

SPIRIT@FIRST

monthly newsletter

FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH *of Essex Junction*

Love. Serve. Grow.

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Church offices will be closed on *Monday, May 31st* in observance of **Memorial Day**.

Your Pastor's Ponderings

I love the scene when a young David, from an unknown and unimportant family, arrives on the battlefield and with a deep faith and calls upon God and his own skill and power to defeat the giant Goliath.

I love the scene when God leads the great prophet Samuel to anoint Israel's new king because King Saul has followed his own course of action. Samuel comes to Jesse and sees six strong magnificent sons, each of which God rejects, which is crazy since the blessings always rests on the eldest. He asks if Jesse has any other sons, which Jesse answers in the affirmative and asks a slave to retrieve the youngest and most insignificant of his sons. When David arrives, God tells Samuel that he is the one to lead Israel and become the one to hold the sacred covenant with God. Much to the chagrin of Jesse tradition and appearance, Samuel anoints David to replace Saul.

I love the scene when David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and unites the disparate tribes of Israel into one body and nation with purpose and vision. Filled with God's spirit he strips down to his underwear and dances powerfully and joyfully for the entire gathered nation to see and his wife [Saul's daughter] is disgusted because behavior like that is beneath a great king.

I love the scene when Saul, losing his grip on the nation and his relationship to God tries to kill the heir apparent even as David is called in to sooth the beast within Saul with his harp playing and singing.

I love the scene when David, in the midst of a civil war at the hands of his son is fleeing Jerusalem for his life and comes across a Saul loyalist who mocks him and says that God was never on his side, that David was just a usurper of royalty, a nobody. David's top general suggests he kill the man but David halts the murder saying that perhaps he is right and let us wait to see how the story ends. David again meets the man again upon his victorious return to the city.

I love the scene when Naomi flees to a foreign land due to a famine and ends up marrying her sons to foreign women. Her sons die and she bitterly returns to Israel with one of the foreign wives who would not leave her but pledged herself to Naomi's people and God. Her name is Ruth and she ends up marrying Boaz who was the father of Obed who was the father of Jesse who was the father of David. The great King David whose grandfather married and had children by a foreign wife.

I wonder which of these momentous scenes was the one that turned the tide in Israel toward a theology where God was not on the side of the rich established gilded families of Israel but on the side of the poor and oppressed, a theology where purity and perfection was not required but a heart devoted to God and the divine relationship, a theology that questioned and upended the traditional way of understanding power and God's activity in the world, a theology where forgiveness, equality among all God's children and a will to bring forth justice was the foundational vision in which to strive.

(continued next page...)

These theologies fit like a glove with the two narrative pillars of Israel's foundational stories: the exodus story where God frees a bunch of slaves and the captivity of the Israelites where the nation is oppressed first by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians.

Is it any wonder that when Jesus comes along, there are great pains to connect him to a king whose message he embodies. His disciples are all nobodies with little education. His greatest frustration comes from the religious and social establishment within Israel. He condemns the rich and sides with the poor. He challenges the traditions of the elders and seeks to unite all the various strands of a divided Hebrew people.

I can only hope that the verdict around the murder of George Floyd will serve as one of the scenes that allow our nation to heal our great primordial sin of racism and defeat the oft intentionally hidden evil of white supremacy. I can only hope that the divine spirit that lifted up King David and then Jesus will continue to lift up scenes in life that push society to an understanding of love, equality, and justice. It is what God, out faith and human decency demands. May God continue to inspire us as we seek to build a peaceable kingdom.

As always, I am yours in Christ,
Rev. Mark

Associate Pastor News

This month marks the fourth anniversary of Joy joining my family. The rescue organization brought her up from Tennessee where she was found wandering a field. Often, she loves to be as close as possible to me. When I move, she moves. Though, at times annoying, especially when I'm trying to nap, it is wonderful to be reminded that I comfort her. She decidedly does not like when I sit on her side of the couch. If I'm laying down on her side of the couch, she will rest her whole body on my chest until I move. Of course, she'll then sit in her rightful place. If my feet are in her spot, she'll whimper or pout her eyes at me, until of course, I move my feet. My favorite is when Joy spontaneously starts to zoom around the backyard. And just as she's about to slow down, I'll rush towards her like I might catch her and she speeds up again. We play this game until both she and I are exhausted, and what a joy it is.

I'll be on vacation in Wisconsin from May 3 through May 12th. I will return to the office on May 13.

Just as a heads up: some members of our church might contact you to have a conversation on how the church could advocate for social and economic justice issues, including racial justice.

Rev. Josh Simon, *Associate Pastor*

Laurie's Lens



Back in March I attended a webinar with the Dr. Christian Smith on 'Religious Parenting'. He reminded those of us in attendance that our work with children and youth is to create at warm and inviting place for relationships to form and invite the Holy Spirit to work and gather with us in our peer groups, youth activities, and intergenerational times for all. We are tasked with continuing to create this safe environment that welcomes all to grow in their faith, attend church, get involved, and help make church/faith/religion a priority in one's life, because it's something you value. He emphasized that building a relationship with God is central to what holds us together and helps us get through the dark times in our lives and we who do this work pray that every child/youth in our community will get involved so that they have faith in their 'life support backpack'. When times get tough, crisis happens, they will have a foundation and relationship with God that they can depend on. God walks with them every step of the way, the church is there for them, and they are not alone. He then went on to add that church, however, is not the most important place for them to build their faith. Their home is. Especially with their parents, but also grandparents (you can also add other relative that they see a lot of and have a strong connection with), all play a key role in helping them build their foundation of faith. Watching and experiencing what is valued in the home with their core family is key. Do their parents walk the walk and talk the talk, demonstrating their faith values? Is there a feeling of support? Is faith shared openly and honestly without force? Chris went on to say that parents need to feel comfortable

sharing their faith with their children, of any age, and that it's never too late to start. When parents voice their faith out loud and do not hold it in, they share it's meaning and share how faith is important in their lives. Just like we share and pass down the history of our family and it's members, it's important to share stories of our faith and what you believe. (for more ... check out 'Handing Down the Faith' by Dr. Christian Smith)

So I ask you.. where do you place faith on your list of values? Do you feel comfortable opening up and sharing your faith and talking to your children about faith? When you don't know the answer what do you do? If you are wondering how to start, even you are wondering how much to share and when, we are hear for you. Faith conversations do not need to be long. Sometimes they are easier to enter into when we are putting our faith into action and doing good works for others, no matter how large or small the task. Let your faith conversations be a part of the quality relationships that you want to have with your children, that helps they grow into strong, healthy, compassionate people. Trust that what you say and what you do will have a long lasting impression on them. Share the faith, don't just hold on to it.

Many have said that the church has been focused on learning and growing 'what we believe' as the core of our Christianity. When what we need to do is move forward with 'faith as a way of life'. Sharing it and showing it to all those around us. However, it's not an either/or, but a both/and. We need to gather at home in conversation about our faith (it's values, experiences & beliefs) and gather as church to enrich our faith with others (through relationships, mission, outreach, support, etc.). We need both to help and keep us moving along on our faith journeys. The pandemic pushed us in this direction with a faith at home program. It has been a switch for me in organizing, but one that I knew was coming and one that 'the church' was needing to make for some time now. I pray you and your family have embraced this change and found it meaningful. I'm hoping that you will share your experience, pass along any feedback, and help us grow towards an even more enriching and meaningful faith formation programs (for all our children & youth, and adults) this fall and into the future. I look forward to hearing from you all.

Peace & Blessings to you on your faith journey,
Laurie Chipman, *Christian Education Director*

Deacons

Like all of us, your Deacons are eagerly looking forward to the time when we can have not only members in the sanctuary but also Deacons and live music. That unfortunately will not happen until everyone is fully vaccinated, in several months. Until then, Deacons will participate via video. We will continue to live stream services even when our in-person worship is unrestricted. We also hope to eventually live stream some of the weekly meetings such as sermon talk-back.

In the meantime, Deacons continue to reach out personally to church members experiencing difficulties to offer support and comfort.

A new member's class is scheduled for April 25. Although Covid restrictions limit in-person worship, people continue to find us online and want to join our welcoming, progressive, and dynamic congregation.

Blessings to you and your families. May we all show one another a little extra kindness these days.

Alison Wermer, *Co-chair Deacons*

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

Welcome home! Even though we cannot be at full capacity just yet, we are thrilled that people are FINALLY able to worship in Our Home once again. Your Capital Campaign gifts have made Our Home more welcoming, safe, and beautiful – now and for future generations. Thank you!

A friendly reminder... the Capital Campaign is approaching the end of our 3rd (and final!) pledge year, ending 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.

“Phase 3” Fundraising Update & Elevator Project Update

Great news! We have received nearly \$60,000 in pledges/gifts to help us complete the elevator modernization. These funds, together with the funds allocated from last year’s endowment distribution and the donation from the Food Pantry, are sufficient to move forward with the project this summer! Our goal is to raise \$130,000 (we have about \$97,000 now). After the elevator is complete, remaining funds would go toward the last few stretch goal projects on our list, including replacement of flooring on the 2nd Floor Hallways, Gym and Fellowship Hall. **Thank you to everyone who has responded so far! If you haven’t had a chance to return your Phase 3 Pledge Form, please do so by April 30.**

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 elevator modernization project will take place this summer and be completed before Labor Day. The church will continue to be open during the construction period and we expect the parking lot entrance to still be useable. We will let everyone know the start-date for when the elevator will be out of service.

We completed the upgrade of our fire alarm system, which is a pre-requisite for doing the elevator work. We are still working on getting updated quotes for the kitchen renovation. The Trustees have also updated the Church Buildings & Grounds Plan so that we can begin to plan for future preventive maintenance and capital improvement needs as funds allow.

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 updated the FCCEJ website Home page, Worship page, and the Worship & Music (landing) page to include information about Hybrid worship and access to the SignUp Genius to sign up for a pew to attend in-person. The Home page and the Faith @ Home page were also updated to include the info about in-person Faith Formation time outside every week, not just the 2nd Sunday of the month.

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.

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 ensure 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.

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

Faith Formation

Young Apostles

(3rd – 5th graders & a Parent/Grandparent)

3rd Sunday of the Month from 4 to 4:45pm

Final gathering this spring ~ May 16th

In-person on church grounds

Come join the fun, fellowship, game & mission conversation ~ Ways to give to others ~ How and where we can shine the light of God in our community.

2020-21 Faith Formation Offering

Current Total is **\$70**

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!



Camps



- 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. Are you planning on sending your child/youth to Horton Center this summer (or another UCC camp)? Thinking about it? Please let us know as we would like to help with cost. It is our goal to support all campers from FCCEJ as we know this is such powerful way for them to grow deeper in their faith, connect with God and others in a life changing experience around the clock for a

Faith Formation Outside

Weekly on Sundays from 9 to 10am

On the Church grounds

For the whole family ~ children, youth, parents & grandparents!

*Hospitality/Fellowship ~ Gathering circle ~
Welcome ~ Story Time ~ Activities/Fellowship*

It is SO good to see folks face to face at FFO! Yes, we are gathering weekly now. Feel free to bring your offering with you for VT Adaptive Sports and place it in the basket. If you are uncomfortable attending in person, email Laurie and sign up for at home activities and can be picked up.

Rainy mornings??? Laurie will post a message on our Facebook Discussion Group that FFO is not happening due to weather and we will gather on Zoom instead. Link is still in our Weekly Update email & Faith@Home Friday emails which have now transitioned to monthly (*on the 2nd Friday*).

On June 6th FFO will begin at 10am! You get to sleep in a little and come celebrate our year with our normal fun along with celebrating our offering to VT Adaptive Sports, having communion and the Ice Cream Social (safely with the ice cream truck). Mark your calendars and come join us!

Youth Ministry

Opportunities to Volunteer:

Vacation Bible Camp ~ August 9th-13th
(sign up online or with Laurie)

Junior Youth (6th-8th) Mark your calendars!

- **Dream 5K Run/Walk/Roll:** May 2nd at 1:30-3pm @ Essex Middle School
 - The church is invited to support our 'First Congregational EJ Youth' team. Sign up by May 9th: <https://bit.ly/2P87ZvI>
- **All Youth Hike:** May 16th at 1:30pm @ Five Tree Hill on Sunset Hill Road in Williston.
 - Google Maps location of parking lot: <https://bit.ly/3vaO6Xb>
- **May 24th at 7-8pm @ church**

Watch your emails for more JY updates & information.

full week. We look forward to seeing more attend each year. Female and male counselors are still needed (need to 18yrs old). Parents who would like to experience camp can be a counselor and receive a mini scholarship for your child/youth to attend camp. If you can't join Laurie for VT Takes a Hike to the Mtn week, then maybe your family would like to go for Family Camp, Open House Day or you'd like to lend a hand on Work Day. Check out all the tabs and look at all the pictures! There are many opportunities at Horton Center!

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



VT Takes a Hike to the Mtn: July 18-24, 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!

Elementary (3rd-5th grade) and Senior High Camp are also offered this week. Siblings could go together for a week at Horton Center. Check out their *Summer Schedule*.



Vacation Bible Camp: Discovery on Adventure Island

August 9th – 13th, 2021

REGISTRATION is ONLINE and OPEN

(No Paper Forms this year)!

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

- Please click the ‘registration’ button on our Vacation Bible Camp page for campers and to volunteer.
- Campers arrive between 8:45 and 9am and are picked up by 11:45am. Volunteers arrive by 8:30am and leave by noon.
- Parents can choose between an in-person program or a flexible/online program if you are not comfortable yet with in-person.
- Not free the week of Vacation Bible Camp? You can help behind the scenes before camp. Please reach out to Laurie with your talent and time frame.
- Still room on our VB Camp Team for more to help with planning. We are looking for someone to help lead games.
- Many extra hands are needed this year to help us offer an safe program this year, outside and under tents. Please sign up online and Laurie will be in touch with you or feel free to contact her with any questions you have.

Think tropical island! It's going to be a fun week!

Missions & Volunteering

With donations, volunteers, and support from the entire congregation, your missions committee has had a successful outreach program this year. The missions committee would like to thank all of you for your contributions and support, most recently for the Easter Called to Care Baskets. Cathy Lapierre (photo, *below*) was instrumental in putting these baskets together and wrote the short piece below about her experience:

Care Basket Smash

The Care Baskets were very welcomed by our 49 seniors. First, we would like to thank everyone who gave donations, and for those who gave handmade items as well. What a true blessing to see all the wonderful items that were donated. We were overwhelmed. I want to point out the members behind-the-scenes as well, for Doug Ovitt and Rev. Mark collecting names and working hard organizing the list and routes for delivery of the baskets, and for the members organizing it on the Signup Genius site.

Our drivers were excited and started early on Palm Sunday. Though the weather was not perfect it sure didn't slow down our drivers. The drivers were welcomed and the seniors happy not just to see the baskets but to see someone to talk to even just for a few minutes.

It was a win, win for both seniors and drivers as they lifted spirits for others as well as for themselves. What a wonderful reward.



- **Special Offerings:** The missions committee would like to remind you that it is always a good time to give toward one of the special offerings, even if the official date for that offering has passed. The recent *Easter Pastor's Fund* raised \$ 1,105 for our ministers to use at their discretion when church members or nonmembers have need for emergency funds. The *Outdoor Ministry* special offering raised \$925 and *One Great Hour of Sharing* raised \$1,475. Thank you for your support of these special offerings that increase our church's outreach locally and globally.
- **Ongoing Support of Care Facilities Staff:** Jane Schneider and Monica Johns have continued delivering safely wrapped donut treats purchased with Missions funds to area care facilities. The donuts are presented with beautiful signs that show the staff's work is appreciated and praise for their skill and compassionate care. Recently, Queen City Nursing and Rehabilitation and Birchwood were the targets of this drive-by donut drop.
- **Virtual COTS Walk:** The Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS) advocates for long-term solutions to end homelessness and provides emergency shelter, services, and long-term housing for Vermonters who are experiencing homelessness or are marginally housed. Visit <https://cotsonline.org/> to learn about all the family friendly activities to support their annual COTS WALK. Don't miss May 2 when there will be a virtual tour of COTS online.
- **Signs for Our Volunteers:** The missions committee recently purchased signs for both the thrift shop and the food pantry indicating the people working are volunteers. We wanted to recognize our excellent volunteer workers who give of their time and skills for our church's important outreach work. Thank you, volunteers!



EDD Dream Big 5K Fundraiser

Sunday, May 2nd, 2021

Donate to EDD Adaptive Sports and support this great organization and our youth who are participating in the EDD Dream Big 5K. The event is virtual this year. Youth who are unable to join us can walk on their own and send in their results. Thanks for your support! **Learn more:** <https://www.eddfund.org/>

Donate here: <https://bit.ly/2P87ZyI>



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, May 10th and Thursday, May 27th.

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! We have shopping carts to borrow to get food home for those without vehicles for those living within walking distance!

Questions or Concerns? Please, email welcome@fccej.org or call the church at 1 (802) 878-5745. Those needing food but unable to attend can call Pastor Josh at 878-5745 to make other arrangements.

Save the Date!

Nearly New Sale

Sat., August 14th 9am-1pm

Food Truck: 11am-3pm

The Craft Fest Committee and the Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop will be again holding an outdoor Nearly New Sale! Drop offs for Nearly New will open that morning at 7am.

To highlight the mission work of FCCEJ at St Thomas Parish in Jamaica, the Food Truck, Jamaican Supreme, will be on-site selling food from 11-3. Stay tuned for more details as the day draws closer.

Questions? Please contact Cathy Shearer or Sue Wood.

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop

News: The Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop continues to have 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.

Donations: We are currently accepting spring and summer items: 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.**



Hours & Contact: Saturdays. 10am-1pm. We may add Tuesdays, 10am-1pm beginning May 4th. For questions or to donate, call the Shop (P# 879-6552); or contact Sue Wood (P# 878-3068) (E: woodsusanjane@gmail.com)

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 provide 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 preparing a dinner for the residents of the Dismas House in Winooski. 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 every 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 we choose to do so. If you have questions about becoming a volunteer, please contact the Church's facilitator for Dismas House, Ed Steele (P# (802) 871-5897; E: edwardmsteele@msn.com). Ed will be happy to talk to you.



Jamaica News: *We are recruiting for 2022!*

Informational Meeting on Thurs., May 13th @ 7pm

Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83625999714>

Passcode: 840984

Meeting link will also be available on the weekly FCCEJ email, calendar, and website.

The Jamaica Leadership team is thrilled to announce that we are now recruiting team members for our next service trip to Jamaica in June, 2022! If you are interested in joining the team, please contact Sharon Dettenrieder (dettenriedes@hartwick.edu) or Carolyn Rushford (cjrushford@comcast.net).

In addition, you can find out more about the Jamaica Service Program, with answers to many questions, as well as the application form, on the church website at <https://www.fccej.org/v5/serving-others/jamaica-service-trip/>.

Team members must be 16 by September 1, 2022 and will need to be fully vaccinated for COVID19. Be assured that we will be monitoring the COVID 19 situation and will take that into consideration in trip planning. *We look forward to hearing from you!*

Would you love to:

- Learn about another culture?
- Work hard on a project to benefit the Jamaican community?
- Get to know our Jamaican partners and meet community members?
- Climb through a beautiful natural river and waterfall?
- Increase your awareness of the challenges of deep poverty?
- Develop strong bonds with other FCCEJ team members?
- Enjoy the beautiful country of Jamaica?
- Have lots of fun?

If so, please consider joining us for the experience of a lifetime!

Jamaica Reflections

Journal Entry by Peter Schmalz - Inspired By The Children

“When we arrived in Jamaica, I found that my focus was primarily on the project: Would we have all the supplies we needed? Would we have enough time? Would we wilt in the heat? Would I have the right skills to contribute to the effort?

By the end of the week, all goals were achieved, but instead of being the focal point, the work project became just one of the highlights. In particular, from the moment we arrived on the worksite Monday morning, we gratefully welcomed the chance to get to know those for whom the project was intended: the school children. While we had prepared for the possibility that we might not see any students during our visit, on our drive in on Monday, we observed children along the main road, dressed sharply in school uniforms, dark blue and aqua shirts, awaiting their ride. We were excited to see who would greet our arrival.

As we unpacked the materials from our bus and moved everything to the worksite, we had an audience of little observers. They were full of questions and comments, and our group quickly began interacting with them casually. Our teenagers were wonderful in their engagement – getting to know many by name. We were working in the schoolyard for the younger grades (ages 4-6), just a few feet from their classrooms. I'm sure we posed a challenge to the teachers, struggling to hold the students' attention. But no one complained, and we tried not to interfere with the classroom lessons.

As the week progressed, we eased into the rhythm of the school day. I was grateful to be treated to the inspirational sound of children singing each morning, their melodies, and delightful accents, drifting out of the classrooms and across our worksite. The teacher would cue the students with each verse. “Come in to my heart”, and then the children followed slowly,

“Come in - - to my - heart,
come in - - to my - heart,
come in - - to my - heart, Lord Jes - us.”



Then the teacher cued the next verse, “Come in to my *soul*,” and the students would follow...

Next came a song performed with more gusto and foot-stomping, which energized me as I prepared to shovel gravel and sand for the next few hours:



“Big foot, little foot – it doesn’t matter,
Big foot, little foot – it doesn’t matter.
Big foot, little foot – it doesn’t matter,
Walking on the King’s Highway”

During breaks, we visited and chatted with the children, and our teenagers were wonderful ambassadors, joking with them and playing games. They encouraged them to work hard in their classes, and to be kind to each other. I taught several children my unofficial “family handshake” (it’s unofficial because my family refuses to do it with me). We enjoyed their positive energy and curiosity about our group. The level of poverty for each wasn’t clear, but we could only assume the worst, based on what we observed for housing on our drive to and from the school.

At the end of the week, our youth played a volleyball game on the school parking lot - a rousing success! With dozens of children and staff circling the court and cheering, the ball bounced around from side to side, with both sides winning points and everyone have lots of fun. (I did not get to see it, but I was told that Zach cut loose with a thunderous spike that may have left an imprint in the hot pavement, and all the children exclaimed “OOHH!!”).

When we departed the school on Friday, we said our goodbyes. There was some sadness that we would not see the children again, but also pride at the work we had done to improve their playground. We’ve since been told that the project has been quite a blessing, and a source of admiration from other schools. Life is very hard in this part of Jamaica, and many of these children will face great hurdles as they mature. But after the week we spent together, we felt hope in their teachers and parents, about what their future might hold.

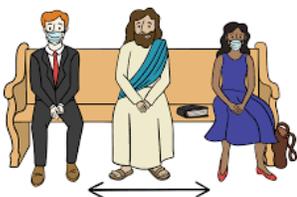
Worship & Fellowship

Hybrid Worship: Sundays @ 10am; Communion 1st Sundays | [youtube.com/c/fceej](https://www.youtube.com/c/fceej)

We are pleased to offer in-person worship on a limited basis with COVID precautions in place. We are offering a single 10am worship service currently. **Reservations required.** To reserve a pew OR sign up to Usher, visit this link:

<https://bit.ly/31Txoip> Then, look at the available slots on the calendar and click the "Sign Up" button. We ask you to limit sign-ups to one Sunday per month to allow everyone a chance to attend. If you need assistance or have any questions about in-

LEAVE ROOM FOR JESUS



person worship, please call the church office at 802-878-5745 or email welcome@fceej.org.

If there are no seats available, please visit www.fceej.org to join us online for the service.

More Worship & Fellowship Opportunities

Daily Devotionals: *Weekdays @ 8am.* Search “firstcongregationalej” on Facebook or visit: <http://facebook.com/firstcongregationalej/>

Sermon Talk Back: *Tuesdays at 8:30am.* Join the pastors for a rousing discussion of the recent sermon. <http://zoom.us/j/740803865>

Coffee Clatter: *Thursdays at 8am.* Join for the pastors online. A little bit of caffeinated confection, a lot of joyful banter about everything under and above the sun! <http://zoom.us/j/97659276694>



Altar Flowers: Request yours here: <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. *Trouble signing up?* Contact the church: welcome@fccej.org or 1(802) 878-5745.

Puzzle Swap First Church's puzzle swap continues. 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 and generally accessible between 8am-2pm, Monday-Friday.

Mother's Day Service: Sun., May 9th @ 10am.

To honor all mothers, FCCEJ will be gifting carnations in a variety of colors! Supplies are limited. *This event coincides with our Per Capita special offering. You may read more about that offering in the Stewardship section of this newsletter.*



Graduation Sunday: Sun., June 13th. Submit graduation photos/details by Wed., June 9th! (Though this happens in June, we are including a note in May's newsletter to afford ample submission time.)

Please email me, jsimon@fccej.org a photo of your child when they were a) young and b) grownup. Also, c) please include details as to where they are graduating from and what their plans are for the near future including any technical colleges, internships, etc. We will happily include this content in our Teleworship service!



Noontime Book Group: every 3rd Monday, 11:30am. (Next date is May 17th)

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

This month we will discuss Libertie by Kaitlyn Greenidge. Judy Allen will lead this discussion. It is a coming-of-age story about a young woman born in post-Civil War Brooklyn. Her mother was a doctor and expected her to eventually take over her practice. Libertie was more drawn to the arts than science. She marries and moves to Haiti, but finds she is still subordinate there. Her story explores the issues of colorism, classism, racism, and patriarchy as she struggles to claim her own identity as a free black woman. Please note that this is a change in the book that we had announced last month.

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.

Stewardship

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



Special Offering - Per Capita: Collected on Mother's Day (Sunday, May 9th)

Dear Friends: Did you know that our church, the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction, is part of a larger organization in Vermont? We belong to the Champlain Association, one of eight associations within the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ. The Vermont Conference's mission is to equip churches for Christ's mission and ministry now and in the future.

Every year our church contributes to this wider church. This is called a per capita donation (or dues). We give as part of our connection to the Champlain Association and

the Vermont Conference United Church of Christ. Per capita dues cover clergy gatherings and educational support, pastoral search and call, church school resources, summer camp for youth at Covenant Hills Christian Camp, training, and resources for staff, and much more.

Per capita Dues are assessed on a per member basis according to the membership numbers reported by churches to the Conference as of December 31 of each year. **This year our per capita dues are \$14.20 per member.** We will be asking for this donation on Mother’s Day, May 9th. Please give now and if possible double your offering to cover the dues for members who cannot give at this time. Of course, any donation later in the year is also welcome. The giving tab at www.fccej.org makes it easy to share your monetary gift with the church.

The *Stewardship Committee* appreciates your generosity towards this special offering.

Kathryn Brennan, Alex John, Emily Guziak, Shannon McCullen, Jonathan Roddy, and Mark Ferrara

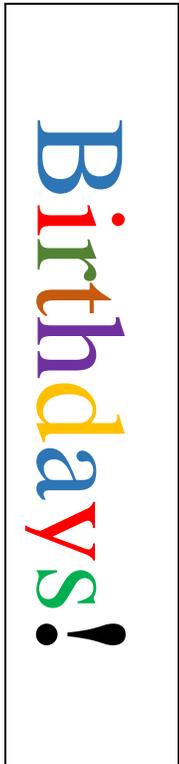
Donate to our Church

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, One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need* and *The Christmas Fund*. We appreciate this fundraising! 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

- *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”).
 - *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 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)

MEILLEUR, Sena	05/01	SPAULDING, Cooper	05/08	GUZIAK, Tim	05/15
PARKER, Collin	05/01	SPAULDING, Kinlee	05/08	BEEBE, Wayne	05/19
PETTINGILL, James	05/01	DROST, Rose	05/09	CIEPLICKI, Betsy	05/20
SHARP, Steve	05/01	DUELL, Marsha	05/09	EHLER-VOCK, Kyle	05/20
CAMPION, Andrew	05/02	WOLINSKY, Lia	05/09	FRANK, Marlene	05/20
MITTL, Steve	05/02	BOTTAMINI, Mike	05/10	HOY, David	05/20
SCHNEIDER, Jane	05/02	HARRIS, Allie	05/10	MANNARINO, Mindy	05/22
FOSS, Donald	05/03	SPAULDING, Kelvey	05/10	ROBINSON, Graham	05/22
GIANNUZZI, Anna	05/03	BAKER, Chris	05/11	BICKFORD, Arlene	05/24
NUTTING, Lester	05/03	HOY, Jennifer	05/11	RELYEA, Becky	05/24
PARKER, Jackson	05/03	KEATING, Denise	05/11	CARLSON, Maryann	05/25
HOY, Jacob	05/04	OWENS, Gretchen	05/11	RICHER, Mary	05/25
GRAY, Don	05/05	PARKS, Jackie	05/11	WOOD, Susan	05/25
PARKS, Grace	05/06	PETTINGILL, Anniella	05/11	STAPLETON, Orion	05/26
RUSHFORD, Carolyn	05/06	WERMER, Nicholas	05/12	WARREN, Mary Anne	05/26
BRENNAN, Nathaniel	05/07	LINDHOLM, Eric	05/13	BASHAW, Dan	05/27
CULVER, Brian	05/07	MAYVILLE, Alec	05/13	MCKENZIE, Maureen	05/29
CUNNINGHAM-FIRKEY, Laura	05/07	CALHOUN, Jordan	05/14	WERMER, Leo	05/29
BLAKE, Pam	05/08	HIGGINS, Rich	05/14	JAMES, Tom	05/30
KINNEY, Anna	05/08	JOHN, Alex	05/14	PALMER, Amanda	05/31
				PETTINGILL, Alyssa	05/31



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 McGearly [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
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Phone: 802-878-5745 **Fax:** 802-872-8236
Email: welcome@fccej.org

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