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FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH *of Essex Junction*

Love. Serve. Grow.

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WARNING FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ESSEX JUNCTION

Sunday, February 7th, 2021 @ 11:15 A.M.

To the members of the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction,

GREETINGS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST:

The Annual Meeting of the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction will be via Zoom (using this web link: <https://bit.ly/31dXQ76>) on *Sunday, February 7, 2021 at 11:15 A.M.* to act upon the following business:

- Article I:** To hear and act upon the reports of the Church Officers, Committees and Recognized Groups of the Church.
- Article II:** To act and vote upon the proposed budget for 2021.
- Article III:** To elect all church officers and committees required by the by-laws of the Church and others as may be necessary.
- Article IV:** To give authorization to the Finance Committee to borrow money and sign notes pledging the credit of the Church, if needed, to meet the current expenses of the Church.
- Article V:** To transact any other business which may properly be brought before this Annual Meeting.

On behalf of the Church,

Christine Sinkewicz, *Church Clerk*

2020 ANNUAL REPORT: While the report is not yet ready as the church office awaits last-minute content, it will eventually be linked on the Warning for the Annual Meeting's official page within our website. Here is a short link to the warning. The report will be linked at the bottom of this page on or after February 1st. Link: <https://bit.ly/3qvFPY>

Your Pastor's Ponderings

When I was young, people would give something up for Lent: ice cream, coffee, chocolate, meat on Fridays, alcohol, cigarettes, or perhaps even marital relations. This was a way to purify yourself as people prepared for Easter and or to work on some behavior in your life that was unhealthy, maybe even sinful. This ritual is a useful tool to get folks to reflect on ways to become better people and over the years I have practiced it with some of those behaviors in my life.

However, neither my home church, Plymouth Congregational Church in Miami, Florida, nor did my family focus much on the dark, sinful behaviors that needed to be given up to become worthy. That was simply not the theology prescribed by my faith community or family of origin. Both groups strongly encouraged personal and spiritual growth and maturity, to be sure, but tended to focus on adopting behaviors that would further goals of progress, insight, and betterment and not on shame, unworthiness, or depravity.

I still do not buy into the theology of purity because it seems all too often to end up being a means to exclude and a rationale for self-righteousness and the accompanying hubris that goes with it! I also am not a proponent of the substitutionary theory of atonement which says we are made right with God by Christ's blood sacrifice on the cross, a ritual grounded upon the Israelite sacrificial practices. Sacrificing an animal and using its blood to be made right with God no longer has meaning for me [and most of humanity I would guess] and neither does God requiring Jesus's blood to be poured out to make us right with God. Seems like an easy out for a humanity that likes to place itself at the center of the universe.

Rather, I believe and think scripture backs me up that Jesus wants us to know that we are loved by God and precious. Out of that gift of love, we then seek to model God's / Christ's love by sharing it with others. We love our children and teach them to love us back AND love others like our neighbors, strangers, those in need and even our enemies. Jesus' teachings seem to dramatically undermine the theology of purity and a belief that our behavior does not matter. God has always demanded we treat each other in respectful, civil, and loving ways and all too often we have rationalized our way around God's demand to love.

So, during this year's Covid Lenten season, we are going to try to not go dark and wallow in the sinfulness of humanity. Rather we are going to preach sermons where God teaches us to find goodness, life, and love amid evil, death and hatred. We are going to emphasize the ways the biblical witness has turned lemons into lemonade; we will look for the ribbon in the sky or the silver lining of the divine narrative. Instead of giving up eating chocolate ice cream in front of the TV at night, we are going to encourage you to buy some carrots and hummus and try that instead. Instead of giving up alcohol, we are going to encourage you to take up a hobby that will lessen the desire to drink. Instead of beating yourself up for the way you have treated people in the past, we are going to encourage you to write notes of support, friendship and thanks to people in your life. Instead of giving up meat, give your frozen steaks to the food pantry and buy some healthy fruits and vegetables.

This way of understanding what Jesus asks of us is empowering, joyful, healthy for your heart and head, and makes the world an increasingly better place. Jesus dying on the cross is the ultimate way in which he challenges people to stand up and work toward healthier structures in our own lives and society.

Looking forward to this Lenten journey with you. Peace,

Rev. Mark Mendes, *Senior Pastor*

Associate Pastor News

Lent is a time of transformation. In the early church, Lent was often an intense period for those who wanted to become followers of Christ to fast, pray, and learn. At the end of the season of Lent, they would become baptized and join the Body of Christ. This practice during Lent extended beyond the early initiates to all the followers of Christ. Over time, the practice of Lent to initiate people into the faith diminished and fasting reduced to giving something up. Praying and learning is always a Christian practice. I did not grow up with the practice of giving up something for Lent. It often has felt strange to do so. Instead, I often take something up. For example, several years ago, I made a commitment to catch myself from saying negative things to myself. It led to a more positive self-image and confidence, and it helped me embody that I am a child of God. Here are some questions for you to ponder to help take something up this Lent:

- ⊕ How would you become a better disciple of Jesus?
- ⊕ How would you better embody the knowledge that you are a child of God?
- ⊕ How would you develop more compassion for your fellow human being?
- ⊕ How would you develop a sense of connection to all of creation?
- ⊕ How could you challenge your perceptions of people who are different than you?
- ⊕ Pick one of these to ponder and see how you could take something on that will lead to your transformation. Any one of these will draw you closer to God's love, Jesus' light, and the Holy Spirit's power of communion with all.

Book Discussion

February 11th, 7 pm-8:30 pm.
We continue our book discussion of "How to be an Anti-Racist" by Ibram X. Kendi. We will discuss chapters 10-18. For the Zoom link, please email jSimon@fceej.org

Rev. Josh Simon, *Associate Pastor*

Laurie's Lens

As we Journey with the Teacher, Jesus, we find creative ways to continue our ministry in this crazy pandemic when we just can't wait to be back together in person. Lent will begin soon, on February 17th, with Ash Wednesday. Our Deacons have been brainstorming new ideas for our Ash Wednesday service. I hope many of you will experience this service with us as we begin the Lenten season, which is 40 days long and has 6 Sundays. The formula for figuring out when Lent begins is finding out when Easter will be. (Yes, Easter moves around each year.) So we look to when the first Sunday is after the first full moon, following the first day of Spring or the March equinox. Once you have the Sunday for Easter figured out you count back 40 days, not counting Sundays, to arrive at Ash Wednesday.

Again this year, like I have for the last several years, I will be taking on something during Lent verses giving something up. I have found the season of Lent to be more meaningful for me when I do this. When I think of Jesus, the teacher, and his time on earth and all the stories of his life with the disciples and others that he met, he took on a lot and his burdens were many. I hope you look for a way to spread the love of Christ to others, be an active disciple, reach out to those in need, and watch for the love of God in others. Be open to the Spirit moving in your life, however and wherever it chooses.

I know you all are weighed down with your schedules and life as we know it. I hope you are finding ways to keep track of our programs and times and mark these as 'save the dates' on your calendar, joining in so you can renew your spirit, breathe deep, gather with others and feel the presence of God & Jesus & the Holy Spirit with you in all that you do. Our summer programs have some great opportunities! We even scheduled a church-wide camping trip to Waterbury State Park on Father's Day weekend. I know for you parents that this is the time when you are scheduling activities for the summer. Summer camps are being planned as in person programs and if they need to go remote they will switch gears. I'm planning a week of outdoor ministry at Horton Center for July 18-24 and can't wait to spend some time on the top of Pine Mountain in NH (*look at our camp section for more information*). I hoping that some of our youth will join me this year! It's going to be a real fun week! HC has many opportunities so I hope you check out their summer schedule. In August, we will have our Vacation Bible Camp! Our team is forming now and we will be looking at how we can do this program safely this summer and connect with all families and see if we can make this a hybrid program.

February brings a lot of planning time as I continue to work on our weekly Zoom connections, our montly Faith @ Home bags for families, Junior Youth gatherings (Zoom for now) and our Young Apostle mission bags. I am SO waiting for the time we can be back together in person, but until then I hope you will save the dates and join every online Zoom fellowship that you can. We all look forward to reconnecting with you. Please, continue to share any ideas that come to you and reach out to us.

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

Music Director's Musings

I am writing this just a few days before the presidential inauguration on January 20th, and I am praying fervently for the safety of all involved. Our choirs and music program had a very busy Christmas season and are taking a bit of a January lull. The weather has been nice enough to get outside and walk with our dogs, and I am very thankful for the fresh air.

We are gearing up for our Lent and Easter season now and would welcome anyone who would like to join in the singing! The choir meets on Thursday nights for an hour (on Zoom), and choir members record their vocal parts separately (with guide tracks). I then mix the voices together into a virtual choir.

We are missing singing and seeing everyone SO MUCH. I am feeling weary of COVID, while also reminding myself how fortunate I am to live in Vermont compared to the terrible outbreaks in other parts of the country.

I wish you all a safe and healthy February.

Blessings,
Carol Spradling, *Music Director*

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

The Capital Campaign is halfway through our 3rd pledge year (which ends July 1, 2021). As of December 31, 2020, the Campaign has raised over \$969,000, far exceeding the initial base goal of \$822,000 and coming close to our stretch goal of \$1.09 million. We can all take tremendous pride in the fact that this has been an incredibly successful campaign! Almost everywhere you look, you can see how your Capital Campaign gifts have restored key infrastructure and made Our Home more welcoming, safe, and beautiful – now and for future

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generations. Thank you for your continued support!

The Marvin Lounge renovation is in progress and we hope to finish it in February. New insulation was added to the exterior walls and the room is much warmer now. New paint and carpet will give the room a fresh new look, and new built-in bookshelves will create a media center and library that will make the room a more functional meeting space. We are very close to having enough funds to complete the last “main goal” project on our list: the kitchen renovation. The Trustees will be discussing the best timing for that project.

We are also mindful that the church has a significant new capital need that we did not know about when we launched the Capital Campaign: the modernization of the elevator. The Capital Campaign Steering Committee met in early January to discuss the elevator, and the last few remaining stretch goal projects. We are exploring ways to raise the additional funds that we will need for the elevator, which has an estimated cost of \$85,000. Please read “The Elevator Story” for more details!

Blessings to you and your families!

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

Trustees

An Elevator Story: Then & Now

THEN....In 1978, the church received a surprise donation from a very generous member of the community. The gift was made by Harry Teachout upon his death as part of his estate plan, and it came with some special instructions: to build an elevator so that all people could have access to the sanctuary on the second floor. As the story goes, Mr. Teachout could not attend worship services due to the stairs. Through his bequest, he wanted to make sure that the church would be accessible for everyone who came after him.

The Teachout family has deep roots in Essex Junction. The family’s Maple Shade Farm encompassed the land where IBM now sits, and Teachout Bros Hardware was a key business in the village for many years. Harry Teachout owned Teachout Bros Hardware along with his two brothers. His family’s connection to the First Congregational Church dates to the church’s founding. In 1805, Harry’s great-grandfather Henry Teachout married Clarissa Stevens. It was Clarissa’s father Abram who donated the land for the village cemetery across the street. Later, another member of the Stevens family, Byron Stevens, donated the land for the First Congregational Church.

NOW....Mr. Teachout’s gift benefited countless people over the past 40 years. Now, it is also a vital part of our food pantry operations because so much food is stored on the second floor. **Now it is time for us to invest in our elevator once again.** This summer, we learned that the elevator needs an investment of about \$85,000 to modernize the all the equipment and controls. This will bring the elevator up to date with current building and ADA codes, as well as ensure the safe, reliable function of the elevator for many years to come.

A new restricted fund has been established so that the church can begin saving for this large capital expense. We hope to raise these funds through a grant request to the Hoehl Family Foundation, endowment requests, and individual contributions by church members who share Mr. Teachout’s vision that our sanctuary be accessible to ALL.

Special thanks to Don Teachout (Harry Teachout’s nephew) for sharing the wonderful story of Harry Teachout’s bequest, and to Maureen Labenski (descendant of Abram Stevens) for providing additional historical information. Don and Nancy Teachout are members of FCCEJ.

Kaki McGeary, *Trustee Chair*

Communications

After a flurry of activity in December to support our church family in celebrating Christmas, January has been relatively quiet for the Communications committee.

Doug Olufsen has been busy setting up a message board monitor in the administrative wing. It is now up and running and Doug also provided a user guide to the staff so that they have the information that they need to update the slideshow images. He will be scheduling time with the staff soon to provide personal training as well. 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 are excited for everyone to see it when we can start returning to the church!

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

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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.

Two of the committee members are moving off the committee. A big thank you to Judy and Kevin for all that you have done. Judy has been on the committee since it started as an ad-hoc endeavor several years ago, and she has contributed many ideas and lots of insight from her wide church and community experiences. Kevin served one year on the committee, but it has certainly been an action-packed year. Their contributions will be missed, but we are excited to welcome two new members that will join us after Annual Meeting.

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. Contact the church office via e-mail at 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

Join Laurie every Sunday from 9 to 9:30am

Faith @ Home with Laurie on Zoom: *January 31st & February 7th, 21st & 28th*

Zoom link in our Weekly Update email & Friday's Faith@Home email

- Gathering time & welcome time
- Sing our opening song – *From the Rising of the Sun*
- Feedback on items in the Faith@Home bags ~ any questions ~ how was your week?
- 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 special guest was Judy Roy, Spiritual Friend volunteer. 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 – February 14th

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. If you miss this Sunday you can collect your bag by the Church Street doors or the following week during Young Apostle time.

2020 Faith Formation Offering

Vermont Adaptive Sports www.vermontadaptive.org

Total as of January 17th: \$ 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 to 4:30pm ~ February 21st

Please join me in the parking lot on the 3rd Sunday and drive thru, say hello and pick up your mission bag for the month. If you have not joined this group yet, please do. If you miss the 3rd Sunday time more bags are placed outside the Church Street doors in the YA bin. In the mission bag you will find a letter that will outline what to do with the items you are given. We continue to talk about giving to others and how and where we can shine the light of God in our community.

Youth Ministry

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

Junior Youth (6th-8th)

Wednesday January 20th & February 7th & 17th

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

We hope you will join the fellowship on Zoom – even if you haven't been online with us yet. It's never too late! Keep watching for the weekly emails from Laurie with more information.

Camps

Horton Center

Visit www.hortoncenter.org and look at the 2021 summer schedule of camps. Are you 18yrs or older you can click on employment or be a counselor and apply online now! Camp needs you to help be in-person! Register online and join Laurie Chipman (co-dean for this camp along with Diane Tinkham, CED in NH):



Vacation Bible Camp: Save the Date!

August 9th – 13th, 2021

Interested in being a part of the planning team this year? We need YOU! Please send Laurie an email and let her know where your interests are. Zoom gathering being planned for February. Our VB Camp Kit has arrived and leader guides will be passed out soon!

VT Takes a Hike to the Mountain

July 18th-24th, 2021

For those going into 5th – 8th in the fall of 2021 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!

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

Missions & Volunteering



JUMP Online Auction. February 1st-12th, 2021

JUMP's primary goal, amid the COVID pandemic, has been to remain open and ensure all economically disadvantaged families have dependable access to help meeting basic needs. The JUMP FLEX program delivers aid to purchase groceries, transportation help, utility assistance, personal hygiene, and cleaning supplies. These vouchers assist not only in meeting basic needs but also help those "living on the edge" to preserve key funds for other essentials. Since COVID-19, 23% of households receiving assistance from JUMP were first time recipients. JUMP asks for your continued support for this valuable and needed mission. We have several great items for you to bid on. More information is coming. If you would like to donate an item, gift card or service to JUMP's Online Auction, please email auction@jumpvt.org with the information.

- Margaret Welch, JUMP Online Auction Coordinator

Jamaica Reflections

Over the next six months, we will be sharing journal reflections from team members who recorded their experiences while in Jamaica. We want to share with you some of the fun, interesting, delicious, and challenging moments of our trips! The excerpt below is from Pete Schmalz on the 2019 trip. You can learn more about our Jamaica Program by visiting the Jamaica page on our FCCEJ website at <https://www.fccej.org/v5/serving-others/jamaica-service-trip/>.

Monday, June 24, 2019 – Day 3

I awoke early enough for some time on my balcony, where I enjoyed surveying the property behind us, and listening to the goats that roamed the wooded land. We were nourished by a hearty breakfast of eggs, bacon, French toast, and fruit. This was our first genuine workday, and everyone was ready to go – we were on



the bus by 7:45 AM. We arrived at the school just as the students arrived, all in their sharp navy and blue uniforms. We had passed many of them on our drive in, waiting for rides on the side of the main road (with others walking on the roadside as we got closer). We met the principal, Ray Howell, and the teachers in the younger grades. I am sure we made quite an impression on the students, who looked on in amazement.



We sorted our tools and took stock of the lumber that had been left for us in one of the rooms. Everyone pitched in on the initial tasks of (1) moving the piles of gravel and sand, (2) digging holes for the playhouse corner beams, and (3) arranging the lumber for the playhouse construction.

There were several local volunteers in-and-out helping us: Melvin (our driver/guide), Mr. Beckford (who has a child in the school), Horace Pusey (police officer), (the male gym teacher - name?), with 2 or 3 teachers supervising their classes nearby.

After about 2 hours, the holes were ready to set the beams, and the playhouse structure began going up. Given my limited carpentry skills, and the need to clear the area, I spent most of my time moving sand and gravel with Dave or digging post holes in the thick clay-like soil. At one point, there was a lengthy disagreement between the Jamaican volunteers and our team, over the layout of the support beams. Mark, Rick, and Nick led the discussion from our side, ultimately settled with some key insights from Kaki.



Our youth did a wonderful job engaging with the children while also contributing significantly to the work. The heat was intense, but we took many water breaks. I was glad that we had plenty of young, strong hands to help on all aspects of the work. The cooks provided lunches to the 300+ students first, and then the teachers and us next, around 2:30 PM. The meal was a very tasty rice and chicken dish, served in Styrofoam carriers. We worked a bit longer, and then were ultimately on the bus by 3:30 PM for the trip back to the hotel for a swim and delicious dinner.



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, the specific distribution dates are Monday, February 8th and Thursday, February 25th.

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@fcej.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.

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

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop

The Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop will remain closed until the beginning of February. At that time, the Advisory Committee will revisit the Co-Vid situation and make plans to reopen as soon as possible! If you have winter inventory you wish to donate, you may do so by making an appointment for drop-off with Sue Wood at 878-3068 or email her at woodsusanjane@gmail.com. Thank you for your continued support of this mission.

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>
- ⊕ **Fellowship Hour, after Worship** @ <http://zoom.us/j/980588369>
- ⊕ **Faith Formation, Sundays @ 9am** via Zoom [Link in Weekly Newsletter] (2nd Sundays, 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 are unable to register for flowers online, then please contact the church office by emailing welcomed@fccej.org or call 1 802 878 5745.



Special Sundays in February

Annual Meeting / Ask the Pastor Sunday. Sunday, February 7th, 2021 @ 10am [Meeting at 11:15am]

Worship via YouTube @ <http://www.youtube.com/c/fccej>; Annual Meeting via Zoom @ <http://bit.ly/3dX076>

Our Annual Meeting will be hosted via Zoom teleconference. Traditionally, the worship service for Annual Meeting Sunday has been to conduct an "Ask the Pastor" Sunday where members and friends are free to ask the two pastors of the church any appropriate question. This allows members to check in with and get real time answers to issues about which they are concerned. We will be continuing this great tradition and to keep questions anonymous, we ask you to send them via email or in writing to Doug Ovitt, Church Administrator, no later than Thursday, February 4th. You may email him at welcomed@fccej.org. He will download the questions and delete who they are from. The Service will start at the regular time of 10 a.m.

Ash Wednesday. *Wednesday, February 17th, 2021 @ 7pm via Zoom.*

Zoom ID# **882 4274 4962** or use this link: <http://bit.ly/2NutPuV>

Lent is one of the sacred times in the life of the Christian Church. It is a time to reflect on our faith and how we live it out in today's world. It is also a time to remember some of the more difficult experiences in Christ's life that culminated in his death. Christians have long used this time as an opportunity to delve into life issues that might be a bit deeper and more meaningful than usual. During this Covid time, we will be trying to continue this long tradition and offer some of the usual offerings with a technological twist. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a time when we place ashes on our head to remember our shared humanity; traditionally we remember our shared culpability in human sin, but we also remember that ashes ground us in the earth, a common element in all our creation and a sacred gift from God. Traditionally, the ashes come from last year's palms that we waved to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem and each year I burn last year's palms. However, with Covid, I invite all of you to burn your own palms [if you saved one and if my stash of last year's palms will be available in the Church Street entryway] and place ashes on your own forehead or wrist or those of your family's when we invite you to do so during the service. Hope to see you there.

Lenten Searcher Studies. *Each Wednesday during Lent, 7-8:30pm (February 24th, March 3rd, 10th, 17th, and 24th)*

Via Zoom ID# **847 2938 1592** or <http://bit.ly/3c1ISqn> Password: **833 380**

Lent is the season to dig a little deeper into your faith or work on deepening your spirituality. Our clergy will be offering two different offerings for anyone who would like to spend a little time learning and reflecting. Rev. Josh will be taking offering a bible study on the Letter of James, Jesus' brother. It is a great book of the bible with lots of incredible practical lessons for life. Rev. Mark will be facilitating a book discussion on a book he highlighted during his morning devotions which people seemed to really like. It is entitled, "Gifts of the Dark Woods," by Eric Elnes and he explores what some of the ancients of the faith called the "dark woods" or "the dark night of the soul" or the place you go when life and faith brings you to a dark and turbulent internal place. He proposes that finding yourself in the dark woods offers great opportunity to connect with God and explore what is important in your life and he explores certain specific gifts that we find there. We will gather as one group and check in with each other and then break into the two groups, then come back together for the last five minutes. Hope to see you there. And if you need help purchasing the book, please let Rev. Mark know and he will get you one.

Noontime Book Group: *every 3rd Monday, 11:30am. (Next meeting is February 15th @ 11:30am.)*

The Zoom ID is <http://zoom.us/j/626841083> *For the password, contact Joanne Irwin joanne.h.irwin@gmail.com

Please join us for a discussion of *The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver. The first novel by renowned author Kingsolver, this is the tale of Taylor Greer, a young woman from rural Kentucky who has set out heading west to see what life holds. She decides she will settle wherever her old car finally dies. While passing through Oklahoma, a stranger places a Cherokee child on the seat of her car and leaves. Not knowing what to do she decides to keep the child and care for her. It is a story of unlikely friendships, nurturing and making do as Taylor tries to make a new life in Tucson, AZ. Written with the humor and amazing descriptions that Barbara Kingsolver is known for, it is a compelling story of leaving the limitations of one's roots, abandonment and responsibility growing into love while making a new life under challenging circumstances. Jane Schneider will lead the discussion.

Puzzle Swap

First Church is beginning a new initiative: a puzzle swap! This idea from Sylvia Nyhagen is free and just entails anyone taking a puzzle to use or dropping one or two off for others to use. If you do not have one to exchange, then just come and take one. We have plenty to start with. They are just inside the new doors at the Church Street entrance to the church. All are welcome.



Valentines for Vets

February is a great time to honor our American Veterans by joining in the national service project entitled Valentines for Vets. This is also an annual effort to honor Dr. Martin Luther King. Through the support of the White River Veteran's Hospital, we have been invited to send heartfelt messages of gratitude, love and hope not only to Vets in the hospital but also to Vets who are homebound and homeless. This is a great opportunity for all ages to engage your creative skills while extending our warm wishes to our Vets. If you create a card the hospital asks that the cards be kept simple. This year stickers, dollies, crayons, and markers may be used. No glitter or add-ons that may fall off. Please bring cards in individual envelopes by February 7th to the First Church's lobby where a well-marked basket will be located for your convenience. If you have questions, please contact Paula Sargent at paula.sargent60@gmail.com. Special thanks go out to the Woman's Spirituality Group who have sponsored this very worthwhile project in past years.



Church-wide Camping Trip: June 18th-19th, 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.

Learn about Little River State Park here: <http://bit.ly/2XCRqvm>

**3444 Little River Rd.
Waterbury, VT 05676
P: 1(802) 244-7103**

Stewardship

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

Donate to our Church

Your donation could support our music, youth, missions, adult enrichment, 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 using Amazon Smile.* We receive 0.5% of your purchases! Visit <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/03-0212216>
- *Send a Check or use BillPay.* This is a remote service that issues one-time or recurring check payments by mail. Please, contact your banking institution for details. Be sure to note the reason for your donation in the check’s memo line (e.g., “food pantry”).
- *Send money via PayPal.* We accept electronic donations through PayPal. Visit our donation page: 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.

Special Offering: Endowment

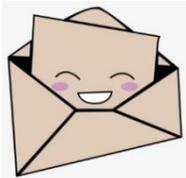
February 7th, 2021

Our endowment was created by the gifts and bequests of faithful stewards, members, and non-members alike, to help future generations. Please, consider adding to these accumulated gifts which serve as a durable support for our ministry.

Please, mail checks (payable to “FCCEJ”) to:

Financial Secretary
FCCEJ
1 Church Street
Essex Jct, VT 05452

2021 Stewardship Drive: Pledge Cards



- ❖ *Read our most recent Stewardship letter here:* bit.ly/35gB4wW
- ❖ *Digital Pledge Form:* <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).
- *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)

Birthdays

02/01	SARGENT, Rusty	02/11	KRAUSS, Chloe	02/17	BEEBE, Sharon	02/22	HOLDEN, Sue
02/02	RUSSELL, Clint	02/12	CHARLAND, Anna	02/17	RAUT, Joy	02/22	KINNEY, John
02/02	WARREN, Tyler	02/12	GRAY, Peter	02/19	GARRAPY, Betty	02/22	SMITH, Mason
02/04	BENTON, Ethan	02/14	BENTON, Mark	02/19	MAUGER, John	02/24	AHOKAS, Cheryl
02/04	FRIZZELL, Cayden	02/14	EVANS, Abigail	02/19	PAUL, George	02/24	DETTENRIEDER, Sharon
02/04	HAINES, Jo	02/14	PARKER, Nancy	02/20	EDWARDS, Elijah	02/24	DEWEY, Mae
02/05	GREGORY, Rheya	02/15	LONGWELL, Cindy	02/20	LAFLAM, Kaydence	02/25	DAVIS, Robert
02/06	FINNIE, Kathy	02/15	WOOD, Rachel	02/20	MARTIN, Sullivan	02/26	GABERT, Valerie
02/08	PARKS, Maggie	02/16	EHLER, Emily	02/22	BOURN, Molly	02/26	MCGEARY, Matt
02/09	GOEDKEN, Ethan	02/16	POTTER, Allen	02/22	EHLER, Duke	02/27	KOCH, Braeden
						02/28	MARSHALL, Connie

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
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

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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 ,
- Phone us at 802-878-5745, OR
- Mail this page back to us at the address above

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