



SPIRIT@FIRST

FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH *of Essex Junction*

Love. Serve. Grow.

December 2020. *In this issue...*

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*** CHURCH COMMITTEES MUST SUBMIT CONTENT FOR THE **ANNUAL REPORT** TO THE CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR BY THE *FIRST SUNDAY IN JANUARY. (JANUARY 3rd, 2021.)* PLEASE EMAIL CONTENT TO WELCOME@FCCEJ.ORG ***

Your Pastor's Ponderings

A brief message of joy this holiday season. Everyone in the leadership of the church was excited to welcome limited numbers of people to our streamed worship services, but the new surge in Coronavirus cases has squashed that plan. It was a bit disappointing for all of us who had taken the time and made the preparations to welcome the hybrid worship into our family of faith. We feel good about keeping our people safe and following the guidelines that our state and national leaders have set into place but still a bit frustrated.

Then an amazing thing started to happen. Other ideas started popping up. One of our members wanted to orchestrate a "Not so Secret Santa" program where people would give, and others would receive Christmas goodies that would then be distributed to other members and friends of the church. Another member thought that we should let the community know that despite the current restrictions, we were still celebrating Christ's birth at the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction. The Deacons decided that they would decorate the church despite no one being inside so that everyone at home would be able to see our beloved sanctuary decorated for the Advent/ Christmas season. One person had the idea of having a nativity scene out front, another thought it would be cool to have families from the church come and be a part of the nativity scene while waving to everyone going by as they listened to Christmas carols, yet another person thought that this might be the year to put some Christmas lights up on our fantastic bushes, and another thought we should have opportunities for folks to come in as family units to spend 15 minutes in the church to pray and take in the peace and beauty of our sanctuary. Anita and Elaine delved into technology so that we can continue to distribute gifts to kids and families in need via the Giving Tree. Since deciding to not be in person during the Christmas season, there has been a cornucopia of ideas to keep the Christmas Spirit alive and our church members connected to one another.

Despite not being inside the sanctuary, the story of God's extravagant love being offered to humanity is being lived out in our midst. May that spirit be with you during this holiday season. I am

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Mark

COVID19 Update

It is with heavy hearts and great disappointment that the Executive Committee must inform you that we have determined not to begin holding in person worship on Sunday mornings just yet.

Our staff and committees had been working out details - we were poised and ready to begin in person worship just in time for Advent on November 29th. Unfortunately, the COVID cases have surged not only throughout our nation, but also in VT - even in Essex. COVID cases are expected to continue to rise as students return home from college and as we all begin to move our lives back into confined spaces for winter. In their press conference yesterday, Governor Scott and the Vermont Department of Health sounded a warning for all of

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us to take the threat seriously. We need to limit the number of people we interact with and the size of groups with which we engage. All of us on the Executive Committee were saddened because we crave to be together as a community of faith, especially during the Advent and Christmas season. While we are postponing the in-person worship, we have not decided, at this time, to reimpose stricter requirements on the groups currently meeting at the church. If the case counts continue to rise, we will have to revisit the restrictions.

On a brighter note, the staff has already begun to prepare for the Christmas services. The Deacons are coming up with a plan to decorate our newly painted sanctuary with our Christmas decorations [will it be bright red or burgundy no one knows....!]. Anita and Elaine are working hard to get our Giving Tree Program up and running this year. Laurie is working on streaming our Annual Christmas Pageant. Carol, Rick, and our musical groups are already singing some favorite carols for the Christmas Eve Services. Rev. Mark, Rev. Josh and Laurie are preparing to present the Christmas story [pre-recorded] in costume and character for their annual 5:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Service. We are working on a few other surprises so our community will get the flavor of our Christmas Spirit despite our lack of physical presence at traditional worship services.

So, despite our disappointment in this setback, we are moving ahead with our celebration of Christ's birth and the many blessings we have in our lives. It will not be the same, but it will still be joyous and good. All of you will be invited to join in as always. Then when this surge of COVID is passed and the new vaccine is closer at hand, the EC will revisit the issue and begin in person worship as soon as we can do so safely. Until then keep the faith, stay hopeful, call the ministers if you need someone to talk to, and remain steadfast in the Lord.

Blessings from the Executive Committee,

Maureen Evans

Ann Gray

Cathy Shearer

Josh Simon

Christine Sinkewicz

Alison Wermer

Rev. Mark Mendes

Associate Pastor News

I celebrate Christmas because Jesus' birth embodies for me the hope that peace, love, and justice will be realized, in small and large moments, and eventually, fully everywhere. I also celebrate Christmas for its traditions. Traditions give us a sense of normalcy and comfort us. Some of my traditions are when I gather with my family in January, or when I join people from church to sing carols to elderly residents at a nearby elderly care place, when our youth perform the Christmas pageant, when we decorate the church, when I sing Joy to the World as loudly and joyfully as I can, and when I would eat at the China Garden on Christmas eve with the Chipmans and then the next day with the Mendes. Just writing these traditions leaves me feeling a little sad knowing that many of these traditions cannot continue in the same way that they would usually be done. My traditions will change a little bit this year. It is too early for me to know how my traditions will change but I am asking myself the question, how will I invigorate my traditions for a Christmas during a pandemic? I am also reminded that a tradition only becomes a tradition after it has been repeated. That a tradition was once not a tradition, it was new. I am also asking, what are some of the new traditions I will begin this year? Like I am, I invite you to invigorate old ones and create new ones. I invite you to drive past the parsonage in December. I will have LED Christmas lights on outside. I want to spread as much Christmas cheer as I can!

You might have noticed the Pride Flag flying from the steeple has changed. It is like the previous one with some meaningful changes. The stripes of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple are still on the flag. Those colors represent life, healing, sunlight, nature, harmony, and spirit, respectively. Those colors were intended to represent the whole LGBT+ community. Without going into the long history and disagreements within the LGBT+ community, I will explain why the change. Not everyone who identifies within the LGBT+ community feels represented by the previous pride flag. Sadly, the racism within general society is not absent within the LGBT+ community, and many people of color had felt left out from feeling represented by the Pride Flag. The new one adds brown and black strips to represent marginalized LGBTQ+ people of color, adding these colors hopes to signify to ALL LGBT+ people that all really means ALL. And again, the pink, light blue and white colors represent the Transgender Pride Flag because, sadly, many Transgender people did not feel included. Another way to signify to ALL LGBT+ people that all really means ALL. In short, no community is

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devoid of bias, LGBT+ people included, I pray that the LGBT+ continues to grow and further looks like the kingdom of God.

Everyone is invited to join a discussion on Ibram Kendi's book, "How to Be an Anti-Racist," on Thursday, December 10th, 7-8:30 pm. The book examines how to uproot racism within our society. Zoom meeting ID is 863 4206 3442. We will discuss the book from the beginning to the end of chapter 9. This is part of the racial justice work many in the church have been participating in, please join us.

Parents with college students and college students, please, keep a look out for an email to schedule a time for our college students to gather online during the break from school. I am looking to schedule between Dec 27th and January 7th.

Rev. Josh Simon, *Associate Pastor*

Laurie's Lens



I'm sure by the time you get this newsletter you have started to decorate for Christmas. Maybe your tree is already up. We are all needing to feel the warmth, love, see the lights and uplift our souls. The darkest days of the year can feel so long, cold and lonely during the winter. In the Faith @ Home items for November (handed out on the 15th and more are here to be put outside for pick up) was a copy of the book Faithful Families for Advent & Christmas. This book is filled with many different ways to help you and your family get ready for the birth of Christ and celebrate his coming. This book is not meant to be another thing added to your to do list and stress you out. It is however a resource for your family to choose a try one to help you create sacred space in your home during these seasons. I will be featuring one in my weekly Faith @ Home emails on Fridays...from ways to tell the story to ideas for decorations. We all need the love and warmth that comes, especially at this sacred time, even more so this year. So look for new ways to help bring the hope, peace, joy and love to those around you this year. Reach out, broaden your view and keep breathing deep the breathe of God.

I have been listening to feedback for our faith formation programs and our CE committee listening too and helping us try to keep all our programs alive and meaningful for you all. Some things are needing to change in order for us to be safe, so PLEASE read ALL these sections in the newsletter this month and if you have any questions, please be in touch.

We are adding another line of communication for our families with children and youth and how we can connect with each other. Be watching for an invite to our new Faith @ Home Facebook closed group. I'll be posting information there, similarly to the Faith@Home emails, but you as families and post pictures, ask questions and be in touch with each other too. You'll get a notification in our weekly church email and the Faith@Home email.

Hope, Peace, Joy & Love to you and yours,
Laurie Chipman, *Christian Education Director*

From the Financial Secretary's Desk

I think I join everyone who attended the memorial service for Pat Seaver in saying that it was a wonderful recognition of Pat's life and how she touched so many lives and gave her all to her family, community and church. She will be missed, and I cannot understate how much she has done in her position as Financial Secretary for so many years at FCCEJ. Dan Petherbridge I believe said it best, "it will take four of us to do what Pat did as one". Her attention to detail and commitment to serving each member completely in her role was outstanding.

Pam Blake has graciously agreed to move into a similar position and joins myself and Linda Bogardus as Assistant Financial Secretary. We have been working hard to get up to speed on the processes and duties of these positions to provide a smooth transfer and ensure the congregation we are processing pledges, donations, and other contributions timely and that member accounts are updated accurately and with the utmost in confidentiality.

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Going forward please feel free to submit to us any questions or notes to the following email address only - finances@fcej.org. Pam, Linda, and Dan Petherbridge (Assistant Treasurer) will follow up with you depending on the type of response needed. In addition, please ensure any contributions submitted have enough detail to allow us to accurately apply the funds in the way that you would like. Finally, please get your pledge cards in to allow us to accurately tally where we stand for the next fiscal year financially. This is very important.

If you're not sure who to contact about a finance-related issue, then you may email Doug Ovitt, Church Administrator, at welcome@fcej.org or call 1 (802) 878 5745. Doug will be sure that the message reaches the relevant officer.

Please stay safe and well,
Rob Sinkewicz, *Assistant Financial Secretary*

Our Home, Our Future, Our Time: Capital Campaign Update

The season of Advent is here... a time of preparing and waiting for the wondrous story of Christmas and the celebration of the nativity of Jesus. It is also a time of preparing and waiting for the day that we can be together in Our Home! Thank you all for your continued support of the Capital Campaign and for your continued pledge payments, even in this challenging time. It is amazing that we still have not needed to tap into our bridge loan financing and 77% of our pledges have been paid in full! Some of you have even continued your payments beyond your initial pledge or extended your pledge for another year. Thank you! These additional contributions will help ensure that we have enough funds to complete the remaining two "main goal" projects: the Marvin Lounge Renovation (starting soon) & the Kitchen (timing still TBD, pending available funds).

The Marvin Lounge project will begin in mid-November. We will be adding insulation to the exterior walls. This project provides an opportunity to give the room a much-needed makeover...including new paint, new carpet, and some new built-in bookshelves along the media wall as well. We hope to complete the project sometime in January. We expect to come very close to having all the funds in place to complete the kitchen renovation, and hope to be able to complete that project sometime in 2021.

Important Note: New Exterior Locks Coming Soon

Our new grant-funded security and controlled-access system is almost complete, which means that we will soon be transitioning away from regular metal keys to new key-cards that you will be able to swipe on the new keypad readers outside each entrance. Once new keycards are issued, we will be changing the physical locks and your old key to the church will no longer work. Doug Ovitt will be coordinating this transition with all our keyholders and outside groups.

Peace & blessings to you and yours this Christmas, and throughout the new year.
Dave Johnson & Kaki McGear, *Capital Campaign Co-Chairs*

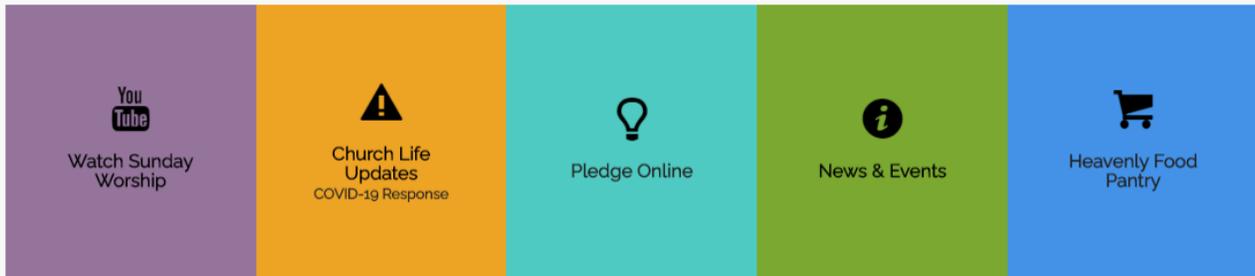
Stewardship Committee

Read our most recent Stewardship letter here: <https://bit.ly/35gB4wW>
The 2021 Stewardship Drive is in full swing! Please remember to turn in your pledge to help us create a budget for next year. Even when we are not able to be physically together, we still support our valuable staff, maintain, and improve our building, and offer valuable programs. This year, we have a new, online form on our fantastic website to help you turn in your pledge: <https://www.fcej.org/v5/giving/pledge-form/> The information entered here is sent confidentially to the Financial Secretary. Many thanks to our Assistant Financial Secretaries Rob Sinkewicz, Pam Blake, and Linda Bogardus for taking over the duties long held by Pat Seaver. We feel confident they can fill these big shoes. Pledge forms can also be mailed to or dropped off at the Church office.

Questions? Please contact Cathy Shearer, *Finance Committee Chair*.

Communications Committee

This year you have an additional method for submitting your 2021 Stewardship Pledge – there is a secure Pledge page accessible from the church website (<http://www.fccej.org>). On the home page, you will see a new block labeled “Pledge Online”. When you click on the block, the pledge page opens. Complete the data elements and submit to send your information securely to finances@fccej.org. Easy peasy lemon squeezy!



Are you wondering where to find the link for Fellowship Hour after Sunday online worship? Each week you can find the link in the bulletin in the section “Worship & Fellowship Opportunities”. To easily find the bulletins, you can use this link: <http://www.fccej.org/v5/category/bulletins/>

Please refer to the website for information on Holiday Festivities including opportunities to help decorate, sign up to provide gifts to children in the community, known as "The Giving Tree", streamed worship options and so much more. At the deadline time for the newsletter the details were not yet decided, but the website will be the nexus for this information.

The Communications Committee is continuing to research a Calendar for the website, and we will share with you once we have found a solution that meets our needs for ease of use for staff as well as our church members and friends. In the meantime, the online calendar (<https://www.fccej.org/v5/calendar-news/calendar/>) shows church activities for the previous, current, and next week.

The website is our best way to reach people right now while we are constrained in what we can do in person. Please take an opportunity to browse the website at <http://www.fccej.org>. Contact the church office via e-mail at welcome@fccej.org or by calling 878-5745 if you have any questions.

Faith Formation

Join Laurie every Sunday at 9am. All parents with children or youth, please take a moment (truly) and click on this survey of 6 questions to help our planning as we move forward with Faith@Home. Thank you.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/S7CZ82D>

Faith @ Home with Laurie on Zoom: *Sundays (except the 2nd Sunday) from 9-9:30am*

November 29th, December 6th, 20th (off on the 27th) & January 3rd

Zoom link in Friday's Faith@Home email

Bible story to read and then join me Sunday morning for conversation along with our line up below. Please pass along any feedback and help us support you in these changing times.

- Gathering time ~ feedback on items in the Faith@Home bags ~ any questions ~ how was your week?
- Laurie will ask you to gather items from around your home
- Sing our opening song
- Reflect/conversation about the story highlighted in the Friday email
- Some Sundays we will have a special guest join us and find out their connection to FCCEJ
- Share where did you see God this week?
- Share your hi and low (thorns and roses) for the week or your joys & concerns (worries)
- Prayer time
- Sing our closing song

Special guest in November have been Mandy Wark and Munroe Shearer. Mark your calendars and join us! We are on for about 30 minutes. Come in your PJ's with coffee/tea/hot coco. We are a real relaxed group.

Faith Formation Outside*2nd Sunday of the month at 9am*

Changed to a Drive Thru to collect your Faith@Home items due to new guidelines from the state and wanting to keep everyone safe. Laurie will greet you and pass off new items to you and answer any questions you have. Please enter from the Church Street side as usual to help the traffic flow.

Children in the Pageant ~ yes!

Please costume up at home and send us a picture of you as a sheep, shepherd or angel and we will insert you into the recording of this year's pageant. We need your picture by December 1st. Need help costume pieces, send Laurie an email.

2020 Faith Formation Offering

Earn an allowance? Practice dividing your money in three ways:

- Give \$ to the church/offering
- Save \$ (in a bank)
- \$ for You to spend/save

Vermont Adaptive Sports <http://www.vermontadaptive.org>*Total as of November 16th: \$117.20*

Send in your offering or drop it by the church. The memo link of your church should say either '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.

Young Apostles**(3rd – 5th graders & a parent)****3rd Sunday of the Month (drive by in the parking lot)****4 to 4:30pm**

We have handed out two mission activities in a bag. In October we passed out a cross suncatcher activity and asked you to write down where you shine your light (where do you see & feel joy). We asked you to feel the light of Jesus in you, around you and shining in everything you do.

For November we passed out a mission bag with a stone from Jamaica (some also had a knitted doll) asking you to put these items in a safe place in your home and think about the children in Jamaica. Look up Jamaica on the internet. How different is your life from children in St. Thomas providence? Then draw a picture and write them a note/letter. Remember you can either mail them back, drop them off or bring them on December 22nd when I will be back in the parking lot handing off the next mission bag to you. Please remember to return the stones & dolls in December so we can use them again. As always, Laurie is looking for ideas and wanting to hear where you like to give of your time in the community.

Youth Ministry

Opportunities to Volunteer: Visit our Signup Genus page and see where you can volunteer. <https://bit.ly/2Hly8WD>

Pageant Rehearsals - JY (6th-8th) & HS Youth*4:30-6pm on Zoom (link provided in the weekly email from Laurie)*

Gathering safely to chat and reconnect, hearing your highs & lows along with an activity to build community. Then we will move into pageant rehearsal and recording. We still have small one-line parts available. Please be in touch. You can also be recorded at another time. Please come and join the group, even if you do not want a part in the pageant. Our first 30 to 60 minutes will be youth time, depending on the day. Due to our new guidelines

for the state we are adapting and trying to keep our program alive and well. Please bear with us, stay connected and join the fellowship every chance you get. We need you to help keep our youth ministry programs alive!

Rehearsal Calendar

- Wednesday, Nov. 18th
- Sunday, Nov. 22nd
- Wednesday, Nov. 25th
- Sunday, Nov. 29th
- Wednesday, Dec. 2nd
- Sunday, Dec. 6th

Missions & Volunteering

Heavenly Food Pantry operates monthly on the 2nd Monday ~ 5:30-7:30pm and 4th Thursday (3rd Thursdays in November and December) ~ 2-6pm. For this month, dates are Monday, December 14th and Thursday, December 17th. Residents of Essex, Essex Junction and Westford are welcome to enter the parking lot at First Congregational Church of Essex Junction using the Church Street entrance. Vehicles will be ushered to a pickup spot after showing proof of residence and identification for each family member, including children. Food will be delivered to the vehicle's trunk, thereby ensuring a safe contactless delivery. There are no income requirements to receive food, but additional items from the USDA are available to those who verify their income falls below federally mandated guidelines! Those needing food but unable to attend can call Pastor Josh at 878-5745 to make other arrangements. We have shopping carts to borrow to get food home for those without vehicles for those living within walking distance! *Questions or Concerns?* Please, email welcome@fccej.org or call the church at 1 (802) 878-5745.

Volunteers: We appreciate all help sorting & distributing food! *Sign up her:* <https://bit.ly/3iVomZ2>

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop: Temporary Closure

Due to the health and safety of volunteers and customers related to the pandemic, the Advisory Committee has made a tough decision to close the Thrift Shop on Saturday, November 21st at 1pm until after the holidays. Our hope is to re-open Saturday, January 2nd, 2021. However, we will reevaluate where things stand the end of December. We appreciate your support in allowing us to serve so many in our community the past five months during this challenging time. Because the shop is closed, we will not be accepting donations. My best, Sue

The Giving Tree: Visit this link to donate! <https://bit.ly/36MeP1B>

Our Christmas gift-giving program is here. It is an opportunity for us to provide holiday gifts to children in the Town and Village of Essex and Westford. Because COVID has made this year's Giving Tree a bit more challenging, we will be using Sign-Up Genius to select gifts for each child. (See link, above.) It will go live on November 20th. If you would like help to choose a gift(s) or if you have no access to the website, Doug, the church's administrator, and I, Elaine Raymond (879-7350) will be available to help you. Please note that there is a number associated with each gift selection, such as 13A. Once you have made your selection(s), please remember to wrap the gift, or place it in a holiday bag. **It is critical that you mark the package with the number assigned to the gift or it will be difficult for it to be given to the correct child.** You are welcome to make a decorative tag if you like. Please bring your gift to the church by Monday, December 7th and give it to Doug Ovitt, Church Administrator, or another FCCEJ staff member if he is unavailable. They will note that you have delivered it and check the gift number.

Thank you for your help and flexibility in making this a Merry Christmas for so many families living close to us. Every year they express how grateful that are for our kindness and generosity.

Mission Challenge: Wildfires - Visit this link to learn more: <https://bit.ly/36JimOn>

We are all aware of the devastation from the wildfires in the West. More than seventy fires have burned more than four million acres in eleven western states, destroying homes, forcing evacuations, and taking at least thirty-five lives. United Church of Christ churches, congregations, camps, and members are in the midst of it.

The United Church of Christ stands ready to help through its Disaster Relief Fund's 2020 Wildfire Response Fund. Traditionally, the UCC remains on the scene long after the newscasters have moved on to assist people as they deal with the long-term ordeal of putting their homes and lives back together.

Your Missions Committee has a challenge for our church! We will match our congregation's personal donations up to \$1000 for this cause. Please open your hearts and wallets to help our western neighbors by sending a check made out to FCCEJ with a note to Fire Disaster Relief on the memo line.

You may mail or drop off your donation to the church office by November 22. Our address is:

FCCEJ
1 Church Street
Essex Junction VT 05452

"We can best do justice, love, kindness and walk humbly with our God together."

Jamaica Service Program Update

The Jamaica Leadership team regrets to announce that there will be no Cabin Fever Calcutta this spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will miss the fun of this annual tradition and look forward to the day when it will be safe to gather once again. Even though we cannot hold a large fundraising event, the need is still great in this impoverished area of Jamaica. This year, we invite you to consider supporting this important program by making a direct donation instead.

Your special donation will help sustain our longstanding relationship with our partners in Jamaica, as well as support the next planned service trip, now scheduled for Summer 2022. Funds are needed for project supplies, scholarships for Jamaican students, and offsetting the cost of travel/lodging for team members so that the trip can be affordable and accessible for everyone who wants to participate. By donating to this service program, you are making a gift that changes lives – not just for the children and families we serve in Jamaica, but also for the youth and adults who participate in the trip. One of our past participants wrote:

During our short time in St. Thomas, I was exposed to the realities of poverty in a way that turned my idea of the world, and my faith, on its axis. I still remember the weight of these truths as we drove through the country, watching the lives rushing by behind the safety of the bus windows. I thought of my home, my school, my church, and how much I wanted to break through the glass, to do something real. This trip allowed us to do something to help the members of a community who are just as deserving of love and support as anyone else, and yet they do not have many of the things we take for granted. –MW, 2015 Trip

Despite not being able to send a team to Jamaica in 2021, our commitment to the St. Thomas Parish community continues. We are in regular contact with our Jamaican friends to look for ways that we can be helpful, even though we cannot be there in person. We recently partnered with the White Horses School to complete fencing around the school perimeter, an extension of the fence we built to secure the school garden in 2017. The fence is important for the security of the children and serves to limit access to one main gate where health checks can be performed. In addition, we helped fund 9 scholarships to expand access to education for students in need.

We know these are difficult times and taking care of yourself and your family is the top priority. Thank you for considering a tax-deductible gift in support of this program. We are grateful for the ongoing support of our congregation!

Make a gift before January 15th for a chance to win a "Taste of Jamaica" basket!

Anyone donating prior to January 15, 2021 will be entered into a raffle drawing for a "Taste of Jamaica" gift basket of Jamaican snacks and goodies. The drawing will be held on January 31st and the winner will be notified by phone or email. Checks can be made payable to First Congregational Church of Essex Junction (FCCEJ), with "Jamaica Program" in the memo line.

Dismas House. Visit this link to register and get more info! <https://bit.ly/36kYq44>

On the fourth Wednesday of each month, three church volunteers prepare a meal for the residents of Dismas House in Winooski (103 E Allen Street). Dismas House is home to 10 people who have recently completed prison sentences and are taking steps to get back on their feet. Typically, one of our volunteers prepares an entrée (usually a one-pot entrée, such as a stew), a second volunteer provides a salad, and a third volunteer, a dessert. Please. Alternatively, you may contact the Church's Dismas House facilitator, Ed Steele, by phone (802-871-5897) or email (edwardmsteele@msn.com).



Photo: The Michaud Grandchildren posing with wreaths and kissing balls.

2020 Annual Christmas Wreath Sale

Scout Troup 624 is selling holiday wreaths. Please plan your decorations with a wreath in mind! They make a wonderful holiday gift to a family member, a friend, or a neighbor! Let us get festive! This sale will support the Troop chartered by FCCEJ, and a local Vermont family-owned business - the Michaud Farm in East Hardwick, VT who makes them. You can place an order for a wreath by emailing Carmelle Terborgh at cjcbeagles@aol.com or calling 802-871-5078 (home).

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- **Location:** The wreaths can be picked via 'drive thru' at the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction at 39 Main Street, Essex Junction. COVID protocols: Scouts will be masked and using hand sanitizer/gloves. You do not even need to get out of your car!
- **Dates:**
 - Saturday, November 28th from 1-4pm
 - Saturday, December 5th from 1-4pm
- **Prices:** Please, make cash or checks payable to "Troop 624". We will have extra wreaths – so if you forget to order, please visit during the sale hours.
 - 14-inch wreath - \$17.00
 - 18-inch wreath - \$22.00
 - 24-inch wreath - \$35.00
 - Kissing Balls - \$30.00

Worship & Fellowship

To access our worship bulletins, visit this link: <https://www.fccej.org/v5/category/bulletins/>



Visit this link to view our official calendar of events: <http://fccej.org/v5/calendar>
 You may also visit our Facebook events page: <http://facebook.com/firstcongregationalej/events/>
 We offer regular worship and fellowship opportunities, too! These include:

- ⊕ **Worship, Sundays at 10am (Communion: Monthly, 1st Sundays) @ <http://youtube.com/c/fccej>**
 - **Christmas Eve Services: 5pm & 9pm @ <http://youtube.com/c/fccej>**
- ⊕ **Fellowship Hour, after Worship @ <http://zoom.us/j/980588369>**
- ⊕ **Faith Formation, Monthly on 2nd Sunday at 9am @ Church Grounds**
- ⊕ **Daily Devotionals, Weekdays 8am and 8pm @ <http://facebook.com/firstcongregationalej/>**
- ⊕ **Sermon Talk Back, Tuesday at 8:30am @ <http://zoom.us/j/740803865>**
- ⊕ **Coffee Clatter, Thursdays at 8am @ <http://zoom.us/j/97659276694>**



Christmas Poinsettias: Visit this link to sign up! <https://bit.ly/3kVBOx8>

Each one costs \$12.95 and comes in one of four colors: red, marble, pink, or white. The deadline to order is Thursday, December 10th. Due to the pandemic, supplies are limited so order yours today! Questions or concerns? Email welcome@fccej.org for details. Please include the words "Xmas Poinsettias" with your payment or check's memo line. Payments may be mailed to:

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



Altar Flowers: Visit this link to request yours! <https://bit.ly/33JWlxj>

Altar flowers cost \$40. People typically buy flowers to honor of a special event, memorialize a loved one, or celebrate a birthday. If you cannot request flowers at the aforementioned link, then please contact the church office by emailing welcome@fccej.org or call 1 802 878 5745.

Caring Circles

Our church has been working very hard to continue our mission of serving God in our community and keeping worship going during these last few challenging months. Most of us have said at one point or another that we miss personal contact, we miss talking to each other, and we miss HUGS. The Deacons and staff have been doing a wonderful job of checking in on folks, but many feel that more frequent calls or emails would make them feel more personally connected at this time.

We are starting a new program to bring small groups of 3-6 people together by phone or by email. These folks would check in on each other every few days with brief phone calls, emails or even cards. There are currently several groups starting up. We hope that this will be a way to stay in touch with old

friends, enrich casual acquaintances and even get to know a few new people. We hope that no one is feeling lonely or without contact from their church family. These Caring Circles will give you a chance not only to keep your own church connection lively, but also to help some who might be feeling out of the loop right now.

If you would like more information or want to participate, please call the church office at 802-878-5745 or contact Joanne Irwin 802-878-2528.

New Members Class: *Sunday, December 6th @ 12:30pm* via Zoom <https://bit.ly/2ILCiHJ>

First Church loves nothing better than new members for their personalities, ideas, insights, volunteer hours, and leadership abilities will strengthen our church and create a faith community better able to spread the love of Christ. Conversely, First Church is a healthy and vibrant church whose members offer friendship, kindness, intellectual inquiry, and love to everyone. We have numerous activities for all ages of service, fellowship, education, spirituality, and worship. First Church has roughly 450 active members and together we seek to make our local community, country, and the world a better place in which to live. We welcome everyone who wants to join us in this venture.

In order to become a member of First Church, everyone is invited to join us for a New Members Class where we get to know each other, learn about First Church and get an understanding of the United Church of Christ, our denomination. We offer two to three classes a year for those interested and hold them after worship on a Sunday morning, providing lunch and childcare if needed. The class lasts a couple of hours.

After discovering who we are as a faith community, all attendees are then invited to formally join the church at an upcoming worship service where we will celebrate your decision and promise to work together to do the work of the church.

Once you become a member you are eligible to vote at the Annual Meeting and or any Congregational Meetings of the church as well as attend or serve on any committee or in any position of the church. There are also some privileges that come with membership like reduced prices for funerals. But more importantly, once you join, you are an equal member within a community of faith that is journeying together to spread Christ's love and make the world a better place.

Christmas Pageant: *Sunday, December 20th*

The Christmas Pageant that our kids put on is always one of the highlights of the season and we are going to have one this year as well, COVID style! Laurie and Josh will be working with our incredible youth to do all the parts of the service over the computer and then they will piece the parts together to create a masterpiece of Christmas JOY. As always, the Christmas Pageant will be the focus of the regular worship service on Dec. 20, 2020. One of the blessings of this year, however, is if you miss the pageant due to work or inclination, it will be recorded and able to be watched any old time after Dec. 20th. You can access the service through our webpage: www.fccej.org.

Christmas Eve Services: *Thursday, December 24th @ 5pm and 9pm*

There will be two distinct Christmas Eve Services this year, both of which will be streamed and accessed via our webpage: www.fccej.org.

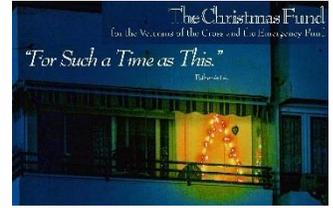
5:00 P.M. Family Friendly Service: As always, Rev. Mark, Rev. Josh and Laurie Chipman will be in costume and in character as they bring the age-old story of Christ's birth to life. The three of them will be bringing you their message from various locations throughout the globe and then all come together to spread the light of Christ. There will be some great music with a special performance of Silent Night by the Stapleton Trio. Have your candles ready.

9:00 P.M. Service of Lessons and Carols: Our tradition service where we hear the story of Christ's birth read by various members of the church and listen to tremendous music from our various choirs will continue this year as well. Get your candles ready to light as you enjoy this ageless rendition of one of the most amazing and world changing narratives ever.

Donate to our Church

Visit this link to Give: <http://www.fccej.org/v5/giving/>

Your donation could support our music, youth programming (e.g. Vacation Bible Camp), missions (e.g. Jamaica Missions), adult enrichment (e.g. Sermon Talkback, JOY), Thrift Shop, Food Pantry, and more! We are also a United Church of Christ "5 for 5" participant in these fundraisers: Per Capita (\$14.10/member is our goal), One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen The Church, Neighbors In Need and The Christmas Fund. We appreciate this fundraising now more than ever! *Questions about your payment? Do you wish to increase your pledge?* Contact our Financial Secretary by email: finances@fccej.org. Here are a few ways that you may help our ministry



**Our Christmas Fund
offering is on Sunday,
December 20th**

- Shop at Amazon.com using Amazon Smile. We receive 0.5% of your purchases! Visit <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/03-0212216>
- Send a Check or use BillPay! Your bank might offer Billpay, a remote service that issues one-time or recurring check payments by mail. Please, contact your banking institution for more details. All checks should be made payable to "FCCEJ." Be sure to note the reason for your donation in the check's memo line (e.g. "food pantry"). Payments should be mailed to:
 - attn: Financial Secretary, FCCEJ, 1 Church Street, Essex Junction, VT 05452
- Use PayPal! We accept electronic donations through PayPal. Visit our donation page: paypal.me/fccej. A PayPal account is not required to donate money!

Hannaford Fundraiser Suspended

Recently Hannaford has changed their procedures and we are no longer able to reload cards. Because of this, the Finance Committee has made the decision to suspend this program for now. The program is most effective when we can sell Hannaford cards in-person after Sunday worship. When the day comes that we return to in-person worship, the Hannaford card program will be re-evaluated, and a decision will be made on whether to re-institute the program or end it permanently. However, if it is again offered only new cards will be available. We are grateful to the people who have supported this program. Card bearers may reload their own cards online by visiting this link: <https://hannaford.cashstar.com/reload/>. We thank all of you for your immense generosity and apologize for any inconvenience.



Come to The Strike Zone and have a few swings on us! This coupon is good for *one (1) free round in the batting cage!*

Call to set up an appointment
802-662-4233

160 Griffin Lane
Essex Junction VT

Birthdays & Thank Yous

OLUFSEN, Douglas	12/04	SHEARER, Munroe	12/16
PAQUETTE, Olyvia	12/04	WATT, Chelsea	12/16
POMAINVILLE, Judy	12/04	BESSETT-MAUGER, Wyatt	12/18
GUILD, Anita	12/05	JOHN, Monica	12/19
BARTLETT, Irving	12/06	FRANK, Rebecca	12/20
IRWIN, Joanne	12/06	FRANK, Sheldon	12/20
HELMSTUTLER, Tom	12/07	HENNESSEY, Steve	12/20
KINAMAN, Russ	12/08	PARKER, Linda Lou	12/20
PLOOF, Cohen	12/10	DEWEY, David	12/21
PORATTI, Alex	12/10	EHLER-VOCK, Donna	12/22
WINSLOW, Mary	12/10	KRESS, Faith	12/22
FIRKEY, Pete	12/11	BOOMHOWER, Linda	12/24
FRANK, Tom	12/12	STEIN, Terry	12/25
GREGORY, Reese	12/12	GILLIAM, Ben	12/27
FIELD, Kathryn	12/13	PERKINS, Kaelani Lyn	12/28
WATT, Jazlyn	12/13	WATT, Deb	12/28
HOLLAND, Deb	12/14	BOUCHER, Arabella	12/29
ELEY, Anthony	12/15	DEWEY, Christine	12/29
GRENON, Frank	12/15	PALMER, Elijah	12/29
HOFFMAN, Brian	12/15	TALLMAN, Kurt	12/30
SCHMALZ, Zachary	12/15	GOEDKEN, Carley	12/31
GREGORY, Rylin	12/16	PORATTI, Samantha	12/31

“Thanks so much for the beautiful yellow rose you sent me on my 91st birthday. Nice to be remembered by you all! I love flowers!”
~ Bernie Currier

“Thank you for the yellow birthday rose! I am glad to have received it.”
~ Mary-Ellen Grove



The Joint Urban Ministry Project (JUMP) is in a joyous mood, raising \$14,500 for the **Virtual RUN or Walk fundraising event** which began on September 26th with a goal to raise \$15,000. The fact that the amount significantly surpassed last year’s goal of \$12,000 is a testament to how many believe in JUMP’s work in our community. **Click here for Thank you VIDEO:** <https://youtu.be/vMCcbaUtMkE>

OUR CHURCH, A “HUB” FOR LEARNING AND FUN
Back in September, FCCEJ hosted several students from the Summit School. The church was one of a dozen “hubs” co-opted by the Essex Junction Recreation & Parks department and Essex Westford School District. We offered students a safe space to learn when their school’s physical building reached capacity given the new COVID restrictions. This was a success as the kids were able to reconvene at their school. We also helped them with their “Trick or Treat Street” project.

Dear First Congregational & Rev. Mark Mendes,

Without you, our first ever "Trick or Treat Street" would not have been possible!

*Sincerely,
Essex Recreation*

