



SPIRIT @ FIRST

FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH *of Essex Junction*

Love. Serve. Grow.

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Your Pastor Ponders...

What a celebration of baby Jesus' birth! The Christmas pageant was a delight under the always stellar direction of Laurie. Our kids did a tremendous job presenting the story and who can forget baby Jesus NOT coming out the door to greet the wisemen because he hadn't been vaccinated! And our three completely different Christmas Eve services came off without a hitch with many community members coming to the outdoor 5pm service, a joyous baptism at our 9pm streamed service and the quiet beauty of our 11pm service. Hopefully, the rituals that have grown up in your family of origin matched the church's in their expression of God's love given to us in a child 2000 plus years ago. Everyone loves to celebrate the birth of a new child.

But then the work begins.....

Babies eat all the time and every tooth, growth spurt, and spit up requires immediate action in order to keep the baby safe, warm, and content. Parents soon figure out whether it's a diaper change or a feeding that is needed. As soon as our toddlers can get off their backs a whole new world of mobility ensues and our attentiveness increases, especially when they get their legs under them. The circles of mobility and independence continues to expand both literally and metaphorically as children grow. Life lessons come with tears, challenges, and difficulties and, as I have learned as a parent, every stage gets more and more expensive. Good parenting breaks one's heart again and again and it takes every bit of energy, focus and skill we have to do it well. And throughout their lives we still occasionally fail miserably.

Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem to be registered with the Roman authorities. Afterwards, instead of returning home and settling down into a new routine of babydom, they had to travel to Egypt to keep their child safe, then back again once the danger was over. There is only one biblical story of Jesus as a child but it shows a spirit of independence that would have driven any parent crazy with worry. There are plenty of non-biblical tales of Jesus acting out as he tried to understand the power and calling to which his destiny would bring him. People thought Jesus was a bit mentally imbalanced at times and his family's understanding often favored the same assessment. And the worse event any parent ever has to deal with in life is losing a child, something in which Mary surely carried with her all her days.

Jesus' birth and those of our own children is just the first shot across the bow. There is more to come. In the midst of the journey with all its trials, however, comes the deepest sense of peace, hope, joy and love. I do not know of any parents who would NOT have their children given the way in which they both challenge and reward us.

Jesus, and seeing yourself as part of the Divine Presence of God, does the same. Saying yes is the easy part but that yes then requires a lifetime of sincere effort that will bring enormous hardship but also the greatest rewards of life. Parenting and faith both have an unwritten journal for each of us. There are guides and plenty of advice but both parents and people of faith learn as we go through the ups and downs of life. The beginning and even the end are but the parenthesis of a larger narrative where meaningful life occurs. A child refines and helps define that life for many of us. God's child has the same potential to refine and define our lives.

The little baby in the manger is just the beginning. Once the celebration of birth is over, the fun begins.....

Blessed to be on the journey with you all, I am

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Mark

And the adventure continues...

Simon Sez...

Happy New Year! We have now passed the Winter Solstice and we have witnessed the birth of the light of Christ. Jesus encourages his followers to shine this light—the light we have embraced—with others around us.

When I was exploring a call to be an ordained pastor, I read many books on spiritual and religious leaders. I read *Rabble-Rouser for Peace*, an authorized biography on the life of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his leadership in the anti-apartheid movement within South Africa and the world. From my readings, including his, I drew inspiration from the ministries that transform people's lives by aiding in their liberation, for their freedom, for their dignity as human beings. Ministry only makes sense, really only worth it to me, if I can be part of someone's transformation and liberation.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was an extraordinary religious leader. His leadership aided my call to ministry and has informed my identity as a Christian, who I want to be as a human being, and as a pastor. We all know that he had the courage to denounce the apartheid government and speak the truth to leaders around the world – to their faces. But he stood up not only to the enemies of freedom. He also stood up to his allies. The dehumanizing apartheid system turned Black South Africans against each other. When Archbishop Tutu came upon a chaotic crowd preparing to kill a fellow Black South African who was suspected of murder, he and a colleague marched into the frenzied crowd and saved the man's life. He understood practicing what he preached despite the odds or potential harm against him. He stuck to his principles and saved the man's life. I try to live with the ethic that if I encourage you to do something, I should be able to do it, too. And I sure hope I can stand up and speak honestly to enemies of freedom as well as my allies.

Another example of the way Tutu inspired me is with his work once apartheid ended. He led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. His proposal for the Commission included “no pre-Nuremburg-type trials” but there needed to be a full confession of crimes committed, then forgiveness with a properly administered amnesty, and if possible restitution for the harm done. He said, *“Let us go... the Christian way, the way that says, yes there is a risk in offering people forgiveness; you don't know how they are going to turn out. But that's not...our business, that God's business, with that particular individual.”*

At the core is restorative justice, he wrote, *“Here the central concern is not retribution or punishment, but, in the spirit of ubuntu, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships. This kind of justice seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he or she has injured by his or her offense.”* One of the reasons why I am a huge supporter of restorative justice practices is this very thing he described. As well as, restorative justice practices recognize that oftentimes a person's actions are a result of the circumstances of their life. I firmly believe that if we focus on how to restore a broken relationship while helping the perpetrator rejoin the community and be a productive member of society it leads to a great human family. I have seen stories where a person committed a crime and instead of jail time turned their life around and became a productive member of society. One of the best ways to build a community is to work with restorative justice organizations like Essex Community Justice Center.

Thank you, Archbishop for the light you shined in the world and for having a deeply profound impact on my identity as a Christian, human being, and pastor. Rest well, Good and Faithful Servant. Amen.

Rev. Josh Simon

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

"When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land."

"I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the gospel, period. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is concerned for the whole person. When people were hungry, Jesus didn't say, 'Now is that political or social?' He said, 'I feed you.' Because the good news to a hungry person is bread."

"All of God's children and their different faith help to realize the immensity of God. No faith contains the whole truth about God. And certainly Christians don't have a corner on God. All of us belong to God."

Epiphany is arriving! As you read this we are in the 12 days of Christmas which started on the 25th and goes to January 5th. The next day, January 6th, is the day of Epiphany when we celebrate the arrival of the magi, or wise men, who came from the east and followed the star for a long time to see the child. From the gospel of Matthew, we learn that they arrived in Jerusalem, spoke with King Herod, then continued to Bethlehem to find Jesus with his mother, Mary, at their home. No mention her husband, Joseph. One can conclude that Jesus had aged from an infant and was now living in a home, no longer a baby in a manger. We can also gather that the family stayed in Bethlehem for some time and that maybe Joseph was off using his carpentry skills, since he was not mentioned.



Sunday morning, January 2nd, we will celebrate the magi's arrival and the day of Epiphany. You may also collect your 2022 Epiphany word star. (You might remember we did this last year.) If you can't make it to worship, stop by during the week and pick up a word star (clearly marked outside our Church street entrance in a bin). Take your star home and place it in a window inside your house or a place in your home that you walk past every day, so that you see it each day during Epiphany and ponder the meaning of the word on your star. Watch for how and in what ways it connects with you (and others in your family). If you are home from college, I encourage you to take one back with you.

The Epiphany season continues until Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday. Shrove Tuesday is traditionally the day that the early Christians enjoyed a feast of the basic foods before they fasted for the 40 days of Lent. The word shrove comes from shrive, meaning to present oneself for confession, penance, and absolution. So, mark your calendar for March 1st, which also happens to be the last day of February school vacation this year. Write Shrove Tuesday on your calendar and celebrate the day with a traditional pancake supper, because the early Christians used up all the ingredients in their kitchen which usually consisted of eggs, milk and flour. Involve the whole family in preparing your meal. Maybe you'll have a short stack of crepes or a tall thick stack of pancakes, or anything in between. Cover them with your favorite toppings and as you pour the maple syrup, remember the sweetness and plentiful love of our God for all people.

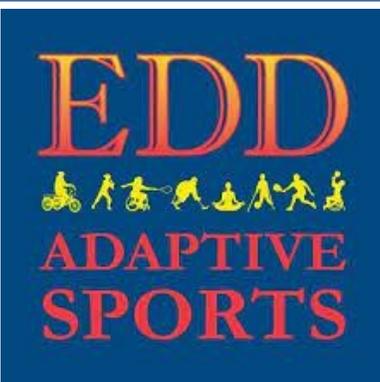
We continue to do our best to keep everyone safe and well. I know some of you continue to worship and connect with us from home. Please let me know if you'd like the Faith@Home monthly emails to continue. My goal is to eventually move these items to our Faith@Home page on our website.

I look forward to you joining us for Sunday morning Faith Formation during our 10:15am service, when you are comfortable doing so, and at our Young Apostle and Youth Gathering times. Here's to a safe & healthy 2022!

Hope, Peace, Joy & Love to you all,

Laurie Chipman

Christian Education Director



2021-22 Faith Formation Offering

EDD Adaptive Sports ~ www.eddfund.org

Help us level the playing field for people with disabilities.

Have you gotten injured lately? Sprained an ankle, a wrist, been sore from a covid shot? You know what it's like to not feel your best or be able to do what you normally can. EDD Adaptive Sports helps to engage those who need assistance and support to help them play sports. Visit their website and ask yourself the question—what can I give to help those in need? Then send in your support by mail or bring it with you on Sunday. Envelopes are in the Narthex by the worship supplies. Our giving is currently at \$158.97.

Faith Formation & Youth Ministry

****Watch for Faith@Home emails in your inbox****

Sunday Morning Faith Formation

Weekly during 10:15am Service wearing masks

We begin in worship with our families and move to the Fellowship Hall large room after Children's Moment. We have two air purifiers running and remain masked. We will keep you posted on when we feel the time it right to transition to our peer rooms.

A Gathering Circle ~ Groups for Prek-2nd grade & 3rd- 8th grade ~ Bible story & Activity

We ask that all parents initiate the pick up of their children when you leave the Sanctuary. We have take home snack bags that can go with you.

- ◆ January 2nd ~ Epiphany celebration & story of the magi
- ◆ January 9th & 16th ~ Baptism of Jesus
- ◆ January 23rd & 30th ~ Jesus & his mother attend a wedding

Young Apostles

January 9th @ 4pm

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

This group meets once a month for fun-filled fellowship. Recreation, Bible Study, mission activities, laughing & talking — and most important of all, creating bonds that will steer our children into lasting friendships in the teen years — all can be found in Young Apostles. Sunday afternoons from 4-5pm. Gather in the church parking lot—if weather is inclement, we'll move inside.

Hoping to have a surprise guest with us this month. Join us and come see who this is. We'll look back on a previous project and see what happened when area community members found out and shared what we did. Come join in the fellowship and have some fun!

Youth Time – The Gathering

Calling ALL Youth! 6th – 12th graders ~ Weekly on Sunday evenings from 6:30-8pm

Mark ALL your calendars!

Our Youth Gatherings start back up on January 2nd ~ holiday party & cookie making for a local organization

Enjoy family & friends on these school break weekends (no YG):

January 16th, February 20th & 27th, March 20th, April 17th, May 29th

Come and get reconnected with your peers. Create community. Be a part of this safe space to talk, relax and connect. We will help keep God & Jesus at the center of your life and build a solid foundation for your faith. We'll play games (hide-n-seek, flashlight tag, etc.), do mission projects and build a safe space for youth to talk and release stress. Join Pastor Josh, Laurie and our adult youth ministry friends Barb Smith & Kathryn Brennan. Interested adults who would like to be a part of this team and help plan our time together and/or participate, please reach out to the staff. Help us build long lasting relationships for our youth and a strong youth program.

Camping Ministry

FCCEJ Camping

We had a such a great time camping last summer we thought we would get the word out early that we were planning to do it again! Mark your calendars for **Little River State Park on June 24-26** and **Grand Isle State Park on September 2-4**.

Come camping with staff and other families so some great outdoor ministry time and fellowship.

Outdoor Ministry Camps

www.hortoncenter.org

2022 HC brochures are in the mail! If you have been to camp in the last couple of years, yours should be in your mail box! We have one at church on the Outdoor Ministry bulletin board in the office hallway outside Laurie's office. Come check it out! More copies are on the way.

Many thanks to all of you who have contributed over the years to our in-house FCCEJ Camper Scholarships. Thanks to you we have funds ready to help send and support campers going to either Horton Center (NH), Silver Lake (CT) or Pilgrim Lodge (ME). Thinking about attending? Would Laurie's presence make a difference? She is starting to schedule her summer so please reach out! Attending a camp is a powerful way to connect with God and connect with others while enriching your faith. Like VB Camp is a full week of programming during the morning, outdoor ministry camp is a 24/7 experience that is life changing for all who take on this cool adventure. Speak to Laurie or one our pastors for more information. Take a look at this video <https://youtu.be/rLZm8fzCV2Y>.

Communications

Our website continues to be updated regularly by Andrea Sharp to keep it current and relevant to the happenings at First Church. The Advent/Christmas block was installed to show the events for this season, the Christmas Eve services and the Sunday service on December 26 at 9am. The Christmas Eve services offered opportunities for in-person worship at the 5pm Family Service (held outdoors in front of the church by the nativity scene) and at the 11pm Contemplative Service with Communion and Finally-At-First providing the music. The 9pm Lessons and Carols service was streamed on our YouTube video channel. We hope you were able to attend and share in the joy of the Christmas Season.

Another update on our website is the block for submitting pledge information for the upcoming 2022 financial year. Pledging is a vital component for the many activities First Church provides to support our faith community and the community in which we live. The online form for submitting pledge information was found to work for some parishioners, but for others the information never arrived at the Finances email address. Due to the inability to find the source of the problem, the pledge form was removed and replaced with the information on how to submit pledges directly to the Finances email address. For those who have received follow-up emails or phone calls after using the online form, we apologize for the inconvenience in having to submit your pledge a second time and appreciate your patience.

The website is a great way to learn about what is happening at the church; please take an opportunity to browse the website at www.fccej.org. Contact the church office via e-mail at <mailto:welcome@fccej.org> or by calling 878-5745 if you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted by Douglas Olufsen

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

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop News!

Happy New Year to our church community and a BIG thank you to our customers, our volunteers, and to those of you who make donations. We are grateful for successful year meeting our mission of outreach and look forward to what 2022 has in store for the Thrift Shop!

During the month of December, the shop held sales of holiday items, as well as offering free items just prior to Christmas.

Beginning in January, sales begin on specific items and continue throughout the winter. We are grateful for your donations of good quality men's, women's, and children's clothing, shoes and boots, linens, and small houseware items. We are no longer accepting books.

If you are interested in joining our team and volunteering a few hours each month, contact either Sue Wood at 878-3068 or Elaine Raymond at 879-7350.

Deacon's Corner

2021 has been a challenging year. We stepped up with hybrid services which were successful. A big thank you to all of the people who made in-person and on-line services happen. The church was beautifully decorated for Christmas and thanks to the people who decorated the church and who helped build the manger scene on the front lawn. Christmas can be a happy time and a sad time. Please let the Deacons know if there is anything we can do to enhance the spiritual life of the church. We are always open to new ideas. We are looking forward to an exciting New Year!

Rusty Sargent, Deacon

Stewardship Update

If you haven't made your 2022 pledge to the church, please consider doing so soon. The gifts that you share with the church are what keeps our church vibrant and flourishing. Pledging is what allows us to see into the future and plan for the year. We use the information gained from the pledge cards to plan our budget, determine what services and supports can be offered, and determine what new incentives we can explore. When you communicate your pledge information, you give the church confidence to proceed with certainty on our mission to serve. Thank you!

Missions Committee

Joint Urban Ministry Project (JUMP) is an interfaith organization supported by more than 25 churches in the greater Burlington area, including Essex Junction. It serves many of the most vulnerable members of our community. Many clients are homeless, disabled, newly arrived here with little or no English, recently released from jail, families with disabled parents and homebound elders with limited income. Each has a unique story, and their needs are very basic and real.

Traditionally folks come four days a week to the First Congregational Church in Burlington, which provides space for a walk-in distribution. Clients may select what need as they enjoy a listening ear and perhaps a warm cup of coffee and a small snack. State food programs often do not include non-food items such as feminine hygiene products, cleaning supplies, soap, shampoo and deodorant. The churches involved help to provide these very necessary items.

When the pandemic started and the in-person model became impossible, JUMP quickly responded by expanding their outreach. A quarterly Care Call system provides calls to homebound people who may or may not have access to computers. A JUMP volunteer checks in to make sure they are all right and to offer vouchers for groceries, utilities, laundromats and area thrift shops. Flexibility within the program helps many people obtain the things they need in a time when their already difficult lives are shaken up by the confusion and danger of the virus. JUMP is now back open for very limited in-person visits one day a week. Each client is given vouchers and a small bag containing daily necessities, including a warm dry pair of socks. Strict measures are in place to keep both clients and volunteers safe.

Currently the greatest need is for deodorant and toilet paper. If you would like to donate deodorant, please leave it in the Red Tent in the vestibule inside the Church Street entrance to the church. Donations of toilet paper would quickly overwhelm our Red Tent, so we encourage you to donate via a check made out to FCCEJ with JUMP in the memo.

Tornado Emergency in Central U.S.

In response to the devastating tornadoes which left a path of destruction across central U.S.A. on December 10th 2021, the United Church of Christ is preparing to provide vital support to assist the victim's families in rebuilding their lives. The Missions Committee will meet in January to spearhead efforts to support these vital services.

To learn more about the disaster go to <https://www.ucc.org/appeal-severe-storms-2021>.



Jamaica Service Program News

Mark your calendars for **Sunday February 27** when both services will be Jamaica themed. We'll share music, a slideshow of our three service trips, and hearing from Jamaica alumni about the impact this program has had on their lives. We hope to hear from our Jamaican partners as well. Please join us!



Giving Tree 2021 Thank You

The Giving Tree for 2021 has concluded! Our faith community provided 159 gifts of clothing and toys, books, games or gift cards to 53 children in the Village and Town of Essex as well as Westford. In addition to these gifts, the Rotary donated winter coats for a number of children. As well, about 30 handmade hats were given to the kids. The youth group put together bags of candy and clementine oranges for each child. Last, the Heavenly Food Pantry gave fresh vegetables and fruits, goody bags, as well as a turkey to each participating family.

As an indication of their appreciation, two of the mothers who picked up gifts cried in response to the overwhelming generosity. Others expressed their thankfulness as we distributed the gifts, saying it would make their children's Christmas very special.

Special thanks to LindaLou Parker, Jane Schneider, Belinda Gabert, Valerie Gabert, Jen Dooley, Jen Kelly, Josh Simon and Laurie Chipman and the youth for their significant help in setting up Sign-up Genius, accepting gifts as they came in, sorting gifts by family and distributing gifts and food to all of the families we helped.

In appreciation of all you do,
Elaine Raymond

Christmas Poinsettia Dedications

Betty Busciglio *In Memory of loved ones*
Cathie Goodheart & Tim Carney *In Memory of our loved ones*
Sanctuary Choir *In Honor of Denise Keating and Marie Johnson*
Brenda Dawson *In Memory of my parents*
Riley Elliott *In Honor of the ministries of First Congregation Church of Essex Junction*
Howard & Janne Giles *In Memory of David & Anne Cozzens,
Howard & Lois Giles and Lois Rossman*
Martha Hopkins *In Memory of my parents, Arthur & Lois Anderson*
Joanne Irwin *In Memory of Edwin & Dortha Hilbert and Alan Irwin*
Andrea J. Goedken & Linda B. Jackson *In Memory of George Arthur Jackson*
Alex, Monica, Liam & Ethan John *In Memory of N.V. & Mary John and
John & Alice Murphy*
Marie & Dave Johnson *In Memory of our parents*
Genevieve & Henry King *In Memory of Grandma & Grandpa Gibson*
Connie Marshall *In Honor of my Barden family and my Marshall family*
Judy & Kevin McCullen *In Memory of Peg & Ed Hurst and Donna McCullen
and In Honor of Shannon, Sean, and Kevin*
Maureen McKenzie *In Memory of Mom, Dad, Jim and Mark*
Mark Mendes *In Memory of Margaret & George Mendes*
Betty Moody *In Memory of Karl K. Moody, Jr.*
Jessica & Jonah Moos *In Honor of family
and In Memory of Leora & Annette*
Lindalou Parker *In Memory of Erica Eastham & Krianna & Kelsey Couture*
Judy Pomainville *In Memory of Wesley & Virginia Larrabee*
Carolyn Rushford *In Honor of Nick & Jamie Rushford*
Paula & Rusty Sargent *In Honor of Paula's mom, Charlotte Lapidow
and In Memory of Rusty's mom, Helen Sargent*
Jane Schneider *In Memory of Russ and In Honor of my parents*
Andrea & Steve Sharp *In Memory of our parents*
The Shearer Family *In Memory of Patricia & Steve Shearer and Malcolm Forbes*
Gorden & Lauren Starkey *In Memory of our parents,
Mr. & Mrs. Gordon Starkey Sr., and Richard Busciglio*
Carolyn Toof *In Memory of Dick Toof*
Carl & Alison Wermer *In Memory of our parents*
John & Phyllis Willey *In Memory & In Honor of our parents, both living and deceased*

Worship & Connection

Sunday Worship - Two Services - 8:30am* and 10:15am

*First service streamed via [youtube.com/c/fccej](https://www.youtube.com/c/fccej)

We are pleased to offer in-person worship with COVID precautions in place. This includes masking and social distancing regardless of vaccination status.

Communion is served in the Sanctuary on the 1st Sunday of each month. The elements will be sealed and passed out to the congregation.

Sermon Talk Back:

Join us every Tuesday from 8:30-10am to talk about the Sunday scripture and message. This time provides opportunities to delve deeper into scripture and hear the perspectives of others in our faith community. Sermon Talkback meets in the Marvin Lounge and via Zoom: <http://zoom.us/j/740803865>

Ushers & Greeters Needed

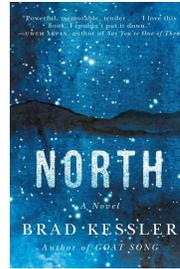
Our ushers and greeters perform a vital function in the life of our faith family and we extend our heartfelt thanks to all who currently serve in this capacity! You have helped create a warm and welcoming environment for everyone.

We are looking to expand our ushering and greeter teams. It's a fun way to interact with everyone and serve our church. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Marlene Frank at marlene.frank@uvmhealth.org or feel free to sign up via this link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60b0a48aaad2ca2ff2-fccej2>.

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

ALDEN, Sam	01/01
DAHAL, Kul	01/01
FRISBIE, Paulette	01/01
HARPLE, Glenn	01/01
REYNOLDS, Lynn	01/01
MCINTYRE, Amy	01/02
DULANEY, Donna	01/04
FORTIER, Jackie	01/04
LAFLAM, Chris	01/04
WINSLOW, Arthur	01/04
MITTL, Keenan	01/06
WISLOSKI, Jessica	01/08
CHADURJIAN, Jon	01/10
NOWELL, Jeff	01/10
DONLEY, Steven	01/11
DOOLEY, Alex	01/11
SIMON, Joshua	01/13
GUILD, Ed	01/15
HELMSTUTLER, Elaine	01/15
BOOMHOWER, George	01/17
RUSHFORD, Bob	01/18
COBURN, Mary	01/20
FREDRICKSEN, AmyBeth	01/20
HARRIS, Carolyn	01/20
CRAM-HUNT, Michelle	01/21
DEAN, Ed	01/21
KELLOGG, Matthew	01/21
BEACH, George	01/24
RIESTER, David	01/24
WILLIAMS, Penny	01/24
SHEARER, Cathy	01/25
VANSTEENSBURG, Allison	01/25
EHLER, Karen	01/26
MCCULLEN, Kevin	01/29
MILNE, Nancy	01/29

Noontime Book Group



On Monday January 18 we will meet at 11:30am in the Marvin Lounge. This will be a hybrid meeting. The Meeting ID and Password will be sent out shortly before the meeting. This month we are reading North by Brad Kessler, a Vermont author. It is set at a monastery in Vermont and is the unlikely interweaving of the stories of a Somali refugee, a Tibetan monk and an army veteran as they seek safer lives in our country. Come join us for good conversation, a lively discussion and a chance to see your friends in a safe setting. Feel free to bring your lunch if you wish.

*As each day comes to us
refreshed and anew,
so does my gratitude
renew itself daily.
The breaking of the sun
over the horizon is my
grateful heart dawning
upon a blessed world.
Terri Guillemets*

Wednesday Night Searchers Continues the Discussion on Race



Our congregation has been talking about issues of race for some time now. Our previous pastor, Rev. Steve Garvey, preached about it and made a point of taking a stand against racism and its implications in our society. When Rev. Mendes first arrived, he too led a series of book groups and discussions concerning the injustice of slavery and the inequality of civil rights in our country. As the discussion expanded and the “Mission Possible” group talked about how to translate our language into action,

the church leadership determined to put our assets to work for our beliefs and decided to partner with the Vermont Refugee and Re-Settlement Program [VRRP] in providing an apartment to an immigrant family. That decision created a relationship with a couple of Nepalese families both of whom have a continuing relationship with our members and or church. Our partnership with VRRP, in turn, opened up the wider Essex Junction community to hosting a Nepalese community which has enriched not only our church but the wider village.

And the discussions continue. A few years ago, the Wednesday Night Searchers explored “White Privilege” with a UCC curriculum and had not only good numbers but an awakening of sorts. Rev. Simon has been reading multiple books on race and on recognizing white privilege. Through our partnership with Vermont Interfaith Agency [VIA], we will host a community discussion on February 2 regarding Proposition 2 which addresses slavery in the Vermont Constitution and looks to expel its tentacled grip from within its pages.

Beginning Wednesday, January 12, the Searchers will begin a discussion on the “1619 Project” which looks not only at the ship to Jamestown which brought slaves to our country but to how we view our history as a nation. As you can imagine, it is a bit controversial, however we will look not only at the events but also how our history has been written and presented. We will cordially and respectfully discuss the material from 7 to 9pm as we seek a way forward as people, a church and a nation. Everyone is invited and the church will have some copies available in early January for purchase or loan. If you want to start reading early, the “1619 Project” book is widely available in local bookstores.



On Sunday, January 2, 11:30am-noon, join us for a racial justice silent vigil. Please bring a sign.

On Monday, January 24, 7-8:30 pm, we will discuss the first six essays from “Black Is the Body: Stories from my Grandmother’s Time, My Mother’s Time, and Mine” by Emily Bernard.

“In these twelve deeply personal, connected essays, Bernard details the experience of growing up black in the south with a family name inherited from a white man, surviving a random stabbing at a New Haven coffee shop, marrying a white man from the North, and bringing him home to her family, adopting two children from Ethiopia, and living and teaching in a primarily white New England college town. Each of these essays sets out to discover a new way of talking about race and of telling the truth as the author has lived it.”

Friday Coffee Clatter:



Everyone is invited to meet at Martone’s in downtown Essex Junction on Friday mornings from 8 to 9. Get some coffee and baked goods with Rev. Mark and other faith friends and talk about absolutely anything! The mask policy is determined by Martone’s. We laugh often while discussing aspects of life and significant current events. It’s a great way to start your day!

Monthly Bridge Group:



Each month, we have two to three tables of folks get together to play some bridge. The skill level is quite diverse with some folks knowing all sorts of strange conventions and others who just like to get together to dabble with the game of bridge as they catch up on what is occurring in our community. Some come to learn and hone their skills. We have snacks and Rev. Mark offers a jar of homemade jam to the winning score. We meet on the 3rd Friday of the month from 1:30 to 4pm and in January that is the 21st. We hope to see you there!

First Congregational Church of Essex Junction
1 Church Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Phone: 802-878-5745
Email: welcome@fccej.org

Donate to our Church

Your donations support 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. Here are a few ways that you may help our ministry:

- ⇒ 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. Please note the reason for your donation in the check's memo line (e.g., "Missions").
- ⇒ Shop using Amazon Smile. We receive 0.5% of your purchases! To start, visit <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/03-0212216>
- ⇒ Send money via PayPal. We accept electronic donations! Visit [paypal.me/fccej](https://www.paypal.me/fccej).
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