

SPIRIT@FIRST

monthly newsletter

FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH *of Essex Junction*

Love. Serve. Grow.

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An Invitation to Hybrid Worship

Dear First Church Friends:

It is with great excitement that the Executive Committee shares with you their intent to move to a hybrid system of worship on April 11th, one where we continue streaming the service live AND welcome a limited number of folks into the sanctuary. Naturally, we will proceed with caution, and Church Council members have been invited to work through the kinks by being guinea pigs for a couple of weeks in March. But with increased vaccination and decreased infections, the Executive Committee thought it was time to finally welcome folks back into the church. However, the worship service will NOT be the same. Here are some things the hybrid service will demand.....

1. There will be no hymn singing, music, and taped anthems yes, but no singing.
2. We will be limited to filling 12 pews with household units. Each pew can fit anywhere from a single person to a household of four folks in one of twelve pews. This means we could have anywhere from 12 to 48 people in the sanctuary for a worship service in addition to the team facilitating the service.
3. Hybrid service with a limited number of people will begin April 11th. Sign-ups will be through a Sign-Up Genius on our webpage or by calling Doug in the church office at 802-878-5745. We hope to have this signup live on fcej.org by Easter.
4. We must have Ushers to screen and ensure everyone moves safely from the parking lot to the pews and back. WE WILL NEED 2 EACH WEEK to safely enable services. This is a vital task to ensure that we follow mandated safety protocols and well-conceived movement plans. If you have been vaccinated and would like to serve in this role as an usher – please call the church office as soon as possible to let our administrator, Doug Ovitt, known by emailing welcome@fcej.org or call 1 (802) 878-5745.
5. Everyone will still need to wear masks throughout the entire service and stay in their respective pews.
6. Many parts of the service [Deacon's Prayer, Anthems and Hymns, Scripture] will be pre-taped and shown up on the front wall of the sanctuary like we used to do for special occasions.

Despite these restrictions, we are excited to have people back in our beautiful new sanctuary, listening to our ministers preach or pray, and talking with folks after the service outside on the way to their cars. It is a first step as we move to a day when everyone is welcome to come to church and we continue live streaming the service online.

Blessings and grace to you all as we continue to live into our new reality.

The Executive Committee

Maureen Evans, Cathy Shearer, Dan Petherbridge, Alison Wermer
Christine Sinkewicz, Rev. Josh Simon, Rev. Mark Mendes

Associate Pastor News

I begin with the first verse and refrain from In the Midst of New Dimensions, “In the midst of new dimensions, in the face of changing ways, who will lead the pilgrim peoples wandering in their separate ways? God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar, we your people, ours the journey now and ever, now and ever, now and evermore.”

The long COVID winter starts to ebb away as spring begins. I am reminded of God’s continuing presence to unite us, to lead us in familiar and new ways of worship as God has led us in familiar and new ways in the last year to provide coats and food to people in need and for us to stay connected via fellowship and education. Over the last year, worship has nourished and inspired us. As worship should always strive to do, and not only that, our worship has reminded us of God’s love for us, and from God’s love our ability to be ambassadors for God and to be tangible signs of God’s love.

As you have read in other places in this newsletter, starting Sunday, April 11th, we will have a limited number of people in the Sanctuary. As our daily lives transition, over the next few months, the live stream tech is undergoing a transition. This will help us have a limited number of people in the Sanctuary and when we are beyond COVID restrictions able to adapt the audio/visual aids we have grown accustomed to in the live stream worship into our worship going forward.

We have a short-term plan, and we are working with vendors to create a long-term plan and many of the details are still being determined. The short-term plan is not really new for the live stream worship team, but I want to tell you what to expect if you attend worship starting April 11th, as of now the long-term plan does not have a set date yet but I include some of that plan, too. The short and long-term plans include streaming our worship to YouTube. Live stream worship has been a good way to keep us connected as a worshipping community, introduced us to new people, and will continue to connect us to people who are physically unable to come to church. In the short term, there will be noticeable cameras on tripods in two pews. In the long term, those cameras will be mounted. The pre-recorded videos and the camera video of Mark and me that you see on YouTube will be projected onto the Sanctuary wall. In the short term, the projector is in its usual, but normally temporary, spot at the front of the parking lot side of the pews. We are still determining the hardware that will be needed for the long term when the Sanctuary is only limited by the capacity of its seat space to make these types of visual aids a more permanent feature of worship. Please, bear with us as we make this transition. In the short and the long, we continue to worship God and to spread God’s love. I long for the Sundays when we can have a full Sanctuary and sing together. Until then, I am grateful to see more people in the pews.

Rev. Josh Simon, *Associate Pastor*

Laurie’s Lens



As I write this Palm Sunday is upon us and the last steps are being put in place for our Holy Week Scavenger Hunt for our families (nursery – 8th grade). I am SO looking forward to getting your text picture of all seven items so that I can tell you where to find your prize (one per child/youth). All the information you need is in your March Faith@Home bags which you can collect by our Church Street doors, so make that your first stop. You’ll get to travel (walk or ride depending on the weather) to homes close by the church, look for symbols of Lent that will be displayed on their porch, and collect an item from each location as you learn and are reminded of the events in Jesus’ life during Holy Week.

We are all tired of being online SO much and crave seeing our church friends, so with that in mind our *Faith Formation Outside program for the whole family will resume on a weekly bases starting April 11th*. All will gather in a safe physically distance circle to start with and then move to organized activity stations (creative, active, etc.). Hospitality will be present with their table of coffee and beverage. Laurie is connecting with past volunteers to see who feels comfortable join us and helping with the stations. If this is you and you haven’t heard from her yet, please reach out and let her know your thoughts. We will continue sharing our joys & worries, doing an activity with prayer and using our hand motions (no singing for now) to our opening Zoom song we learned, ‘From the Rising of the Sun’, as we start our gather.

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NEW this year is our online registration for our Vacation Bible Camp! Many thanks to Andrea Sharp and our Communications team for helping us join the techie world! No paper forms this year, so please go to our VB Camp page on our website and sign up your children, sign up youth volunteers or young adult volunteers. For other adults interested in helping our in-person program, please email me. We are looking for many hands this year! We also have openings on our planning/station leader team who already has their wheels in motion planning a great program for all campers with their creative thoughts and talents to make this camp week a fun one for all families whether you decide if you want the flexible online program to do it when you can or if you want to come in-person to church in the morning and go online to access additional videos later. We want our in-person program to be as safe as possible, so outside and under tents as well as crafts being prebagged (as well as snacks) and not collecting items from a common table. Our music station will be a dance and choreography station (as of now we won't be singing in-person).

Please remember that we have scholarship money to help your child go to camp for a full week this summer at Horton Center or another UCC camp. Our Sunday morning faith formation program offers children/youth just one hour a week, but a week at an outdoor ministry camp can give them a 24/7 connection for 6 days! Helping them grow deeper in their faith and connect with their God in a truly life changing way. Parents who are interested in counseling, receive a mini scholarship for your child/youth going to camp. 😊 How many from FCCEJ will come with me this year to Horton Center?! www.hortoncenter.org (three camps offered that July 18th week). Let's go feed our soul! More information in our Camp section of this newsletter.

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

Deacons

What a contrast to last year currently. A nationwide shut-down had just been announced and we were facing a frightening, unknown future. Now, it is spring again but this time our community is opening, and we can visit one another in small groups. Such a joy.

Your Deacons have been working behind the scenes to plan for this re-opening. We will begin **in-person worship** with a limited number of people the Sunday after Easter, April 11th. We will continue to live-stream the service so everyone can still participate, wherever they are. People wishing to attend a service can call Doug in the church office (802 878 5745) or go to the church website and follow the links to Sign-up Genius.

We decided that it would be prudent to have only vaccinated people volunteer to usher Sunday mornings. We need 2 people every Sunday to safely direct people to their seats. Please call Doug at the church office if you would like to volunteer. We cannot do it without our volunteers!

Caring Circles are underway and bringing connection to people who are otherwise alone. The groups share phone calls, cards, emails and even cookies. Each group decides what works for them. If you would like to learn more about this program or want to join a group, please call Doug at the church office.

Blessings to you and your families,
Alison Wermer, *Deacon co-chair*

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

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 generations. Thank you for your continued support!

A friendly reminder... the Capital Campaign is approaching the end of our 3rd and final pledge year (which ends July 1, 2021). Please check your pledge records for any balance due. If you have any questions about your balance due, or if circumstances have changed, please contact Campaign Treasurer Dan Petherbridge.

Elevator Fundraising Update: The estimated cost of the elevator modernization project is \$85,000. We have received \$21,000 in pledges/gifts to date. These funds, combined with the Endowment distributions from

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last year and a gift from the Heavenly Food Pantry, bring our total to \$58,000. Our grant request to the Hoehl Family Foundation was denied.

Thank you to everyone who has responded so far! If you have not had a chance to return the Phase 3 Pledge Form we mailed, please return no later than April 30.

As we explained in our letter, if we raise more than what we need to complete the elevator, then we will begin to tackle the other remaining projects from our original “stretch goal” list (the main kitchen renovation – for which we already have most of the funds committed – and the replacement of flooring on the 2nd Floor Hallways, Gym and Fellowship Hall).

The elevator was first made possible by ONE person 40 years ago. Now, it will take MANY to sustain it! We know it may not be possible for everyone to participate at this time, and we appreciate everyone for their time and consideration.

Blessings to you and your families!

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

Trustees

The Trustees are busy laying the groundwork for the elevator project IF we have the funding to move forward this summer, which we truly hope will be possible. We see this as the best time to do this work to minimize the disruption to the life of the church. We will be upgrading our fire alarm system soon, which is a pre-requisite for the elevator work according to code. We are also getting updated quotes for the kitchen renovation and thinking about timing and logistics. We continue to look at our facility/grounds needs overall. Stay tuned.

Kaki McGeary, *Trustee Chair*

Communications

The Communications Committee is busy organizing and supporting several methods to share our church’s happenings and events. We are also planning ways to share the workload within the committee to ensure efficiency, use of our many talents and back up each other.

Andrea Sharp continues to be our Website Guru and has updated several areas including information about the events for Holy Week and the Easter Season, the Giving Page for Special Offerings, Vacation Bible Camp Registration, and links to our Sign-up Genius requests for Easter Care Basket Contributions, Easter Flowers, and Sanctuary Visits. Andrea and Hannah continue to investigate options for keeping a current calendar on the website based on our Outlook 365 office calendar that automatically transfers the information.

Judy McCullen created the Sign-Up Genius List for the Easter Care Baskets. Doug Ovitt created the Easter Flowers SignUp and Josh Simon repurposed the previous Sign-Up Genius List for Sanctuary Visits. The In-Person Sign-Up List is under review for the Hybrid Services starting on April 11th, 2021.

FCCEJ has opened an advertising account with Front Porch Forum for posting Major Events at the church. The Communications Committee will review requested posts to insure we capture the information and include it in our other forms of communications like the Website. Currently Josh Simon and Doug Ovitt are authorized to submit the posts. The account is limited to 12 posts a year.

The committee wishes to cross-train our members for distributing the workload and backup capabilities for maintaining our website, support for Sign-Up Genius List creations and Front Porch Forum. We will be creating reference documentation in support of these activities as we do the learning to facilitate our current and future committee members.

Respectfully submitted by Douglas Olufsen

Committee Members: Francis Gravel, Andrea Sharp, Hannah Tracy, and Douglas Olufsen

Faith Formation

Moving to weekly every Sunday from 9 to 10am in the Parking Lot

If the weather is stormy Laurie will post a message on our Facebook Discussion Group to let you know we are rained/stormed out and FFO will move to Faith@Home on Zoom. The Zoom link will stay in our Weekly Update email & our Faith@Home Friday emails so you have easy access if needed.

Young Apostles: (3rd – 5th graders & a Parent) 3rd Sunday of the Month from 4 to 4:30pm ~ April 18th

In-person in the parking lot! Come join the fun, games and mission conversation. If you miss it, stop by the church to collect your mission activity bag. Did you miss our gathering in March? Your bag awaits you by the Church Street doors. Each mission bag starts with a letter that outlines what to do with the items inside. We continue to talk about giving to others and how and where we can shine the light of God in our community.



2020-21 Faith Formation Offering

Our offering continues for this organization until the 1st Sunday in June, as we are transitioning to a program year for our offering choic. So come September and Welcome Back Sunday you will all (children & youth) vote again where your offering will be going. So, until June continue to support <https://www.vermontadaptive.org/>. If sending in a check, please write 'Faith Formation Offering' in the memo line or put your money in an enveloped marked as such and drop it at church. Blessings!

Youth Ministry

Opportunities to Volunteer: Have you looked lately on our 'Get Involved' page of the website and clicked on the Signup Genus box on the right? Go here <https://www.fccej.org/v5/serving-others/get-involved/> Dismiss House April meal has slots open and so does the Food Pantry preparation for March & April.

Junior Youth (6th-8th) NEW time! 4-5:30pm on Wednesday, April 7th & 4:30-6pm on Sunday, April 25th
Mark your calendars! We are NOW in-person outside at church! Watch your emails for more JY information and our back up plan for rainy days. If you signed up for Care Packages, they are still being passed out each month. Never too late to sign up!

Camps



FCCEJ Camper Scholarships are available to help you camp!
Contact Pastor Mark (mmendes@fccej.org) Pastor Josh (jsimon@fccej.org)
or Lauri (lchipman@fccej.org)

- Interested in coming to www.hortoncenter.org as a camper? **Watch this!** <https://youtu.be/rLZm8fzCV2Y>
- Are you 18yrs or older? Love the outdoors and spending time helping children/youth? **Watch this one!** <https://youtu.be/gecZ0v3BGZk>

Camp will look a little different this year with less campers in a cabin and therefore more counselors are needed. Laurie is looking for counselors for VT Takes a Hike to the Mtn or you can counsel another week. Counselors get a reduction in cost for their own child/youth to attend when you volunteer. No cost for counselors. You'll have the time of your life! The most fun you've had in a real long time and be exhausted everynight to sleep deep, not to mention worship at Chapet Rock on top of Pint Mtn. Click on 'volunteer' on their website for more information. (*College youth – this looks great on your resume!*) Register online and join Laurie Chipman (co-dean for this camp along with Diane Tinkham, CED in NH):

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VT Takes a Hike to the Mtn ~ for those going into 5th – 8th in the fall of 2021. July 18-24, 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!



Elementary (3rd-5th grade) and Senior High Camp also offered this week.

Siblings could go together to Horton Center. Fun times for them. Nice for parents to get a break week. Check out all the other camps at Horton Center this summer by clicking on their *Summer Schedule*.



Vacation Bible Camp: *Discovery on Adventure Island*

August 9th – 13th, 2021

REGISTRATION is ONLINE and OPEN!

“Arise! Shine! Your light has come: the Lord’s glory has shone upon you!”
(Isaiah 60:1)

Morning from 9am to 11:45am for

in-person campers & online for those are looking for flexibility. Please put our August dates on your calendar and volunteer if you can for this really fun program that will be offered this year online and in-person. Help behind the scenes before camp, during camp and/or in-person with campers. Wondering what is the best fit

for you? Call or send Laurie an email and with your talents and skills and we’ll figure out the best fit for you. There is still room on our VB Camp Team for more to help with planning. Think tropical island! It’s going to be a fun week!

Missions & Volunteering

As the calendar moves into spring, your Missions Committee has been busily springing forth with our outreach work:

- **Chili Dinner:** We had a very successful Chili dinner February 26th, filling bellies, our coffers and lifting spirits with 130 dinners sold with a total raised of \$1,533.00. Phyllis Willey and Sue Wood worked with many volunteers who prepared the chili and cornbread, packaged the meals for take-out, and safely set up pick-up and deliveries. Many mentioned the spirit raising aspect of this event; providing a lift from the confining routine many of us have experienced this past year. The money raised will also provide much needed funds to further the outreach work of your Missions Committee.
- **Called 2 Care Easter Baskets:** 48 Easter basket gifts to our community’s shut-ins were beautifully prepared with Easter wrap and flowers by Catherine Lapierre. Many people provided creative donations, fun puzzle books, edibles and lotions, teas etc. for the baskets and 10 other people volunteered to be delivery drivers. These baskets provide a way for us to let the recipients know we are thinking of them and sending our love their way. Thank you to all who contributed items and volunteered their time!
- **Support of Care Facilities Staff:** The Missions Committee has tried to express gratitude and support to the staff at care facilities both in February and March with safely wrapped donut treats purchased with Mission Committee funds. In March, Monica Johns and Jane Schneider delivered to both Maple Ridge and Mansfield Place. Ed Steele made beautiful signs to thank the facility staff for their skill and compassionate care. Your missions committee is planning more monthly deliveries to care facilities in the months ahead.
- **Mission Committee Support for Outdoor Ministry:** Outdoor ministry started when Pastor Ryan came to FCCEJ and started recruiting youth to go to camp. There is an exciting new program this summer we want you to be aware of with the title of “VT Takes a Hike to the Mtn”. July 18-24, 2021, students going

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into 5th – 8th grade in the fall of 2021 can journey to Pine Mountain in Gorham NH. VT students will join NH middle schoolers at the Beautiful Horton Center camping facility for an exciting week full of diverse activities. God's spirit will be in all that they do at camp as they hike, play, pray, sing, rock climb, do some arts and crafts, and discover their own courage through games, challenges, and much more! It is a terrific opportunity to meet new friends and have fun. Bring a friend to camp to enjoy the fun with you! FCCEJ Camper Scholarships are available to help you go to camp! Contact Pastor Mark (mmendes@fccej.org) Pastor Josh (jsimon@fccej.org) or Laurie (lchipman@fccej.org). Before you decide about camp, **WATCH THIS!!** <https://youtu.be/rLZm8fzCV2Y> Register online and join Laurie Chipman (co-dean) and others in NH. www.hortoncenter.org

- Support for Outdoor Ministry comes from both direct donations and a special Sunday offering for "Outdoor Ministry". This year so far donations are over \$800. Thank you for your support of this exciting student program.
- Our Missions Committee would also like to remind you of an upcoming special offering, The Easter Pastor's Fund. In these economic uncertain times, there is a unique opportunity to help those in our local area who have financial needs. The Pastor's Fund is used at the discretion of our ministers to provide support for heating bills, emergencies, food etc. for both members and non-members. What a great way to show our caring to our neighbors in need! The date of this offering is on April 4th, Easter Sunday, but donations are always gladly welcomed both before and after this date. Please just clearly mark your donation for the Pastor's Fund.

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop



Hours: Currently, we are open only on Saturdays but plan to add our mid-week schedule as soon as our volunteers are fully vaccinated.

Donations: Men's, women's, and children's clothing and accessories of good quality are appreciated along with bed and table linens, smaller household items, and jewelry. We no longer accept books. Donations can be made during our Saturday hours 10-1 or by contacting Sue Wood. Thanks to our volunteers, our customers and everyone who makes generous donations, as we continue to meet our mission of providing for those in need.

Contact: Phone# 879-6552. For questions, contact Sue Wood at woodsusanjane@gmail.com

News: The Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop reopened Saturday, February 27th, and has had a steady stream of business each weekend. Most days, there has been a line of folks waiting, for the doors to open! Customers and volunteers follow the Governor's guidelines for retail operations: social distancing, mask-wearing, and limited shoppers at any given time. The shop is thoroughly cleaned by a volunteer weekly. As you dig out your lighter wear and put winter items away, know that we are accepting spring/summer donations at this time.

Save the Dates:

- \$2.00 Bag Sale Saturday, March 20th.
- Free Community Day Saturday, March 27th. (Preparation for our changeover to spring/summer wear.)
- New Inventory Saturday, April 3rd.



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, April 12th and Thursday, April 22nd.

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

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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.

Heavenly Food Pantry has been selected by local Hannaford store leadership as the benefiting non-profit in the Fight Hunger Bag Program! **For the month of April 2021**, Heavenly Food Pantry will receive a \$1 donation from each purchase of the \$2.50 reusable Fight Hunger Bag at the Hannaford store located at 21A Essex Way, Essex Junction VT.



Dismas House. Volunteers needed in 2021.

Visit <https://bit.ly/36kYq44> for more information and to volunteer.

"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 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).

Cancer Patient Support Foundation: Ringing of the Church Bells

Our church will be joining the Cancer Patient Support Foundation (CPSF) on April 11 in its Ringing of the Bells to celebrate local cancer patients and their families. CPSF is celebrating its 20th Anniversary on April 11th. This organization supports nearly 500 Vermont cancer patients and their families each year. This Vermont based nonprofit helps patients meet their basic needs including food, housing, home heating, childcare, transportation to treatment, prescriptions, and medical costs not covered by insurance. Church bells will ring 5 times (1 for each 100 families CPSF supports annually) at 7pm on April 11 to celebrate the thousands of Vermont cancer patients. *For more information go to www.cpsfvt.org.*

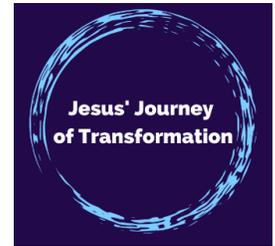


Worship & Fellowship

Visit this link to view our official calendar of events: <http://fcej.org/v5/calendar>

You may also visit our Facebook events page: <http://facebook.com/firstcongregationalej/events/>

- ⊕ **Worship, Sundays at 10am (Communion: 1st Sundays) @** <http://youtube.com/c/fcej>
- ⊕ **Fellowship Hour, after Worship @** <http://zoom.us/j/980588369>
- ⊕ **Faith Formation, Moving to weekly every Sunday from 9 to 10am in the Parking Lot**
- ⊕ **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>



Holy Week & Easter: <https://bit.ly/3k83CyO>

Palm Sunday Pickup: *Sunday, March 28th (Service @ 10am via <http://youtube.com/c/fcej>)(Palms pick-up between 9am-Noon.)* Everyone likes to wave palms and remember when Jesus entered Jerusalem. And many of us like to keep our palms from Palm Sunday and put them up somewhere to remind us of last year's Holy Week remembrances and celebrations. And those of us that are religious fanatics like to save our palms to burn them for the following year's ashes on Ash Wednesday. So, despite not being in worship on Palm Sunday we are going to place palms on a clearly marked table out in the parking lot on March 28th / Palm Sunday. You are free to come by any time between 9:00 a.m. and 12 noon. Enjoy and be sure to wave them out the window on your way home!

Maundy Thursday: *Thursday, April 1st @ 6pm via Zoom. <https://bit.ly/3bLwHx9> (No password is required and the pastors themselves will digitally usher you into this special event.)* This is day when we remember the last time Jesus sat down with his disciples and friends to eat a meal and share in conversation. Once gathered in the Upper Room, Jesus and his disciples shared a Passover Seder Meal which commemorated the Hebrew people escaping their bondage in Egypt and finding Divine freedom in the wilderness. Jesus shares this sacred ritualistic meal with them and then adds a couple of aspects to it: communion and foot washing. Each Maundy Thursday we remember these things and encourage our members to explore the meaning of that fateful night. This year we will enter this meal by hosting a zoom mealtime meeting where we will share the old sacred story and then break up into small groups of six or so folks and share a meal together and explore some issues of faith and spirituality. Thus, we want you to bring your computer to the dining room table and be ready to share a meal with others while you converse. It will be a time of fellowship, food, and discussion.

Good Friday: *Friday, April 2nd @ 7pm via <http://youtube.com/c/fcej>.* Join us to watch an ecumenical worship service! FCCEJ joins other churches in the Champlain Valley for an ecumenical Good Friday service. We will watch the worship service together with the other churches at 7 pm on YouTube. The service will be available for later viewing on the FCCEJ YouTube Channel. If you have not already, please subscribe to our YouTube Channel so you can easily access our services.

Easter Sunrise: *Sunday, April 4th @ 6:30am via <http://facebook.com/firstcongregationalej/>* We will not be physically meeting for our Easter Sunrise Service this year, unfortunately. However, Rev. Mendes will again have a live sunrise service in some beautiful location on the church's Facebook page where we will all experience a Vermont sunrise as we celebrate the miracle of Christ's resurrection. This will be a special ecumenical event for Rev. Mark Mendes will be **welcoming Rev. Karen Mendes and the First Baptist Church of Burlington** to this sacred event. Rev. Karen Mendes will save Rev. Mark and our entire community by bringing her angelic voice to the occasion. Together, they will worship Jesus, commemorate his resurrection, and proclaim the continuing presence of Jesus within our world and our midst. You will not want to miss this once in a lifetime occasion. They will begin their live stream at 6:30 a.m. on April 4th.

Easter Celebration: *Sunday, April 4th @ 10am via <http://youtube.com/c/fcej>.* With Easter being such a high and grand occasion, the Staff and Executive Committee determined to pre-tape the service and play it at 10 a.m. on Easter morning. With so many churches planning streamed services at 10 a.m. on Easter morning, we did not want the most sacred of all services to suffer a technological crash. Both the Sanctuary Choir and Finally @ First are busy recording some magnificent music. The Staff and Deacons are all preparing their parts and Rev. Josh is ensuring that it is all expertly pieced together and ready to go. You will be able to reach the Easter Celebration by going to our webpage and clicking on the live service tab.



Altar Flowers: Visit this link to request yours! <https://bit.ly/33JW1xj>

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 welcome@fccej.org or call 1 802 878 5745.

Easter Flowers: The signup has ended as the deadline has been reached. Thanks to everyone who ordered. Pickup your flowers by contacting welcome@fccej.org.

Holy Week: Family Household Sanctuary Visits

Monday-Saturday, March 29th-April 3rd

Preregistration is mandatory. Signup here! <https://bit.ly/3v4BDFc>

During Holy Week, we are going to open the sanctuary for our members and friends who would like to spend some time in prayer, reflection or simply soaking in the beauty of our newly restored sanctuary space. From Monday March 29th through Saturday April 3rd from 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. there will be 30-minute time slots in which you and your family can sign up for your time in the church. There are 30-minute time slots, but we ask everyone to only stay in the sanctuary for 20 minutes so that we can be as safe as possible. To sign up, please go to our webpage and click on the Lenten Activities tab, then on the Prayer Vigil/Sanctuary Visit Sign Up, then select your time slot. If you do not have a computer or are unclear on how to sign up, then you can call Doug in the church office and he will sign up for you 878-5745.



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.



Noontime Book Group: *every 3rd Monday, 11:30am.* (Next date is April 19th)

Zoom Link: <http://zoom.us/j/626841083> / **Password:** 455 075

In April we will meet to discuss *Redhead by the Side of the Road* by Anne Tyler. In this book Micah Mortimer is a fortyish man, very set in his routine and ideas, whose life is suddenly upended when his lady friend is unexpectedly evicted, and a teenager shows up at his door claiming to be his son. It is described as a funny, joyful, and compassionate look inside a man who finds others just a bit beyond reach. It looks at themes of "second chances, misperception and the sometimes-elusive power of human connection." (*From the book jacket.*) Our book for May is *A Promised Land* by Barack Obama. This should be an interesting and insightful read, but it is a long book. We picked a shorter book for April so we could get a head start for May!

Questions/concerns? Contact Joanne Irwin @ joanne.h.irwin@gmail.com

FCCEJ Life Story/Memoir Club: *every 3rd Wednesday @ 1pm via Zoom.*

Anyone is welcome to join this group of (mostly) FCCEJ members, which is just getting off the ground. Our plan is to share ideas, collaborate and encourage each other in writing down our life stories, or the stories of others we know. We hope it will be a fun way to write and learn together and make the pandemic and winter months go by more quickly! If you are interested in joining us, please contact Pete Schmalz at pnschmalz@comcast.net or P#879-3352. The Zoom link is kept private so please ask Pete for it.

New Members Class: *Sunday, April 25th @ Noon via Zoom. (Link TBD).*

<https://www.facebook.com/events/157727399530872>

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 400 active members and together we seek to make our local community, country, and world a better place in which to live. We welcome everyone who wants to join us in this venture. To become a member of First Church, everyone is invited to join us for a New Member's 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.

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:

Mail checks (payable to "FCCEJ"):
attn. Financial Secretary
FCCEJ
1 Church Street
Essex Jct, VT 05452

- *Shop using Amazon Smile.* We receive 0.5% of your purchases! To start ordering, visit this link <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!

- ? *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 & Thank Yous

04/01 DORN, Emily	04/08 BAKER, Sandra	04/15 COBURN, Bob	04/23 BAKER, Anna
04/01 MESSIER, Carla	04/08 HAMILTON, Kim	04/15 GREGORY, Raven	04/23 MARTIN, Poppy
04/02 CODDINGTON, Lynn	04/08 KINAMAN, Lilo	04/15 REED, Ellie	04/24 MITCHELL, Steven
04/03 HENNESSEY, Barbara	04/08 VOCK, Steve	04/16 MUDGETT-RUSSELL, Barbara	04/25 BRENNAN, Ciaran
04/03 SAVAGE, Cheryl	04/09 FOSS, Suzanne	04/17 PHILLIPPO, Maxwell	04/25 PORATTI, Rob
04/04 DEAL, Claire	04/09 GRENON, Nova Louise	04/18 BELIVEAU, Lyn	04/26 CIEPLICKI, Grant
04/05 DORN, Kevin	04/10 CALHOUN, Paul	04/18 COE, Ginny	04/26 HARRIS, Dick
04/05 SILVERMAN, June	04/10 SIEVERS, Arnd	04/18 HAYES, Nancy	04/26 WERMER, Carl
04/05 SULLIVAN, Mike	04/11 HOPPER, Jan	04/19 ADAMS, Betty	04/27 PETTINGILL, Davin
04/06 KOCH, Darryl	04/12 NOEL, Blakely	04/19 ASTORE, Liam	04/28 BROOKS, Adam
04/07 DYKE, Mayve	04/14 KING, Genevieve	04/19 PARKER, Vanessa	04/28 DONEY, Myrna
04/07 GRENON, Katherine	04/15 CARPENTER, Toby	04/20 GOEDKEN, Linus	04/29 BASHAW, Jennifer
04/07 MCGEARY, Caitlin	04/15 CHARLEBOIS, Micah	04/22 PORATTI, John	04/29 WAHL, Hannah
	04/15 CLARK, Ashley		04/30 CLARK, Ryan

*I was so nice to receive
A yellow rose on my birthday.
It was thoughtful of our
First Church Family to
remember me! Thank you!
ART LAGRANGE*



Thanks to the Essex Rotary, we received several hundred more masks to protect our Pantry volunteers and help the community!



Visit FCCEJ.ORG to learn more about our thriving church! →



MINISTRY DIRECTORY

Staff

Senior Pastor: Rev. Mark Mendes [mmendes@fccej.org]
Associate Pastor: Rev. Josh Simon [jsimon@fccej.org]
Christian Education Director: Laurie Chipman [lchipman@fccej.org]
Music Director: Carol Spradling [cspradling@fccej.org]
Church Administrator: Doug Ovitt [welcome@fccej.org]

Music

Director, Sanctuary Choir & Heavenly Harmony: Carol Spradling [cspradling@fccej.org]
Currier Bell Choir Director: Carolyn Harris [899-6759]
Finally @ First Director: Rick Dooley [rickdooley5@gmail.com]
Men @ First Director: Bill Bickford, Jr. [bill.bickford@aol.com]

Officers

President: Maureen Evans [233-6127]
Vice President: Cathy Shearer [878-6023]
Financial Secretary: Rob Sinkewicz [878-4470]
Treasurer: Dan Petherbridge [879-0261]
Clerk: Christine Sinkewicz [878-4470]
Historian: Ann Gray [878-4088]
Auditors: Betsy Weischedel [922-2094] & Steve Wood [878-3068]

Committee Chairs

Christian Education: Lisa Clark [872-5849]
Communications: Francis Gravel [802-318-6235]
Deacons: Judy Pomainville [236-0604]
Finance & Pastoral Relations: Cathy Shearer [878-6023]
Hospitality: Jim Glatz [503-5076]
Human Resources: Maureen Evans [233-6127]
Missions: Paula Sargent [879-3598]
Music: Denise Keating [345-8900]
Nominating: Dick Harris [1-802-644-6488]
Stewardship: Kathryn Brennan [878-9509]
Trustees: Kaki McGearry [879-2062]
Ushering: Ushering: Marlene Frank [872-9126]

Recognized Groups

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop: Sue Wood [878-3068] woodsusanjane@gmail.com
Heavenly Food Pantry: Valerie Gabert [879-0109]

First Congregational Church of Essex Junction
1 Church Street
Essex Junction, 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

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- 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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