



SPIRIT @ FIRST

FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH of Essex Junction

Love. Serve. Grow.

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Your Pastor's Ponderings.....

One of my favorite scenarios to observe these days is when a member or friend comes to church for the first time since the pandemic began. They come in and find old friends and experience the power of not only God's presence but their brothers and sisters of the faith surrounding them. You can tell they had forgotten just how pleasant it can be to be a part of such a community and how uplifting it can be to your spirits to laugh, joke and commune with folks who are all dedicated to spreading God's love. And the icing on the cake is their expression and words upon seeing all the completed work of our most recent Capital Campaign. Some wear masks and others don't, but you can tell how meaningful it is to be back.

It makes me think of some of the parables we have been learning about in worship: lost coin, lost sheep and the prodigal son. When one coin is found, the owner of the house celebrates with great joy. The same is true when one lost sheep is found: the shepherd celebrates with great joy. The highpoint of this trio of parables is when the prodigal comes home after being gone so long. The Loving Father is so happy to see their long lost child, that he offers him a robe, ring, sandals and kills a fatted calf for a celebration. During the pandemic, I have lost touch with so many of our members who I used to see on a regular basis, but when they come back after a long absence, I feel like the loving father welcoming their precious child home. Most weeks have both older members returning, or guests who have checked out our online services, liked what they saw, and came in person.

Let me warn all of you that we have a great month planned for you. Reformation is the last Sunday of the month and there will be no less than **FIVE** significant events occurring on that day from bibles being passed out, to blessing animals, to social service agencies coming to share their message. There are lots of activities in the Faith Formation classes that day as well. But, in the weeks prior to Reformation Sunday, Stewardship will present a skit for the campaign drive, our congregation will vote as a whole whether to support the Vermont State Proposal to finally rid the state's constitution of vestiges of slave language. And we will have guests from both social service agencies, and one that will join us on the day we dedicate a tree in memory of loved ones that prematurely died. It is autumn, and we have many activities going on as we all settle into a new way of doing church in a post pandemic world.

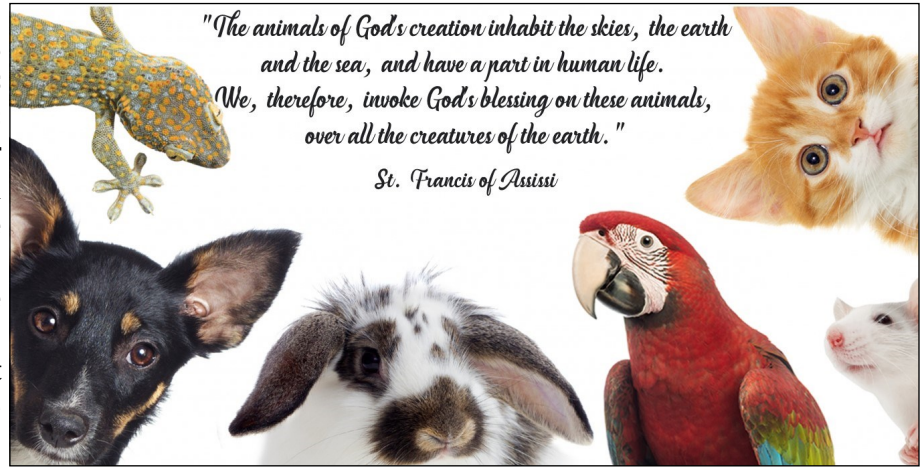
I look forward to welcoming you all home.

Rev. Mark



Simon Sez...

The Catholic church and the Episcopal church, in October, celebrate the feast for St. Francis of Assisi. He died in October 1226. St. Francis of Assisi is well-known for his care for animals. As the story goes, he's in a garden praying to God when he notices birds have gathered around him. He asks them if he can share the Word of God with them. There are other stories that animals would follow him. When he was sitting down, a rabbit might jump on his lap. As part of the feast day, the priest holds a blessing for the animals.



Many Protestant churches are not known for the blessing of animals. As a friend once asked me, "isn't that a Catholic thing? I thought Protestants didn't do that?" The blessing of the animals goes beyond that, and it is nice to share a celebration like this with our Catholic siblings in the faith. We bless animals to ask for God's care for them and to express gratitude. Our blessing is to glorify God, to honor the ways we are intricately connected to nature, and honors the bond we have with them.

Laurie's Lens

It was delightful to see so many of you on Welcome Back Sunday, September 11! I so enjoyed watching the kiddos bounce in the bouncy house and reconnect with many of you; hearing how you are and watching you all chat with each other while enjoying the picnic provided by our CE team. What a special Sunday and we have another one coming up on October 30. Our 3rd graders will receive their very own Bible in worship (parents please reach back to me especially if you have an older child who doesn't have a bible), the kiddos will get to vote on their offering choice and following the service you can have your pet blessed and enjoy the Halloween party after the 2nd service hosted by our Junior Youth. You won't want to miss this fun day.

Fall has arrived, the air is cooler, the nights are cooler, and the leaves are changing colors. A sign of what's to come, yes, but for now I'll enjoy all the beauty of fall that God has given us and celebrate. This fall also brings a great group of faith formation volunteers to help lead our programs and because of that our children are back in their peer rooms. Funds were approved to purchase a walkie talkie/radio system to help us follow our Safe Conduct Guidelines, keep everyone safe as we move from 2nd to 3rd floor and back to the Sanctuary. They are great on fire drill days and helping those on the peer room/administrative side of the building stay in direct contact with those leading worship and our Nursery staff. They are a great addition to our program, as is the new pager system in the Nursery that arrived in July for our staff to distribute to parents. Thank you all for your support to the children and youth that help to keep our programs healthy and current with the times.

Blessed to be in ministry with you,

Laurie Chipman

Christian Education Director

Music Notes

The Sanctuary Choir is looking for more singers. Feel free to stop by our Thursday rehearsals at 7pm in the Sanctuary and try it out, no strings attached. It's a wonderful time to start as we head into the joyful season of Advent and Christmas!

Also, we are planning a multi-movement piece to be featured during Lent.

Great music, great people, great community—come join us!



Faith Formation

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

Faith Formation Peer Groups for 2022-23

There is always room to add more volunteers to this list. Interested? Please reach out to Laurie. Thank you to all who have stepped forward so far.

Nursery (up to 3 years)- *Senior High Youth Staff*

PreK (begin at 3 years) - *Megan Bartlett, Derek Lyman*

Kindergarten, 1st & 2nd Grade – *Sue Conti, Matt Noel*

3rd Grade – *Judy Roy*

4th & 5th Grade – *Justin King, Mel Gibson-King*

6th – 8th Grade – *Pastor Josh Simon, Laurie Chipman*

Helpers – *Jenny Bourn, Sarah Spaulding*

Substitutes – *Aimee Koch, Barb Smith*

Spiritual Friends – *Gail Babinger, Donna Burnett, Mary Anne Warren, Janne Giles*

High school youth are welcome to attend worship, volunteer as helper in Faith Formation gatherings while gaining community service hours and/or interview with Laurie to be on staff in our Nursery: lchipman@fccej.org.

All Faith Formation volunteers for children and youth have been active at FCCEJ for at least 6 months, love spending time learning right along with the kiddos on Sunday mornings, encourage everyone to ask questions, welcome all and have a love for God. These adults are background checked, go through the child protection registry check, a fall orientation and safe conduct training, and receive a weekly email of upcoming information for the Sundays ahead (includes an outline for their time on Sunday and the lesson plan – all simple and easy to follow). The only prep that is asked it to read my email and read the bible story for that Sunday a couple of times before arriving. All items needed for your time together with the kiddos are laid out on Sunday morning, ready to be looked over before the 10:15am service starts.

Faith @ Home Page

<https://www.fccej.org/v5/grow-in-faith/faith-home/>

Have you visited this site lately? It's a great place to go for another copy of Flat Jesus, suggestions on ways to pray, information on Advent and activities to do at home.

2022-23 Faith Formation Offering

In the hallway on the 2nd floor we have posted the offerings from the last 12 years with the logo of the organization, the year and the total amount given. During October, the children and youth can suggest one of these organizations to support during 2022-23. On October 30 (Bible Sunday for 3rd and above, Halloween Party & Blessings of the Animals), we will vote between the organization that got the most suggestions and a new one. Mark your calendars for October 30.

Young Apostles

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

Recreation, mission projects, laughing & talking, and, most important, creating bonds that will steer our children into lasting friendships in their teen years. This is all found in Young Apostles.

Our first gathering will be October 2 from 4-5pm. We had a request from Burlington Health Clinic that serves the homeless for more Homeless Care Kits. Come join the fun! Play a game. Learn more about the HC Kits and how to put one together for your family to hand out. Laurie has handed out the window of her car two HC Kits in the past two weeks as she's driving around town.

YA will meet every couple of months. Parents, please share your feedback on dates/times/ideas by reaching out to Laurie lchipman@fccej.org.

Vacation Bible Camp – Hero Central

Mark your calendars for August 7-11, 2023

Would you like to see VB Camp also offer an afternoon session M-F, giving campers a full day option?

It would be the same morning program with volunteers.

Those who wanted the afternoon option would pay a fee (camp scholarships available), these funds would be used to pay high school youth in the afternoon (with adult volunteer support) to continue a faith-based program.

Youth who are interested in working the afternoon should sign up quickly with Laurie as there will be a limited number of slots.

Please reach out and pass along your input, thoughts, concerns to Laurie lchipman@fccej.org or a member of the CE team. We'd loved to hear from you so we can put plans in place for 2023. Thank you!

Youth Ministry & Young Adults

Junior Youth 6th-8th grades

Lead by Pastor Josh & Laurie

Our first Junior Youth gathering will be Sunday, October 2nd, 11:30am-1:30pm. We'll plan our Halloween Party for Sunday, October 30. We'll eat pizza! If you're planning to attend, please contact Pastor Josh jsimon@fccej.org or Laurie Chipman lchipman@fccej.org

Junior Youth will lead the Halloween Party after the second service on Sunday, October 30. They will decorate during the second service. Everyone is invited to dress up for our Halloween party!

High School Youth 9th-12th grades

Pastor Josh is trying his best to attend as many sporting events as possible. If there's a particular event you want to bring to his attention, email him at jsimon@fccej.org.

Look out for an email from Josh about arranging a time for high school students to go through Mazza's corn maze.

Nursery Staff Opportunities

Be on our Nursery staff and earn \$20 a worship service. Possible new member class and funeral childcare also. We currently have 7 on payroll and there is room for more. Volunteer and gain community service hours while spending time with the children during faith formation time on Sunday mornings. Interested in working afternoons the week of Vacation Bible Camp in August? See Laurie for details and next steps.



20/30 Gathering

Pastor Josh invites folks in their 20s and 30s for a potluck dinner on Friday, November 4th at 6pm at the parsonage (3 Church St.) . We will enjoy an evening of delicious food and good conversation.



FCCEJ Outdoor Ministry Camping Trips

A great time was had at both Lake Carmi in June and Grand Isle Labor Day weekend. We really would love your help in picking the locations and dates for summer 2023. Whether you have gone in the past or would like to go in the future, reach out to Laurie and she will add you to the list of folks who will gather to chat before the end of October. So please don't delay.

OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

PETHERBRIDGE, Bonita	10/01	MOOS, Jonah	10/12
AMBROSAIT, Carolyn	10/02	CURRIER, Bernie	10/13
WATT, Aliyah	10/02	DONLEY, Kevin	10/14
BABINGER, Gail	10/03	CHARLAND, Kelley	10/16
PARKER, Holly	10/03	JACKSON, Michelle	10/19
DOOLEY, Rick	10/04	LEAVITT, Sylvia	10/19
GOEDKEN, Andrea	10/04	FRANK, Nicole	10/20
BURNETT, John	10/05	HEWETT, Anne	10/23
WELLS, Joe	10/06	WERMER, Alison	10/24
BOYD, John	10/07	CHADURJIAN, Mark	10/26
CILLEY, Jed	10/07	ALLEN, Nancy	10/27
FRANK, Meaghan	10/07	WILSON, Russell	10/27
JACOBS, Joyce	10/07	PAUL, Beth	10/29
LEAVITT, Dick	10/07	HOFFMAN, Kim	10/30
HYDE, Paul	10/09	KEITHCART, William	10/30
HAYES, Deanna	10/11	HOUGHTON, Carl	10/31
HIGGINS, Zach	10/11	STARKEY, Gorden	10/31
MITCHELL, Marilyn	10/12		

SPECIAL SUNDAYS IN OCTOBER

We will be returning to the traditional way of observing communion in October by passing out the silver plates and cup holders. The Deacons approved this upon recommendation from the CDC and our own local health care professionals with the main reason being that the coronavirus is not spread through physical contact but via air born spreading. There will be a few of the sealed plates for those who are uncomfortable with the return.

MISSION SUNDAY - October 2

October 2 is Mission Sunday and as such we will be inviting Rev. Debbie Ingram, the Director of Vermont Interfaith Agency to preach with some of her words focusing on the upcoming Proposition 2 [Article 1 on VT. State Voting ballot in November] regarding eliminating any vestiges of language around slavery or indentured servitude. The Missions Committee has also invited several local social service agencies to set up tables in Fellowship Hall displaying their information and any items that they might sell to help benefit their particular organization. It is also Communion Sunday.

WARNING FOR A SPECIAL MEETING - October 16, 2022 - 11:30am

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ESSEX JUNCTION

To the members of the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction,
Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ. A Special Meeting of the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction will be held in the sanctuary of the Church on Sunday, October 16, 2022 at 11:30 a.m. to act upon the following business:

ARTICLE I: To vote on Proposal 2, [First Question, Article 1 in upcoming State of Vermont's Election Ballot] a resolution to Amend the Vermont Constitution to clarify that slavery and indentured servitude in any form are prohibited. *Complete First Church Resolution available in hard copy at church office.*

On behalf of the Church,

Brenda Dawson, Church Clerk

CHAMPLAIN ASSOCIATION FALL MEETING - October 23

FCCEJ is a member of the United Church of Christ which makes us covenantal partners with the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ [VTCUCC] as well as the Champlain Association of Churches of the VTCUCC. The Champlain Association are local churches closest to us where we gather to support and encourage one another. The Champlain Association has sixteen churches and geographically ranges from Burlington to Jeffersonville, from Charlotte to St. Albans and is the body that ordains candidates for ordination. We meet twice a year to conduct business very similar to our Annual Meeting where we elect officers and a budget and hear reports of what our churches and association committees are doing. The Champlain Association's Fall Meeting will be held at the First Congregational Church of Burlington on October 23 at 12:30pm with lunch included [PIZZA]. All delegates and or interested members are welcome to attend.

REFORMATION SUNDAY - October 30

October 30 will be an incredible Sunday with many activities and rituals occurring. Since it is Reformation Sunday, we will be giving new bibles to any 3rd grader [or older if they are new to the church] so that they can read for themselves of Christ's great love for them. We will also be celebrating the way in which members and friends financially support our many ministries through pledges and gifts; so bring your pledge cards to bring up to the altar! But wait, there's more! We will also be blessings your pets after church AND our kids will be having a Halloween Party. If that's not enough, the Faith Formation participants will be voting on what organization to support with their offerings this year.

THIS IS A SUNDAY YOU DO NOT WANT TO MISS!!!!

TAKE NOTE FOR NOVEMBER



The Giving Tree

Once again, the members we have the opportunity to provide gifts to needy children in our community. The Giving Tree will be set up the Sunday before Thanksgiving (November 20) in the narthex with gift tags for about 50 children. Each child receives three tags – two for articles of clothing and one for a toy, book or gift card. More information will be included in the November newsletter.

New Member Class

Sunday, November 6 is the date for our next New Member Class. Join Rev. Mark after second service to learn more about FCCEJ and the UCC. Lunch is provided. Childcare available upon request—please contact the church office.

Missions Committee



The members of your Missions Committee would like to remind you of the special offering for October:

NEIGHBORS IN NEED (NIN) 2022 SPECIAL MISSION OFFERING.

According to the United Church of Christ website, "Neighbors in Need (NIN) is a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry. (CAIM). Two-thirds of this offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. Neighbors in Need grants are awarded to UCC churches and organizations doing

justice work in their communities. These grants fund projects whose work ranges from direct service to community organizing and advocacy to address systemic injustice. This year, special consideration will be given to projects focusing on serving our immigrant neighbors and communities." Please mark your donation as for the Neighbors in Need special offering.

Missions Fair:

On October 2nd this year, come and celebrate all our church has done and is doing to support outreach on local, national and global levels. Debra Ingram from Vermont Interfaith Action will be a special guest speaker that Sunday. There will also be representatives from other organizations with tables set up in Fellowship Hall. There is much to celebrate about the work our church has done for our mission outreach.

Jamaica Mission Trip - Update

by Peter Schmalz

Greetings on behalf of the Jamaica Leadership Team! We have been meeting regularly throughout the pandemic, and as many of you know, we've recently decided to postpone the next FCCEJ Jamaica trip to 2024. This decision was based primarily on the uncertainty of COVID situation in Jamaica in 2023 (the country continues to have low levels of vaccinations, although quarantine restrictions for reentering the U.S. from international travel were recently lifted). Probably related to that reason, we also have not been able to get a clear picture of how many church youth/families are ready to make a commitment at this time. Lastly, the COVID-related postponements this year have significantly condensed the time period in which to plan any trip, let alone a trip of unknown certainty.

Although we do not plan to hold a Calcutta in 2023, we are excited to announce that the Calcutta Committee has begun planning an alternative event in early 2023. Rather than holding a large Jamaica-specific fundraiser, our goal would be a smaller fundraiser to support FCCEJ mission activities more broadly, as well as to build awareness and enthusiasm for our Jamaica mission efforts (while providing the congregation with a chance to have fun together). In this way, we hope to grow enthusiasm towards recruiting a Jamaica team in Spring 2023.

As a participant on the 2019 trip, I think often of the friendships formed with our Jamaica partners, in that poor yet joyful corner of the island. I reflect on the impact it had on me – my first in-depth exposure to a developing nation. I marvel at the growth I saw in my son, Zach (who was 16 at the time), and the seven other teenagers in our group. I can think of no better way for them to see beyond their comfortable Vermont environs, to challenge themselves to work together on a grueling project, and to introduce them to our church's wider mission. The Jamaica Leadership Team looks forward to keeping the spirit of FCCEJ's Jamaica mission alive, despite pandemic setbacks. It gives me great joy knowing that future youth and adults will get to experience this mission trip, hopefully in the not-too-distant future!

Heavenly Food Pantry

The next food distribution is Monday, October 10 at 5:30pm.

We are in need of the following food items:

Baked beans, Canned pasta, Chunky soups, Canned green beans, and small bags of dry cat food.

The pantry continues to need help to fulfil the delivery part of its mission. If you have an hour or so available on a food pantry day and the means to deliver 8-10 bags of food, then the pantry could use your help. Please call the church office at 802-878-5745 or send an email to welcome@fccej.org. We appreciate all the support as we continue the pantry's mission of seeing that no one goes hungry! www.fccej.org/Serving-Others/Heavenly-Food-Pantry.



Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop October News!

The Thrift Shop continued to thrive this summer, thanks to our customers and the volunteers who sort, arrange displays, hang inventory, work the cash register, clean the shop, schedule volunteers, oversee finances, and take care of the PR.

We volunteers are grateful that the Thrift Shop continues to be a successful Outreach program here at FCCEJ! The shop is now stocked with fall and winter items. As you prepare for the change of weather, we welcome your donations on the days we are open: Tuesdays and Saturdays from 10-1 and Wednesdays from 4-7. We hope you will visit us this fall and if you are interested in helping us out, please contact either Elaine Raymond, Sue Wood, or the church office.



Racial Justice Group

The Racial Justice Group meets every 4th Thursday of the month at 7pm. This month, we are reading "*Shoutin' in the Fire*" by Danté Stewart. Please read the chapters, "The Fire," "Wages," and "Terror" for our discussion. Want to join us via Zoom? Email Pastor Josh, jsimon@fccej.org

**Faith is like radar that
sees through the fog.**

Corrie ten Boom

Donate to FCCEJ

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.
(A PayPal account is not required to donate money.)

~ FIVE CORNERS CHRISTMAS CRAFT FEST ~

Saturday, November 12th 9am -3pm

Mark your calendar for this fantastic event! There are fun and fabulous opportunities for everyone at the Craft Fest! Please pick any of the following:



Sweet Shoppe

We need volunteers to make a wide variety of items, so get those creative juices flowing! Suggested items include various breads, sweet rolls, cookies, donuts or donut holes, homemade candy/brittle/fudge, any type of bars, popcorn balls, trail mixes. Remember that gluten-free options are always appreciated! We are asking to limit chocolate chip cookies and chocolate fudge due to an overabundance in the past. If

anyone is doing some canning, a jar or two of pickles, relish, jams & jellies or other items would be welcomed. All contributions must be individually wrapped so that no food is directly handled. For more information or to sign up, please email Mary Gratton at mgrat14@comcast.net.

Luncheon

Calling all cooks! The luncheon team would appreciate assistance with the following: Butternut squash soup, chili (meat and vegetarian) and mac & cheese. The following items are also needed: hot dog rolls, cans of soda, bottled water, bottled lemonade, napkins, plastic utensils, condiment packets.



Silent Auction

Consider a donation of one of these popular items:

Themed basket, original artwork, quilts or quilted table runner, gift certificates, sporting events tickets, hosted dinners, homemade knitted items and services such as lawn mowing.

Accessory Room

Time to organize your jewelry boxes and see if there are any pieces you no longer wear. Donations can include pins, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. In addition, we are having a kids table so items include barrettes and headbands. The room also includes donations of scarfs and pocketbooks.



Crafters

We currently have one table left! If interested please contact Ann Gray at grayann8@aol.com.

Jen Ellis, also known as Bernie's Mitten Maker, will be returning this year selling mittens with her partners at the Vermont Mitten Company and Vermont Teddy Bear. She will also be taking pre-orders for her new memoir, *Bernie's Mitten Maker*, which comes out in May, 2023.

Nearly New

We are looking for clean, nearly new items such as household items, toys and puzzles, books, sports equipment, seasonal items and working small appliances. Please DO NOT donate furniture, exercise equipment, electronics or over-sized items. We will be accepting donations from Sunday, October 30 through Friday, November 11. They can be brought directly to the gym. We are also looking for paper bags to use at the sale.

Please note sign-up sheets will be available in Fellowship Hall starting Sunday October 23. Committee members will be available to answer questions. For further information, please contact Linda Bogardus at lbogardus@myfairpoint.net.

Thank you from the Craft Fest Committee!

Wendy Wark, Mary Gratton, Gail Cromie, Elaine Raymond, Maureen McKenzie, Sue Conti



FREE Little Art Gallery & Library

Are you crafty? Do you like to make little faith inspired items to give away? Our little faith-based gallery could use some new items. Stop by the library outside the Church Street entrance over by the picnic table and open up the doors. Take a book home with you while you are there.

Guest Bakers & Hosts Wanted!



FCCEJ is FULL of amazing bakers and friendly people and we would love to spotlight any of that amazing energy on a Sunday for Fellowship Time. Have you wanted to volunteer but don't have a lot of extra time? Do you have a wonderful recipe that you would like to try out with a crowd? Would you like to help out hosting with us or be a sub for a Sunday? We would love the help! Email, call or text Jen Dooley dooleyjrj2000@comcast.net 802-578-0230 for more information or to sign up!

Lunchtime Book Group

The Lunchtime Book Group will meet on Monday, October 17, at 11:30 in the Marvin Lounge. This month we are reading Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine by Gail Honeyman. Eleanor Oliphant is a woman scarred by abuse and profound loneliness. The story tells of her journey as she summons the courage to begin letting others in for the first time, reaching for the life she doesn't believe she deserves. Reviewers describe it as deeply moving, gripping, hilarious and intriguing. Marty Hopkins will lead our discussion. We hope you can bring your lunch and join us!

Yoga @ First

New to yoga? Returning? Come sit with Jonah Moos and practice a compassionate, inquisitive sequence to integrate the mind, body, and soul. In each session, we will focus, breathe, build heat, strengthen, and relax. Tuesday evenings, from 5:00-6:15 in the 2nd Floor Program Room. Wear comfortable, non restrictive clothing. Bring a mat or borrow one. Donations (to FCCEJ) welcome, but not required.

Fall Prevention - Tai Chi

Join your faith family for Tai Chi class on Tuesday mornings at 10:15 in the Fellowship Hall. This is a beginning class of slow, controlled motions that aid in strength and balance. There is no charge for the class but donations to FCCEJ are appreciated. The first class is scheduled for October 11. Contact Betty Adams for more information: adamsvt123@gmail.com
Sponsored by Age Well.

THE SEARCHERS

The Wednesday Night Searchers continue their exploration of the movement of God's presence in the world and our response to that presence by reading, *"Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation"* by Kristen Kobes Du Mez.

The book looks at Christian Nationalism and how it has not only affected the church but our politics as well and this book will surely lead to some stimulating conversations! We meet every Wednesday night from 7-9pm in the Marvin Lounge and via Zoom ID # 853 5516 9054. Everyone is invited.

SERMON TALKBACK

Do you ever get home and discuss Rev. Mark or Rev. Josh's sermon and wonder how they reached the conclusion they did, or totally disagree with how they interpreted a particular text, or have some fascinating sentiments to add that you have read from another source, or maybe have an unanswered question? Well, Sermon Talkback is the group for you!

We meet every Tuesday morning from 8:30 - 10am in Marvin Lounge. Coffee is provided and sometimes we even have some tasty treats. You can also join us via Zoom, ID# 740 803 865. All are welcome.

BRIDGE GROUP

Do you love to play bridge or want to better your game or simply like to play and talk and eat some goodies. Well, on the third Friday or every month, our church hosts a bridge club for anyone wanting to play. The range of skill is pretty wide but everyone is good natured and simply enjoys coming together to have some fun. And the winner of the day wins a selection of a home made jam by Rev. Mark! We meet in the Marvin Lounge on the 3rd Friday of each month from 1:30 - 4:00pm and everyone is welcome whether member of our church or not.

Deacon's Corner

After a delightful Summer of Josh's musical series, Bethany playing, and picking hymns, it was great seeing everyone for Welcome Back Sunday! There was a wonderful mix of new people, the "regulars", and people who hadn't been in church for years. Things almost seemed back to pre-COVID times as we heard the laughter of children at the bounce house and people had the chance to socialize and catch up. Individuals and families visiting for the first time were able to experience the church at its best.

We realize folks are looking to connection after a few challenging years, and we plan to encourage these new and old relationships over the next year as our program theme is – Making Connections, Nurturing Hope.

As another sign of getting back to "normal", we have moved back to passing elements in conjunction with CDC guidelines, but will still have sealed plates and juice cups for those who are more comfortable partaking communion in that fashion.

Amy McIntyre, Deacon

Capital Campaign Update

We're almost done! Thank you all for your generous support of the Our Home, Our Future, Our Time Capital Campaign. Together, we raised more than \$1 million (\$1,014,261.14 to be exact!) to restore our beautiful home, take care of several long-overdue maintenance needs and make our facilities more welcoming, safe and accessible for the future.

Planning is underway for our final Campaign project...a new floor for Fellowship Hall!

As you might expect with an old building, the project is more complicated than we imagined. As we began planning the project, we noticed that the floor was not level and we were concerned that this might be a sign of an underlying structural problem. Before investing in a new floor, the Trustees hired the structural engineering firm of DuBois & King to assess the floor.

Unfortunately, DuBois & King discovered that our live load capacity is currently 14 psf, which is well below current building codes that require a uniform design load of 100 psf for assembly occupancies. It should be noted that these weight limits are supposed to include people, equipment, stored materials and appliances. Even without having any people in Fellowship Hall, our chair/table storage, plus our Food Pantry freezers and storage cabinets, put considerable load on the floor. To increase the load capacity of the floor, we will need to add several new beam lines as well as additional supports along existing beam lines.

While DuBois & King did not observe any notable displacement or deformations during their evaluation, the Trustees recognize that this is something that needs to be addressed as quickly as possible. DuBois & King has developed detailed construction plans and is overseeing a competitive bidding process to help us find a qualified contractor. We know the project will be tricky and costly because the crawl space below Fellowship Hall is about 4 ft. high, making it difficult to access. This is where new footings will need to be poured and new beams added. Bids are due back in mid-October.

This critical infrastructure project is vital to the continued operation of our church, including the Food Pantry. It is key to our ability to host all-church gatherings, welcome community groups into our space, and to continue being a community center for Essex. We will make every effort to minimize disruptions to our operations during construction, and we will know more about what that will look like once we get the detailed quotes back from contractors.

This structural work is our top priority. The preliminary estimated project budget is \$70,000, which includes money for a new durable vinyl floor that can withstand the heavy wear and tear of the all the tables, chairs, foot traffic and food pantry carts. We have \$36,000 remaining from the Capital Campaign. We have applied for a grant to help with the remaining expenses and will hear back in mid-October. If grant funds are not approved, we may need to wait to re-surface the floor. And, if the structural work ends up being significantly more expensive than projected, we may need to explore other financing options.

Kaki McGeary & Dave Johnson, Capital Campaign Co-Chairs

News from Trustees

In addition to working on the Fellowship Hall project for the Capital Campaign, the Trustees continue to look after the rest of our building and grounds to keep things running smoothly, do necessary repairs and to save money wherever we can. It is impossible to calculate the money we have saved by having a dedicated, hands-on group of volunteers who take care of weekly boiler maintenance, minor plumbing and carpentry repairs, painting, groundskeeping projects and more. It seems like every time we think we have caught up, something else needs attention. Even as I write this, we have identified a few critical boiler repairs that will happen this fall. Thanks to all of the Trustees for their hard work: John Burnett, Dennis Conti, Ed Guild, Frank Smith and Art Winslow!

We also have a few bigger projects to tell you about:

Sanctuary Audio Visual Upgrades

After many months (years!) of planning, discussion, consulting with professionals, re-imagining and waiting for quotes, we are nearing the finish line! Council has approved our request to use up to \$15,500 from the Memorial Fund to enhance our A/V equipment. Upgrades include two new PTZ cameras to be installed in the balcony (mounted on tripods to start), a portable joystick controller to make camera operation easier, and improved microphones. This long-awaited investment will enhance the livestream experience in terms of picture and sound, and special services like the Christmas Pageant will be easier to see and hear from home. Electricians will install new wiring in order to hide cables and provide a finished look. The price tag for this project is significantly lower than some of the early estimates we received (\$30K-\$70K), and we expect our final cost to come in a bit lower than what Council approved. Many thanks to Josh Simon and Ed Guild for spearheading this project. We are very grateful for the generous contributions to the Memorial Fund which have made this project possible.

New Fiberoptic Internet Service & Cyber Security – coming in November

Council approved our recommendation to switch internet providers from Comcast to Burlington Telecom. This change will give us a dedicated fiberoptic service with much faster upload and download speeds than we are able to get with Comcast. This should improve our streaming capability and reduce, if not eliminate, the interruptions we sometimes experience on Sunday mornings during worship. The great news is that our monthly internet costs will decrease, and Burlington Telecom is not charging us anything for the installation or the cost of bringing fiber to our building. Our phone service will remain under contract with Consolidated Communications for another year. With the switch to Burlington Telecom, we are also investing in a new firewall that will better protect the church against the threat of cyber attacks. Thank you to Art Winslow for leading the effort to research providers and equipment, and to Linus Goedken for lending his expertise. Once again, generous donations to the Memorial Fund will cover the cost of the new firewall.

Daycare Fence

It has come to our attention that the fence surrounding our daycare play area is in severe disrepair. The fence is 40+ years old and needs to be replaced. A safe and secure fence is required for the licensing of the daycare operation. Although this was not a budgeted project, it is a safety issue and must be addressed without delay. We plan to save money by installing the fence with the help of volunteers, and receiving a contribution from Creative Discoveries (daycare tenant) to help cover of the cost. Special thanks to Art Winslow for researching options and pricing. If you have experience with fence installation or are interested in being part of a work team, please let us know!

Kaki McGeary, Trustees Chair

First Congregational Church of Essex Junction

1 Church Street

Essex Junction, VT 05452

Phone: 802-878-5745

Email: welcome@fccej.org

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

Sunday Morning Worship:

8:30 - In-person and streamed via youtube.com/c/fcej
Music: Bethany Blake directs our Sanctuary Choir and provides accompaniment

10:15 - In-person—Faith Formation for PreK - 5th grade
Music: Finally @ First Praise Band
Communion is served on the 1st Sunday of each month

Visit us online:



FCCEJ.ORG



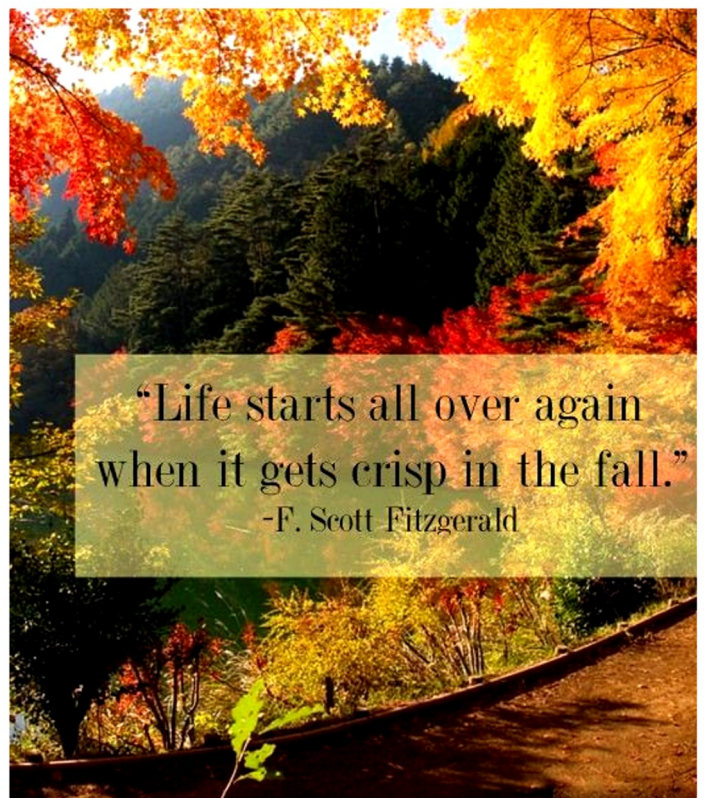
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“Life starts all over again
when it gets crisp in the fall.”
—F. Scott Fitzgerald