

# SPIRIT@FIRST

FIRST  
CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH *of Essex Junction*

*Love. Serve. Grow.*

January 2021: *In this issue...*

- Your Pastor's Ponderings
- Associate Pastor News
- Laurie's Lens
- Deacons Corner
- Capital Campaign
- Trustees
- Communications
- Faith Formation
- Youth Ministry
- Camps
- Missions & Volunteering
- Worship & Fellowship
- Stewardship
- Birthdays
- A Prayer for the New Year
- Ministry Directory

\*\*\* CHURCH COMMITTEES MUST SUBMIT CONTENT FOR THE **ANNUAL REPORT** TO THE CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR BY THE *FIRST SUNDAY IN JANUARY. (JANUARY 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021.)* PLEASE EMAIL CONTENT TO [WELCOME@FCCEJ.ORG](mailto:WELCOME@FCCEJ.ORG) \*\*\*

## ANNUAL MEETING SUNDAY ONE WORSHIP SERVICE @ 10 A.M. FEBRUARY 7, 2021

At our Annual Meeting in 2019, the congregation voted to change the by-laws and shift the date of the Annual Meeting to the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in February, which would give our financial officers more time to get the church's financial reports in order. Thus, our Annual Meeting this year will be on February 7<sup>th</sup> after the ONE worship service at 10:00 a.m. or roughly at 11:15 a.m. Everyone is welcomed to attend and speak, and members are welcome to come and vote. The Meeting will be held on Zoom this year and that identifying number will be sent out closer to the meeting. Looking forward to seeing you there!

### Your Pastor's Ponderings

Recently I was listening to a guest on a late-night news program and the newscaster was interviewing an author who was advocating for breaking up the four huge monopolies in our country that control our lives way beyond what the early monopolies did in the turn of the 19th century. The author said that if the antitrust aspect of our federal government broke up Amazon, Facebook, Google and then we would see an explosion of new ideas resulting in expanded business, inventions, and discoveries. As an example, he brought up the breaking of ATT which so many people warned against when it was happening. However, once broken up, each smaller unit then competed more aggressively, invested in research and development, and looking for new avenues to diversify their interests. The author goes on to say that at the end of the first year the new entities net worth was worth more than the mother company that was broken up. And out of the breakup new inventions led to the unbelievable explosion in portable phones.... something we are all quite aware of these days.

There are always doomsayers and people who think that change is suspect. They are with us today and even more poignantly due to the added dimension of the coronavirus and political unrest.

It would be easy as I write my first newsletter article of 2021 to focus on all the negative events of the last year and how circumstances have not only taken the lives of so many people but made life unbearably difficult. However, upon reflecting on 2020 in the life of our church, it has been one of the best years since my arrival. Just think about what has been accomplished this last year

- ❖ Our Sanctuary and narthex have been completely restored and painted
- ❖ Both Entrances have been upgraded with keyless entry
- ❖ Our Faith Formation Room have all been made more secure
- ❖ Our offices, bathrooms and Marvin lounge have all been upgraded

*(Continued on next page...)*

- ❖ Our Food Pantry has expanded and adjusted their efforts for the Coronavirus AND received over \$ 20,000 in financial donations
- ❖ There have been more new ideas initiated this year than in any other year of my ministry: Care Circles, Exterior Christmas Decorations, Not So Secret Santa Gift Exchange, Memoir Group Meeting, the Meetings and Greetings of our members in Worship Services, the One Day Lawn Sale and of course the too numerous to list technological answers to the isolation that occurred due to the coronavirus.
- ❖ A marked increase of individual members calling and taking care of other members from afar.
- ❖ Church Council invested over \$ 5000 in electronic and technological equipment that will allow us to video our services as we move forward, even after the coronavirus.... something we have been taking about for years but never have the will to see it through.

In addition to these new items, the church has continued to excel in their giving, in zoom meetings, in a high-quality streamed service which have more people watching than on a regular Sunday in the sanctuary and in connecting to and taking care of our members. 2020 has been a tremendous year of growth and expansion. Can't wait to see what 2021 will be. Happy New Year everyone!!!!

*Yours in Christ,*  
Rev. Mark

### Associate Pastor News

My newsletter entry for January 2021 is as relevant now as it was when I wrote it last year, so here it is with the change of the year and additions for this year are in bold.

2021 is here! And what a year it will be. Sadly, I think this will be another difficult year in the life of our nation. Yes, there are signs of hope a vaccine to help prevent COVID, and I hope it proves to be as effective and as long lasting as we want it to be. I am not usually in the predicting the future business, so I am not going to start now. Maybe, I should be. But I will say this year, no matter what happens, we must keep our hope in God's presence and God's ability to persuade and call humanity to strive towards liberation.

Even though I will not predict the future, I do have words of encouragement and maybe a mantra for 2021: Keep Faith Alive. When there are difficult days this year, Keep Faith Alive. Let us hold onto our Christian faith strengthened through the community of Christ, where love is the means to a peaceable kingdom. Keep Faith Alive. We do this not by avoiding each other but drawing ourselves closer to one another. Keep Faith Alive. A faith that advocates for a just and peaceful world. Keep Faith Alive. A faith that keeps us going strong where we not only survive, but we also thrive. Keep Faith Alive.

**It is also important to remain true to who we are and who we desire to be in the world, despite chaos and challenges. As I remind myself at the beginning of every new year, I remember my personal mission statement:** *"knowing that I have one life to live on this planet, I will do everything in my power to live with joy, love, and compassion by spreading God's love and taking action to create a better world."* My personal mission statement guides my life. No matter if my life is going well or there is a challenging time, my personal mission statement connects my daily life to the vision and purpose I have for my role in the world. I invite you again to think about your personal mission statement for how you desire to live in the world and let it guide your life. Ask yourself these basic questions: What inspires me? What does the world need? What helps me come alive? These questions might help guide in writing your own.

#### **Activities**

On Thursday, January 14, 7-8:30 pm, we continue our discussion of Ibram X. Kendi's book, "How to be an Anti-Racist." We will discuss chapters 3 through 9. The conversation will be hosted on Zoom, please email me at jsimon@fccej.org for the Zoom info. You are welcome to join us, even if you have not read the book, or finished reading the sections we'll be discussing.

Rev. Josh Simon, *Associate Pastor*

### Laurie's Lens



As I write this article I am reflecting on the most joyful morning I have had here in a while. On Sunday December 13th we had 18 of our young families arrive in their cars for our FFO drive-thru they handed me their Faith@Home bag and I filled them with our fun December items. It was great to see so many of you and wish you a Merry Christmas. You all warmed my heart so much! The joy in your eyes and voices truly warmed my heart, even through your masks. I've been learning how to read your eyes. Maybe you are doing this too as you see folks you know and you greet each other when you have masks on. It was truly felt like a Sunday of Joy for Advent! We did miss others of you. I hope, if we didn't not get on deliever to you, that you will stop by the church and pick up your December bag outside the Church Street doors. I pray you added a couple of different and new sacred moments to your Christmas this year. My husband Brian and I also came to the church for a 15 minute slot (signed up online) and enjoyed some time in our decorated Sanctuary listening to Christmas music. Maybe some of you also spent some time at the nativity scene and visited the holy family.

2020 has been a very different year, filled with many firsts. For our children, youth and family ministry programs here we have seen our first virtual Christmas pageant, the birth of our Faith@Home webpage, our new FCCEJ Faith@Home close Facebook group for families, Faith Formation Outside time for families, a virtual Vacation Bible Camp, and our new Young Apostles group form for 3rd – 5th graders – just to name a few. Please keep sharing your thoughts, feedback and ideas with us. Ministry is a two way street and hearing from you all, how you relate to the programs, what you find helpful, what you struggle with and thoughts of what we could do that we are not already doing really do help us stay vibrant and engaging.

Remember the different says you celebrated the birth of Christ anew among us again. I pray you won't forget them and will maybe even add them in again next Christmas. So as we begin 2021, I wish for you to continue feeling the Hope, Peace, Love & Joy of Advent and that is comforts you in these days and months ahead. (Watch for ways to engage in the season of Epiphany in our weekly emails.)

*Blessed to be journeying to sacred moments with you,  
Laurie Chipman, Christian Education Director*

### Deacon's Corner

In these strange and challenging times, we thank you all for participating in our online Sunday services and “virtual” special events. We are deeply appreciative of those who continue to work hard to make our online services and ongoing ministries meaningful, including everyone who helped decorate the church for Christmas last month, and helped build the manger scene on the church lawn. Together we have reveled through the beauty, mystery and joy that comes with the Advent season. We are also mindful of the pain and sadness that many people continue to experience each year, and particularly this year. Please let the Deacons know if there is anything we can do to enhance the spiritual life of the church. For example, some of us have recently joined together in a “Life Story and Memoir Club” to help encourage each other to write/preserve life our stories during the long winter months. Some have also formed care-giving circles to help folks keep in touch with each other during these times of isolation. We are always looking for new ways to support each other and welcome your ideas as we head into what we hope will be a glorious New Year! - Peter Schmalz, FCCEJ Deacon

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

Farewell 2020! As I write this, the snow is falling, and everything looks fresh and new outside. At the church, there are so many places that look fresh and new as well. It is hard to believe that one year ago, we were setting up a temporary worship space in Fellowship Hall so that the plaster ceiling and walls in the Sanctuary and Narthex could be fully restored. Despite this very difficult year, we have made amazing progress. Almost everywhere you look, you can see how your Capital Campaign gifts have restored

*(Continued on next page...)*

key infrastructure and made Our Home more welcoming, safe and beautiful – now and for future generations.

Thank you all for your continued support of the Capital Campaign and for your continued pledge payments, even in this challenging time. We are blessed to have 77% of our pledges already paid in full, even though the end of our 3-year pledge period doesn't end until July 1st. Some folks have even continued to make payments over and above their initial pledge.

The Marvin Lounge project is underway. New insulation was added to the exterior walls and the room is much warmer now. In the coming weeks, we will be painting and putting in new built-in bookshelves to create a media center and library. New carpet will be installed once the bookshelves are done. We hope to complete the project by the end of February. The security system upgrades are finally finished, and new electronic keycards are being issued.

We are SO close to having enough funds pledged to complete the kitchen renovation, and the Trustees will be discussing the best timing for that project. If additional new gifts come in, there are several remaining stretch goal projects that remain on our list, including new flooring in the gym & second floor halls, new flooring in Fellowship Hall, and possible further organ work.

*Blessings to you and your families for a very happy & healthy new year!*

*Dave Johnson & Kaki McGeary, Capital Campaign Co-Chairs*

### Trustees Notes

Trustees continue to oversee all of the Capital Campaign projects, as well as take care of the general maintenance and upkeep of our buildings and grounds. We have repaired the heaters in the gym so that both blowers work once again. We are in the process of having a zone valve replaced that has been causing a leak in Josh's office, and we are fixing several small radiator leaks in the Sanctuary. Ann Gray completed a special training course to become a state-certified lead inspector. All childcare facilities and residential rental properties are supposed to be inspected each year, so Ann is completing those inspections on our behalf.

**Elevator Update:** At our inspection earlier this summer, we were told that it is time for us to start planning to modernize our 30+ year old elevator because the current electrical controls and key parts will not be serviceable much longer. The estimate for modernization is about \$70K, plus the cost of some electrical work. Bay State Elevator, our long-time elevator service provider, has recommended modernization over replacement. Replacing the elevator would cost twice that much, and we are told that modernization will last at least as long as a new one. We have applied for a grant to help fund the modernization of our elevator. We will be notified about the decision in January or February.

Kaki McGeary, *Trustee Chair*

### Communications Committee

The Communications Committee have been busy in the last few weeks on two different efforts:

First, Doug Olufsen created and presented to the staff and Kaki McGeary a message board monitor for the administrative wing. This monitor will display a slideshow of images that will automatically update when a staff member changes a slide on the device. This will be a great method for people to visually see what is happening at the church, and it will be easy for the staff to update it to keep it relevant. We're excited for everyone to see it when we can start returning to the church!

Second, Andrea Sharp has updated the website so people can easily find information about all of the activities happening at First Church in the Advent season. This is the January newsletter, but it is published early in December, so you still have time to check out all that is going on. You can click on the golden block on the home page ([www.fccej.org](http://www.fccej.org)). Or you can navigate to it directly here: <https://www.fccej.org/v5/advent/>. 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/>

*(Continued on next page...)*

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 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 [www.fccej.org](http://www.fccej.org). Contact the church office via e-mail at [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org) or by calling 878-5745 if you have any questions.

*Respectfully submitted by Andrea Sharp*

*Committee Members: Doug Olufsen, Judy McCullen, Kevin Hamilton and Andrea Sharp*

### Faith Formation

**Faith Formation News: Join Laurie every Sunday from 9 to 9:30am!**

**Faith @ Home with Laurie on Zoom: January 3rd, 17th, 24th & 31st**

Zoom link in Friday's Faith@Home email

- Gathering time ~ feedback on items in the Faith@Home bags ~ any questions ~ how was your week?
- Sing our opening song – From the Rising of the Sun
- Reflect/conversation about the bible story highlighted in the Friday email
- Special guest? Find out their connections and involvement here at FCCEJ
- Share where did you see God this week?
- Share your joys & worries
- Prayer time
- Sing our closing song – This Little Light of Mine

Our last couple of special guests were Ethan Benton, now teaching music in the Burlington area, and Pastor Mark. Mark your calendars and join us! Zoom link will open at 9am. Come in your PJ's with coffee/tea/hot coco. We are a real relaxed group.

**Faith Formation Outside [FFO]: 2nd Sunday of the month. (Next date is January 10<sup>th</sup>)**

Come drive thru the parking lot and collect your Faith@Home items for the coming month. Bring your Faith @ Home bag for Laurie to fill and wear your mask. Please enter from the Church Street side as usual to help the traffic flow.

### **2020 Faith Formation Offering**

Vermont Adaptive Sports <http://www.vermontadaptive.org>

Total as of December 13th: \$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.

*Earn an allowance? Practice dividing your money 3 ways:*

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

**Young Apostles (3rd – 5th graders & a parent): 3rd Sunday of the month from 4-4:30pm.**

*(Next date is January 17<sup>th</sup>)* \*\*\* This program has also switched to a drive thru in our parking lot. \*\*\*

Our new program group is in its third month. I am hopeful that before our program year is done this group will be able to meet again safely in our parking lot to help us continue to build community. This is a fun group to join! If you have not done so already, here is your invite. Mission kits were passed out with a letter of instruction and welcome on December 20th. Please bring them back with you on January 10th and hand them off as you pick up this month's mission kit bag. The gift of giving is taught to us by the magi who followed the star and arrived to find Jesus with his parents. We celebrate this on Epiphany with the gift of giving. This month we will continue to practice the gift of giving.

**Pageant Costumes**

If you have not done so already, your angel and sheep costumes can be returned to church to the YELLOW bin just inside the glass doors on Church Street. Thank you so much for participating and being a part of this year's pageant. You were all amazing!

Youth Ministry

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

**Junior Youth (6th-8th)**

4:30-6pm Zoom time (link provided in the weekly email)

Sunday, January 3rd & Wednesday January 20th

We hope you will join the fellowship on Zoom – even if you haven't been online with us yet. It's never too late! Help us keep our youth ministry alive and well. Share your feedback. Let us know your thoughts as we move into 2021. On January 3rd we will have an Epiphany party!!!

Camps**Outdoor Ministry Camps**

VT @ HC ~ for those going into 5th – 8th in the fall of 2021: **July 18-24, 2021**

Join Laurie (a co-dean for this camp) at Horton Center our UCC camp in NH! VT @ the Lake is taking a hiatus from the lake at Rock Point and hiking to the Mountain! Come join us up at Pine Mountain and unite with middle schoolers from the Green (VT) and White (NH) Mountains. God's spirit will be in all we do at camp this week as we hike, play, pray, sing, rock climb, do some arts and crafts, and discover our own courage through games, challenges, and much more!

**Vacation Bible Camp: Save the Date! August 9th – 13th, 2021**

Who would like to be on the planning team this year? Please send me an email and let me know where your interests are. We will begin with a Zoom gathering for the planning team in February.

Team: Bible Drama Leader, Craft Leader, Discovery Leader, Game Leader, Music Leader, Opening Leader, Photographer, Puppeteer, Snack Leader, Tech support and hopefully Decorations.

Missions & Volunteering**The Giving Tree**

As you read December's newsletter, gifts for the Giving Tree will have been given out to the families and their children. This year there were 52 children who were given Christmas gifts through this program. It is difficult to describe the feelings expressed by the parents as they pick up the gifts. They are so very appreciative of the generosity of this church. Many express that they would have no gifts for their kids without our assistance. For each of you who helped to make this a time of joy for so many children and their parents, we thank you.

Special thanks also need to go to Essex Rotary, Sharon Dettenrieder and her daughter for the gift of coats and hats, to Mary-Ellen Grove and Judy Allen for hats and mittens, to the youth of our church for bags of candy and clementines, and for a gift of teddy bears from Alice Siegriest. *Sincerely,* Elaine Raymond and Anita Guild

**Sharing Our Bounty**

Our community has been very generous with the Heavenly Food Pantry this year. Recently, we learned of another neighbor in need. The Food Shelf at the Sara M Holbrook Community Center in Burlington had gotten low. The dedicated volunteers at our Food Shelf filled several boxes of food and pantry items to share with the Center, helping spread the generosity of our community to that Burlington neighborhood. Thank you!

**Mission Challenge: Wildfires Challenge.**

You can learn more about the wildfire relief efforts here: <https://bit.ly/36JimOn>

The Mission's Committee is letting you know directly that we made our goal of raising \$2000.00 to help with wildfire relief programs through the United Church of Christ.

**Hannaford Fight Hunger Bag Program**

It's time to spread the word about your upcoming month in the Fight Hunger Bag Program! For the month of January, 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 78 Marshall Ave, Williston VT.



**Heavenly Food Pantry** operates monthly on the *2<sup>nd</sup> Monday ~ 5:30-7:30pm* and *4<sup>th</sup> Thursday (3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays in November and December) ~ 2-6pm*. For this month, the specific distribution dates are Monday, January 11<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, January 28<sup>th</sup>.

Volunteers: We appreciate all help! *Signup here:* <https://bit.ly/3iVomZ2>

Donations: The Pantry would benefit from the following items: egg cartons, toilet paper, toothpaste, baking items/cake mix, and small dish soap.

Eligibility: 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@fceej.org](mailto:welcome@fceej.org) or call the church at 1 (802) 878-5745.

**Dismas House. Volunteers needed in 2021.**

To volunteer or request more information, please visit <https://bit.ly/36kYq44>

"The much-appreciated deed you can do!" As you may know, there are four Dismas Houses in Vermont. They are homes for folks who need a place to live after they have served a prison term. Each of the four Dismas Houses provides not only shelter but also support as residents make the transition from life in prison to life outside.

For the past several years, the members and friends of the Church have been helping with the support of Dismas House residents. We do this on the 4th Wednesday of each month by taking food to the Dismas House in Winooski that we've prepared for the dinner served on the fourth Wednesday of every month. Typically, three of us do the food preparation. One prepares an entrée, (often a one-pot dinner such as a stew or lasagna). A second person prepares a salad, and a third, a dessert. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, we would enjoy the dinner with the 10 residents and the Director and the Associate Director. The interactions that occurred between us and the residents helped them overcome the fear of facing the public that former prison inmates have. And the meals that I had there were excellent! I found the residents friendly and very appreciative of our help. I feel that by helping the residents, we are living out Christ's message of love and care for our neighbors.

The outbreak of the pandemic changed things for a while. We still prepare the food but we drop it off at the house and no longer enter the house. In this way, we and they have been practicing social distancing. With the development of vaccines for Covid-19 during the winter of 2020, protocols will change so that we can once again enjoy eating dinner with residents.

If you would like to prepare part of a dinner, please speak to or email Ed Steele, the member of our church who facilitates the program. He would be happy

(Continued on next page...)

to talk to you about the program. Ed can be reached by phone (802-871-5897) or email ([edwardmsteele@msn.com](mailto:edwardmsteele@msn.com)).

## 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, 1<sup>st</sup> Sundays) @ <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** @ <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>



**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 link, then please contact the church office by emailing [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org) or call 1 802 878 5745.

**Noontime Book Group:** every 3rd Monday, 11:30am. (Next meeting is January 18th @ 11:30am.)

**The Zoom ID is** <http://zoom.us/j/626841083>

\*\*\* For the Zoom meeting password, contact Joanne Irwin [joanne.h.irwin@gmail.com](mailto:joanne.h.irwin@gmail.com)

This month we are reading *The Library Book* by Susan Orlean. This book is described as both a whodunit investigation of a devastating fire in the Los Angeles Public Library and a tribute to the author's own mother's struggle with dementia, as well as a delightful history of libraries worldwide. Sounds fascinating, and from the reviews and comments of folks who have read it, IT IS! Come join us for a good discussion and even better fellowship!

### **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.

**Church-wide Camping Trip: June 18-19, 2021**

You are cordially invited to a church wide camping trip on June 18 and 19th at Little River State Park in Waterbury. Everyone is invited to make your own reservations and then we will meet up for activities, meals, and a Sunday morning outdoors worship service. Bring your games and swim trunks for the purpose is simply to have some fun and get to know each other. Make it in your calendar and get ready to make a reservation when the state park website comes online.

**Stewardship**

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

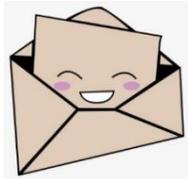


Your donation could support our music, youth programming (e.g., Vacation Bible Camp), missions (e.g., Jamaica Missions), adult enrichment (e.g., Sermon Talkback, JOY), Thrift Shop, Food Pantry, and more! We are also a United Church of Christ “5 for 5” participant in these fundraisers: Per Capita (\$14.10/member 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! Here are a few ways that you may help our ministry

- 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](https://paypal.me/fccej). A PayPal account is not required to donate money!

*Questions about your payment? Do you wish to increase your pledge?* Contact our Financial Secretary by email: [finances@fccej.org](mailto:finances@fccej.org).

**2021 Stewardship Drive: Pledge Cards**

Read our most recent Stewardship letter here: <https://bit.ly/35gB4wW>

Pledge forms can also be mailed to or dropped off at the Church office: <http://bit.ly/2JanByL>

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. The information entered here is sent confidentially to the Financial Secretary. Pledge Envelopes may be retrieved at church Monday-Friday, 8am-2pm (except for holidays or certain staff vacations or absences.) Due to this and COVID19 precautions, please give the church office ample notice if you intend to stop by so that we may ensure someone is available to hand them to you safely. We are happy to mail your pledge envelopes to you, as well. Do please ask us if you wish for them to be mailed.

- *Do you have questions about pledging?* Please contact Cathy Shearer, Finance Committee Chair. (P# 878-6023).
- *Do you need to confirm receipt of your pledge card or payment?* Please email the Financial Secretary ([finances@fccej.org](mailto:finances@fccej.org)).
- *Do you wish to pick up your pledge envelopes or need them mailed to you?* Please contact the church office by phone (802-878-5745) or email ([welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org))

Birthdays

DAHALL, Kul	01/01
DYKE, Owen	01/01
FRISBIE, Paulette	01/01
HARPLE, Glenn	01/01
RUSHFORD, Nicholas	01/01
MCINTYRE, Amy	01/02
YOULEN, Bryn	01/02
OWENS, Edward	01/03
DULANEY, Donna	01/04
LAFLAM, Chris	01/04
WINSLOW, Arthur	01/04
WISLOSKI, Jessica	01/08
NOWELL, Jeff	01/10
SINKEWICZ, Sara	01/10
DONLEY, Steven	01/11
DOOLEY, Alex	01/11
SIMON, Joshua	01/13
BARTLETT, Lincoln	01/15
GUILD, Ed	01/15
HALL, Wayne	01/15
HELMSTUTLER, Elaine	01/15
BOOMHOWER, George	01/17
RUSHFORD, Bob	01/18
MANNARINO, Molly	01/19
COBURN, Mary	01/20
HARRIS, Carolyn	01/20
DEAN, Ed	01/21
BEACH, George	01/24
WILLIAMS, Penny	01/24
SHEARER, Cathy	01/25
VANSTEENSBURG, Allison	01/25
GILLIAM, Ingrid	01/26
MCCULLEN, Kevin	01/29

**A Prayer for the New Year**

A UCC Devotional

by Daniel Hazard &amp; Felix Carrion

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. — *Mark 1:14-20 (NRSV)*

The author of the Gospel of Mark is fond of using the word "immediately" to describe a response that follows from a call or invitation. He attaches this word to the response of Simon, Andrew, James, and John to Jesus' invitation to come follow him. However, what appears to be a casual encounter in the moment actually reveals much more that is at work.

Something breaks through in the life of these four individuals and they can no longer remain attached to a life that does not capture the fullness of who they are and what they are here to accomplish. Jesus invites them to separate themselves from the world they know and to find new direction. They experience a breakthrough, an epiphany of sorts, and find the strength to finally follow a new path, long buried by the sleep of delay, procrastination, or neglect.

In his poem, "The Strength of Fields," James L. Dickey cries out, "Lord, let me shake with purpose." Sometimes a prayer like this is needed to wake us from our slumber, to shake us loose from our fears, and to set us on our way of "immediacy" toward long-forgotten hopes and longings and dreams. I think this is a prayer for the New Year.

"Lord, let me shake with purpose. Amen."



Happy new Year

**BE THE CHURCH***Protect the environment.*

Care for the poor.

**Forgive often.****Reject racism.****Fight for the powerless.***Share earthly and spiritual resources.*

Embrace diversity.

**Love God.****Enjoy this life.**

# 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]  
**Asst. Financial Secretary:** Rob Sinkewicz [878-4470]  
**Asst. Financial Secretary:** Pam Blake [872-8204]  
**Asst. Financial Secretary:** Linda Bogardus [872-8972]  
**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 [878-3068] [woodsusanjane@gmail.com](mailto:woodsusanjane@gmail.com)  
**Heavenly Food Pantry Contact:** Valerie Gabert [879-0109]

First Congregational Church of EJ  
1 CHURCH STREET  
ESSEX JCT, VT 05452  
Phone: 802-878-5745 Fax: 802-872-8236  
Email: [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org)

NON-PROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
BURLINGTON, VT 05401  
PERMIT #598

**ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED**

**Please help us clean up our mailing list! If you no longer wish to receive our newsletter, or would like to receive it electronically instead, simply:**

- E-mail an “unsubscribe” message to [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org) ,
- Phone us at 802-878-5745, OR
- Mail this page back to us at the address above

**Find Us Online!**



**FCCEJ.ORG**



**FCCEJ**



**FIRSTCONGREGATIONALEJ**



**FCCEJ\_802**