sunday Service ~ 10:30am @ <https://zoom.us/j/980588369>
- Saturday Worship at 4:30pm @ <http://zoom.us/j/403773331>
- Daily Devotionals, Weekdays 8am and 8pm @ <https://www.facebook.com/firstcongregationalej/>
- Yoga with Jonah, Mondays and Thursdays at 5:30pm @ <https://smcvt.zoom.us/j/620842254>
- Solidarity Group with Rev. Josh Simon, Mondays at 7pm @ <http://zoom.us/j/910565449>
- Sermon Talk Back, Tuesday at 8:30am @ <http://zoom.us/j/740803865>
- Thursday Coffee Clatter, Thursdays at Noon @ <https://zoom.us/j/97659276694>
- Church Committees utilize Zoom as needed. Please, contact the relevant committee chair for details.
- Don't have a web camera? No problem! Visit our Facebook Events page and click your desired event for a list of phone numbers that you can call to join by telephone/cellphone. (There are numbers for people living nationally and internationally): <https://www.facebook.com/firstcongregationalej/events/>
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Our 8th Open & Affirming Anniversary

On Sunday, April 26th, we celebrated by teleworship the 8th anniversary of our church's entering into a very special covenant: that we would follow Christ's command to love all people without exception. Here is a brief timeline of our journey towards becoming an Open & Affirming institution:

1. Rev. Heike Werder was hired as First Congregational Church's Associate Pastor and served from 1995 - 2000. Although not completely out, many within the church community knew of Heike's lesbian sexual orientation and supported her ministry with joy. She was well loved and did exceptional ministry here.
2. Under the leadership of Rev. Steve Garvey and after a series of educational opportunities, a ballot vote was sent out to the congregation to determine if the ordained staff could perform Civil Union Services in the sanctuary. On February 12, 2001, the vote affirmed the church's support for performing civil unions.
3. After the positive Civil Union vote, Rev. Steve Garvey and Rev. Tim LeConey performed nine Civil Union services both at First Congregational Church and off site.
4. During the September 2008 Leadership Retreat, the church created and then affirmed a vision statement that read, "A Welcoming Church, Accepting and Serving All, In the Spirit of Christ."

5. In 2009, an adult education opportunity looked into racism and ways that First Church could become more inclusive in its outlook and practice. This was followed up with a series in 2010 on immigration that resulted to the church partnering with the Vermont Refugee and Resettlement program in renting its apartment to refugees in the area. This was followed by a series on cultural diversity led by Dan Balon: a diversity specialist with the Burlington Schools. During this time, we also started a mental health outreach ministry through NAMI, led by Bernie Profili.
6. Rev.s' Mendes and Gackenhimer both express their support for the Open and Affirming process by using the "No Matter who you are or where you on life's journey, you are welcome here," every Sunday, by providing O & A specific educational opportunities starting in Oct of 2009, by including the discussion in each New Member's Class and by challenging the church in various ways to understand faith, doctrine and theology in new and different ways: of significant interest was Brian McLaren's book. "*A New Kind of Christianity*."
7. During 2009, the Deacons discussed our church's policy on whether our ordained staff can marry gay and lesbian couples. Not having a policy puts our staff in an uncomfortable position. In Oct./Nov. 2009, the Deacons bring the issue to Council and Rev. Mark leads the Open and Affirming discussion.
8. In March of 2010 under the leadership of President Todd Kelley, Church Council passes two motions. The first declares, "that Church Council should consider our church as Open and Affirming." The second, "that after prayerful and loving consideration and in view of our Vision Statement - *A Welcoming Community, Accepting and Serving All, In the Spirit of Christ* - the Council declares all members of this church entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership."
9. At the Leadership Retreat on May 16, 2010, Rev. Ryan led multiple workshops on the Open and Affirming process where everyone present offered their verbal support to its tenants. At the same time, Rev. Mark explored our church's theological identity with a vast majority of attendees seeing First Church as moderate to liberal in our theology.
10. At the June 2010 meeting, with both Leadership Retreat discussions in mind, Church Council voted to establish an Ad Hoc Open and Affirming Committee, with possible names being affirmed at the Oct. 2010 meeting. The names ultimately chosen were Kathy Mertens, Dave Eaton, Bruce Giannuzzi, John Alden, Todd Kelley, Linda Bogardus, Paula Duke, Mark Benton, Ryan Gackenhimer and Mark Mendes.
11. Beginning in June 2010, the Open and Affirming Committee presented many forums to educate the congregation concerning the Open and Affirming process including speakers, Sunday forums, printed brochures, cottage meetings, biblical studies, and many one on one discussions.
12. In 2011, Rev. Mendes performed a marriage for two delightful women and beautiful brides at the Inn at Essex.
13. In April of 2012, Church Council unanimously voted to accept the proposed Open and Affirming Statement as presented by the Open and Affirming Committee and called a Special Congregational Meeting for April 29, 2012 after the second worship service. The warrant for aforementioned meeting was read according to the by-laws for two Sundays prior to the meeting in worship and a letter was sent out two weeks prior to the Special Congregational Meeting to all members and friends of the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction.
14. The congregation voted on April 29, 2012 to become an Open and Affirming Congregation.

OUR OPEN & AFFIRMING STATEMENT

The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction, United Church of Christ, is an Open and Affirming congregation, embracing diversity and affirming the dignity and worth of every person, because we are all created by a loving God. We seek to live Christ's call for compassion, justice, healing and wholeness in life. Therefore, we welcome into our community persons of every race, gender, age, sexual orientation, faith background, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, mental and physical ability, economic and social position, gender identity and expression, level of education and family structure. We invite all to share in the life, leadership, ordained ministry, lay ministry, worship, sacraments, responsibilities, fellowship, blessings, and joys of our congregation as we seek to grow together in faith and love.

MINISTRY DIRECTORY

Church Staff

Senior Pastor: Rev. Mark Mendes [mmendes@fccej.org]

Associate Pastor: Rev. Josh Simon [jsimon@fccej.org]

Music Director: Carol Spradling [cspradling@fccej.org]

Christian Education Director: Laurie Chipman [lchipman@fccej.org]

Church Administrator: Doug Ovitt [welcome@fccej.org]

Music Ministry

Cherub Music: Jenny Bourn [jennybourn4@gmail.com]

& Laura Marthaler [Laura.marthaler@gmail.com]

Currier Bell Choir Director: Carolyn Harris [899-6759]

Finally @ First Director: Rick Dooley [rickdooley5@gmail.com]

Joyful Noise: Jessica Moos [jessicamoosvermont@gmail.com]

Men At First Director: Bill Bickford, Jr. [bill.bickford@aol.com]

Sanctuary Choir/Heavenly Harmony Director: Carol Spradling
[cspradling@fccej.org]

Committee / Church Officer Contacts

President, Chair Human Resources Committee: Maureen Evans [233-6127]

Vice President, Chair Finance & Pastoral Relations:

Cathy Shearer [878-6023]

Treasurer & Historian: Ann Gray [878-4088]

Asst. Treasurer: Dan Petherbridge [879-0261]

Financial Secretary: Pat Seaver [879-4445]

Clerk: Christine Sinkewicz [878-4470]

Christian Education: Lisa Clark [872-5849]

Communications: Andrea Sharp [879-0580], Judy McCullen [878-9794]

Deacons: Judy Larrabee-Pomainville [802-236-0604]

Hospitality: Jim Glatz [503-5076]

Missions: Joanne Irwin [878-2528], Ed Steele [871-5897]

Music: Denise Keating [345-8900]

Nominating: Barb Smith [310-2491]

Stewardship: Jessica Moos [399-8068], Shannon McCullen [922-8792]

Trustees: Kaki McGeary [879-2062]

Ushering: Justin King [238-6273], Jessica Moos [399-8068]

Recognized Groups at First Church

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop Sue Wood [879-6552] woodsusanjane@gmail.com

Heavenly Food Pantry Contact: Valerie Gabert [879-0109]

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