



**SPIRIT @ FIRST**  
*monthly newsletter*  
**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH** *of Essex Junction*  
*Love. Serve. Grow.*

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**Your Pastor's Ponderings.....**

We are in the heart of celebrating Christ's empty tomb with familiar stories of Jesus walking, talking, breaking bread, eating, forgiving, and teaching his disciples and the wider community. Christ's resurrection promises new life and hope, much needed outlooks in today's culture. While we claim these great gifts of the faith, our neighbors remember Passover and cherish breaking Ramadan's fast or simply relish the chocolate bunnies, Easter egg hunts, mountaintop hikes or festive meals where families and friends gather to lift life up as a gift. Whether mirroring the excitement of the resurrection, or claiming their own path toward optimism, it is a joy to see most everyone emerge from their winter doldrums by embodying the highest of human ideals. Many of us see the guiding hand of God in drawing everyone together in such a public and positive way. Our Easter was filled with supernal music, delicious food, spirit filled worship and enough people to feel like the old pre-pandemic days of abundance.

What is usually a low turn-out week turned into quite a celebration as we lifted up the tremendous success of *Our Home, Our Future, Our Time* Capital Campaign. Our church raised \$1.15 million dollars to upgrade every corner of our building from the sanctuary to the parking lot, from the administrative wing to the kitchen, from every window and floor to the bathrooms, from the elevator to our entrances. We praised the leadership of Kaki McGeary and Dave Johnson along with the Capital Campaign Committee and the Trustees who shepherded all the projects, money and details of the many projects voted upon by the congregation. Then we ate cake!!! All the generous gifts and the accompanying work highlighted the hope of the future that the theological truth of the resurrection purported to plant within the faithful.

After such pinnacles of experience, I was ready to rest a bit and catch up on my visiting and administrative paperwork. Alas, Christ's resurrection spirit never ends, but instead continues to invite our community into a brighter future. The energy and creativity of spirit seems invigorated in this place, even after the Easter celebration, even after the close of the capital campaign!

- The Jamaican Service Trip Team is planning to alternate between domestic and international service trips starting next summer with a Blackfeet Native American service trip to Montana where adults, families and older youth will be invited.
- Our Bridge Club had three tables this past month and are expanding their card playing to meet on the first and third Friday of every month from 1:30 – 4pm.
- We have been invited to participate in the first City of Essex Junction Pride Event on June 3rd at the Maple Street Park by providing a kid family gaming station.
- For the first time in many years, we have our Planned Giving Committee partnering with a local lawyer in offering an educational workshop on wills, trusts and other instruments to ensure our financial wellbeing.

*Continued on next page...*

- AND the Social Justice subcommittee of Missions is planning to present quarterly speakers on Sunday afternoons on issues of race in our culture with the first one on June 18th to correspond with the Juneteenth celebration the next day.
- AND for the first time since the pandemic, our Scout Troop held their overnight on the church lawn and will participate in Scout Sunday the weekend of June 10th. And the Trustees and Church Council have worked hard to get the parsonage ready to rent and decided to use the turnover to live into our vision of a inclusive community by partnering with the local Immigration Office in settling a large family from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- And on top of all this, Church Council is leading the process to analyze and determine how best to use our previous daycare space in light of the many missions of our church.

There is no rest for the weary! Each of these **new** initiatives reflects Christ’s resurrected implication that there is new life and hope for the future. After Christ left the tomb, that is when the spread of the gospel occurred. After our celebration of Easter all of these new ideas and programs came to fruition.

Let us not be discouraged, but rather let us lead the way into a brighter future. Let us not rest on our laurels, but look for new opportunities to live into Jesus’ vision of a peaceable kingdom. Let us not be content, but claim the gift of Christian restlessness to spread the word about our church and the good it does in our community and world.

Looking forward to what bubbles up.....

As always, I am yours in Christ,

Rev Mark

### **New Members Class - Sunday, May 21**

Have you felt welcomed at FCCEJ? Have you sensed the warm of God’s spirit present in our worship services? Do you appreciate the progressive nature of our views and want to explore the faith in challenging new ways? Do you want your children and grandchildren to learn values that align with your own and not on ancient doctrines of the church? Have you been attended FCCEJ for years but figure it might be time to join? Do you want to be a part of a faith community that is engaged with the wider society and works hard to make our community a good place to live?

Well, you are in luck because on May 21st after the second service, we are offering a New Member’s Class where you can learn about our church and the United Church of Christ [our denomination] so that you can make an informed choice. We hope and pray that after you learn all about us, you will want to join us in learning about God and spreading Christ’s love around a bit.

## **Volunteer Opportunities**

### **Spring Garden Work Day**

**Saturday. May 6th—8:30-noon**

Spring is in the air! Please join the Trustees for a work day to spruce up our garden beds and spread some mulch... many hands make light work! Come for the whole time or just stop by for an hour or two... any help is greatly appreciated. Many thanks!

### **Audio/Visual Support**

We are looking to expand our audio/visual team for Sunday morning worship. This involves running the streaming video for the 8:30 service and controlling the cameras. We will provide all the training needed. Please contact the church office—[welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org) if you are interested or would like more information.

Age Well is seeking volunteers to provide regular social interaction and assistance to seniors in their homes. Help older Vermonters by delivering Meals on Wheels, providing friendly visits, shopping, errands, assistance with appointments, organizing, bill paying, respite, minor home repairs, veterans visiting veterans and more. Time is based on your availability--it can vary from one day a week to two days a month (M-F between 8am-4pm).

Contact our Volunteer Department at 662-5249 or [volunteer@agewellvt.org](mailto:volunteer@agewellvt.org) for information.

## Laurie's Lens

Our program year will soon be winding down and there is much to celebrate! When we gather on June 4th for our 9am worship service we will be thanking our volunteers and celebrating the Faith Formation offering to Church World Service. I hope you have marked your calendars and can join us on this celebration Sunday.

May brings time to get out in our gardens, enjoy the flowers and get my hands into the earth, connecting with God and creation. However, it's also the time for me to reconnect with my friends across New England who work with children, youth and families in their churches, as well as making new connections with others during my annual continuing education retreat, N.E.A.U.C.E. (New England Association of United Church Educators). I am so thrilled to be finally back in person this year at Pilgrim Pines Camp in Swanzey, New Hampshire! I give thanks for this retreat and all the effort the planning team gives to put it together. Having been on the team myself in previous years helps me to appreciate it all the more. I continue to connect with others here in Vermont each month during our Community of Practice Circle (V.A.U.C.E.) sharing about our programs, resources, struggles, joys and supporting each other in our ministries as we hold confidentiality. Currently we are still gathering on Zoom due to how spread out we are here in Vermont. Gathering in a larger setting at N.E.A.U.C.E. for worship, keynote speakers, workshops, brainstorming, and fellowship truly feeds my soul, especially in this outdoor ministry setting with opportunities for walks and lakeside views. This year I will be attending as a Faith Innovator, having been asked to present our Nursery Youth Staffing program in a workshop setting. I reached out to my counterpart at Middlebury UCC, Eliana, and asked if she'd present with me since I got the idea for the program from her predecessor who started it a few years back. She graciously accepted. Another thing that makes this retreat a special one.

May also means it's time to start recruitment for our 2023-24 program year. If you love kids, want to know more about the bible and grow along side them, then please reach out and volunteer to help on Sunday morning as a leader or helper in a peer group or as a spiritual friend on communion Sundays. Faith is not taught, faith is caught. Helping others catch the faith also gives you the opportunity to catch more faith yourself. Our own faith life is enriched exponentially when we help others, learn and grow along side them, and be a witness for Jesus. Volunteer as often as your schedule allows; maybe once a month or maybe every Sunday. You decide. Volunteers are partnered together so that we have two at each of our gatherings which fulfills our Safe Conduct Guidelines. Training will take place in the fall and you'll receive a weekly email keeping you connected to others and supported on your journey. This is a reminder for our current volunteers to share their plans on volunteering for next year as well. High school youth are welcome to join the volunteer team and gather community service hours. Something great to add to resumes and college applications! Please reach out to me with any questions. I'm happy to help you figure out what area is the best fit for you.

Many thanks for your continued support for me and the programs here at FCCEJ. It means a lot.

Blessings,

Laurie Chipman

Christian Education Director

### 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 the current season, and activities to do at home.

# Faith Formation

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

## Faith Formation Peer Groups

*All ages are encouraged to ask questions, as we learn together about Jesus and the love our God has for everyone.*

*On All Family Worship days children/youth participate in the full worship service with their families.*

### May Schedule

**May 7th** ~ Communion & Spiritual Friend Sunday (program for PreK-2nd grade)

**May 14th & 21st** ~ Peer Groups

**May 28th** ~ All Family Worship Day

**June 4th** ~ Celebrate Our Program Year & Volunteer Recognition/All Family Worship ~  
Ice Cream Social following worship outside on the lawn (weather permitting)

## 2022-23 Faith Formation Offering

**Current Total \$440 (4/24/23)**

**Church World Service** - *Building a world where there is enough for all.* ~ <https://cwsglobal.org/>

Offering will be sent to CWS in June and go towards purchasing blankets (\$10 each). Continue to bring your offering with you on Sunday morning (or mail it in). Remember to pick up an offering envelope out in the Narthex basket (with a bible picture scene) so that it is counted for Faith Formation and not the general plate offering for the church.

We put together 4 Welcome Backpacks and sent them on their way to CWS Warehouse in April.

### Young Apostles - May 7th from 4-5pm ~ bring your whole family!

*3rd - 5th graders come with a parent/guardian/grandparent*

Our spring gathering will be a fun time with our guest Janne Giles, retired school teacher, who is bringing her very large Vermont floor map with her. Mark your calendars and come join the fun!



## Vacation Bible Camp 2023 - Hero Hotline - Called Together to Serve God!

**August 7-11, 2023**

*'So let's strive for the things that bring peace and the things that build each other up.'* Romans 14:19

Outside on the church lawn or inside on a rainy day.

<https://www.fccej.org/v5/grow-in-faith/vacation-bible-camp/vb-camp-registration/>

### Morning Session: Drop off between 8:45-9am

**You & Me Toddler** (attend with an adult) up thru current 5th graders

**Youth Assistants** - current 6th—12th graders

Closing segment of the morning session starts at 11:30. Parents are encouraged to arrive by 11:45, or before, to hear the topics of the morning and pick up their children who are not registered for the afternoon session.

### Afternoon Session: Immediately after morning session till 4pm

Parents - here is your full day option - cost is \$50 per afternoon or \$250 for the full week. Scholarships are available so don't let the cost stop you from registering! Campers have lunch, watch a movie, do a VB Camp hands on mission/art project and play games.

### VB Camp Team is Coming Together!

*Decoration Leader - Allison VanSteensburg*

*Science Leader - Eric Lindholm*

*Snacks - Lauren Starkey*

*Tech Crew - Doug Olefsen*

Feel free to reach out to them or Laurie if you would like to help at their station. All volunteers arrive by 8:30 (or before) for morning team meeting and depart shortly after noon. Not sure where or how to get involved? Contact Laurie. There's a place for everyone at VB Camp!

We are still recruiting for the following stations: *Crafts, Recreation, Music, Photographer(s),*

*Youth Assistants* - those currently in 6th grade and older (*be a group leader or help at a station*)

Other Volunteer Opportunities: *assemble backdrops, name tags, divide up crafts, set up canopies (week before camp)*

**~High School Youth & College Students are encouraged to apply to work the afternoon program. We need 4-6 workers to start to build this program. \$425/week. First ones to sign up get the first slots.~**

## Calling ALL Youth

A Time to Unplug - Share – Ask Questions - Build Community -- Reconnect with God

All are Accepted & Welcome

### **JUNIOR YOUTH ~ SUNDAYS FROM 11:30-1:30PM**

**May 7th** - Make crayons for Kings Street Youth Center

**May 21st** ~ inviting this year's 5th graders to JY time - Pizza & Ice Cream party! Please RSVP to Laurie

### **HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH ~ WEDNESDAYS FROM 1:45PM TO 3:15PM @ FCCEJ**

**May 3rd & 17th** ~ RSVP to Laurie so there will be enough snacks for all. Come unwind in the Youth Room or outside.

### **Summer Local Mission Youth Day in July**

Looking for youth who are interested in participating in local mission outreach day(s). If this is something you'd like, please reach out to Laurie. There are several options in the area that we could choose; from making a meal, gardening, building, food shelf, etc.

### **Join the Nursery Staff**

Interested in joining the Nursery staff? Applications are on the Youth Board outside the staff offices. Turn them in to Laurie and set up an interview and be oriented to the Nursery. Staff earn \$20 per worship service and are on the contact list to work childcare for new member class, etc. You can also request a job application by emailing Laurie at lchipman@fccej.org. Those who will be freshmen in the fall can apply in June and start working over the summer.

### **VB Camp Community Service & Income Opportunity - Current 8th Graders through College Students**

*August 7-11th*

~ Volunteer the mornings of camp week from 8:30 to 12noon for community service hours.

~ Work the afternoon until 4:30pm (\$425 for the week). Applications are now posted on the bulletin board in the hall or reach out to Laurie. **Sign up ASAP.** The number of workers needed will be determined by the number of campers that register. Two youth/college are needed for every 4 campers. Reach out to Laurie with questions.

### **Youth Parent Gatherings - May Date TBD—please contact Laurie with suggestions**

Calling all parents of youth in grades 6th-12th. Come join Laurie for a time of fellowship, conversation and experiencing some of what youth gatherings look like as you grow in your faith. Gather with other parents and renew old friendships and make new ones. Dessert provided.

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## FCCEJ Outdoor Ministry

The 2023 camping weekends with FCCEJ families are set! Several sites have been booked and paid for by our FCCEJ Outdoor Ministry Fund; many thanks to those of you who have given on the special offering in the past. Check your calendars and reach out to Laurie to hold a site for your family. Currently signed up for camp sites are the following families: Chipman, Lyman, Mendes, Moos, Stein, Wermer.

- Friday, June 23 to Sunday morning, Jun 25 at Button Bay State Park on Lake Champlain  
<https://www.vtstateparks.com/buttonbay.html> (6 tent/RV sites and 3 lean-tos)
- Friday, August 25 to Sunday morning, August 27 at Branbury State Park on Lake Dunmore  
<https://www.vtstateparks.com/branbury.html> (5 tent/RV sites, 1 tent only)

### **Outdoor Ministry Camps**

**FCCEJ Camp Scholarships await you!** For children, youth, adults, or families. Connect with Laurie or Pastor Mark if you are interested in one of our UCC summer camps - Horton Center (NH), Silver Lake Conference Center (CT) or Pilgrim Lodge (ME). Funds are available to help you and your family attend one or these and/or our FCCEJ camping in Vermont.

Attending a week at an UCC camp is a powerful way to connect with God, get to know others while enriching your own faith. If you like VB Camp then you are *really* going to enjoy your overnight time at camp. This life changing experience is one you will never forget and when your week is over you won't want to come home. You'll want to sign up every summer for a week at a UCC camp!

Visit the Horton website for pictures of the great views on top of Pine Mountain: [www.hortoncenter.org](http://www.hortoncenter.org)

Multiple camps are available each week for 3rd – 12th graders, along with these specials:

**Opening Work Days** – May 19-21

**Open House Day** ~ Saturday, June 17—11am-4pm

**Grandparent / Children Camp** ~ July 30-August 1

**Peace, Faith & Rejuvenation** (*women only*) ~ August 3-6

**Family & Friends Weekend** ~ Sept. 1-4

**Fall Work Days** ~ Oct. 6-8

## Missions Committee

### **CALLED TO CARE BASKETS**

The Missions Committee extends their sincere thanks to all the people who donated items for the Easter baskets, those who helped put the baskets together, and the many people who were delivery drivers. A special thank you to Cathy LaPierre who organized this activity. Approximately 60 lovely baskets were delivered, sending a message of our love, remembrance, and care during the Easter season.

### **CONCERT SERIES**

On March 26th, 103 people attended Community Concerts @ First featuring UVM music professor and pianist, David Feurzeig. David has embarked on a project to play a free concert in every Vermont town to raise awareness about climate change. Afterwards, concert goers enjoyed a variety of delicious soups in our newly painted fellowship hall, made by Mission Committee members. The tables were beautifully set complete with flowers donated by Paula Sargent. A big thank you to all of the Music and Missions committee members who made this event a huge success. Our community raised \$1300.00 which is the most a concert by David has raised! The proceeds will be donated to 350VT.org which is building a people - powered and people -led climate justice movement in Vermont for a just, thriving world.

### **UKRAINIAN BREAD FUND RAISER**

Thank you to all who purchased this delicious bread. \$1065 was raised and sent to the United Church of Christ (UCC) Ukraine relief. The UCC supports the Ukrainian people in many ways, including food, shelter, medical care etc. You can learn more about the variety of ways the UCC is supporting the people of Ukraine at [www.ucc.org/global-h-o-p-e/ukraine-emergency-appeal/](http://www.ucc.org/global-h-o-p-e/ukraine-emergency-appeal/)

### **COTS WALK - SUNDAY, MAY 7, 2023**

Remember that the COTS Walk is May 7 and there is a team from FCCEJ participating! The purpose of the COTS Walk is to raise awareness of homelessness in our community and to raise money for the shelters and services that COTS provides. If you would like to contribute to our team, please go to [www.cotsonline.org](http://www.cotsonline.org). The team will be listed as First Congregational Church of Essex Junction and Gail Cromie is listed as the captain. There are other volunteer opportunities listed on the web site as well. Let's cheer on our team and support their efforts!

**Vermont Interfaith Action**  
*Transforming People and Communities*



As many of you may know, Pastor Josh served as President of VIA during his final year at FCCEJ. Following his departure, the Missions Committee is stepping up its support of VIA and its mission

(*"to create solutions to systemic issues that prevent our most vulnerable citizens from enjoying the quality of life God intends for us all."* [www.viavt.org](http://www.viavt.org)). We will be inviting the wider FCCEJ community to consider getting involved with one or more of the VIA's five areas of action:

- 1) Racism in Policing
- 2) Economic Injustice
- 3) Affordable Housing
- 4) Prison Reform
- 5) Immigration Reform

Working groups in each of these areas meet monthly (in person and/or on Zoom), and include people from congregations around Vermont, of varying faith backgrounds. Please reach out to Peter Schmalz if you are interested in learning more – these are great opportunities to practice our faith, while getting to know people from other faiths around Vermont.

## Social Justice Group

Are you passionate about social justice? Concerned about racial equity, LGBTQ rights, affordable housing, homelessness, the environment? Curious about any of these issues or others? Wondering how to live out Christ's example to love others? We'd love to hear your voice!

For several years, small groups have been meeting at FCCEJ to discuss racial justice and our Open and Affirming mission. We are looking to join together as one Social Justice group, which will function under the umbrella of the Missions Committee. Our vision is that we will meet as a larger group, and then break out into smaller areas of focus based on participants' interests. Our goals will include both education/learning and action to make a difference in our community.

For example, the Racial Justice Group is planning to invite speakers to FCCEJ and hold a racial justice vigil on Sunday, June 18th, in celebration and recognition of Juneteenth. We'll also be partnering with Vermont Interfaith Action (VIA) on May 10th, to recognize 104 Vermont municipalities who have signed onto a Declaration of Inclusion, welcoming all to their communities. (For information on this event, visit: [www.viavt.org](http://www.viavt.org)).

Our first Social Justice Group meeting will be Sunday May 7th, at 11:30 (following second service) in the Marvin Lounge. We'll do some brainstorming and planning for upcoming months. Please join us!

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## Intergenerational Service Trips

The Jamaica Leadership team is excited to announce that, after a COVID hiatus, we are expanding and re-envisioning our FCCEJ intergenerational service trips! Our hope is to have a service trip every year beginning in 2024, alternating each year between a national and international project. For 2024, we have chosen a service trip within the United States, working with an organization called Global Volunteers. GV coordinates and provides service opportunities all over the US and internationally. In the summer of 2025, our goal is to do an international trip, hopefully returning to work with our partners in Jamaica.

An informational meeting for the 2024 trip is scheduled on Wednesday May 10th at 7pm for those who are interested or curious. Here is some tentative information:

- June 22-29, 2024
- Blackfeet Reservation, Montana
- Ages 12+ (youth 12-15 must be accompanied by an adult)
- Estimated Cost Per Person: \$800 includes all food, lodging and air/ground transportation
- Deposit: \$350 (non-refundable) – due date To Be Announced
- Trip Description – for full details visit [www.globalvolunteers.org/usa-montana/](http://www.globalvolunteers.org/usa-montana/).

*We will travel to the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana for a week of cultural immersion and service. Participants might help renovate a classroom or repair a fence, paint an elder's home, help with a summer day-camp program for children, volunteer at the elder care center or help at the food shelf or thrift store.*

*Ample time is provided after each workday to enjoy local natural and cultural activities on and around the Blackfeet Indian Reservation – which include museum visits, hiking local trails, horseback riding, golfing, fishing, souvenir shopping and participating in community events and celebrations. Volunteers often attend traditional Indian “sweats,” sun dances, pow-wows and rodeos. As a Global Volunteer on the Indian Reservation, you have the unique opportunity to experience daily life as a “non-tourist” and participate in daily activities with local residents. We will also have a guided driving tour through Glacier National Park on the first Sunday of our visit.*

We're very excited to start these new adventures and look forward to putting a team together! We are always looking for more people to help with planning and fundraising efforts, so please let one of us know if you are interested:

*Carolyn Rushford, Sharon Dettenrieder, Peter Schmalz, Kaki McGeary, Mark Mendes & Mandy Wark.*

## Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop May News!

Happy Spring! The Thrift Shop began offering Spring and Summer items the last week of March and our customers were delighted! We had record sales the first day, again bringing in over \$600! With such a generous customer base and community, we were able to upgrade the shop with new lighting. It is so much brighter and makes the shopping experience that much more enjoyable for the customers and the volunteers. We also contributed toward the purchase of the new roller shades in the Fellowship Hall.

We continue to explore ways to reuse and recycle items donated that we cannot sell, with a goal of keeping the clothing waste in our community and continue to reach out to folks who reuse and recycle. We appreciate the continued support our community at large provides and always welcome donations of gently used items in good resalable quality. Currently we need men's clothing, jewelry, linens, such as bedding, towels, etc., household items and games. We no longer accept books, toys, and larger items.

We would like to thank the many generous community members who make donations, so we may continue to meet our mission of serving others, both with sale items and financial donations to local organizations. Please spread the "good word" of the shop's mission with your friends and if you are interested in volunteering, contact Elaine Raymond, 879-7350 or Sue Wood, 878-3068 or Sandy Tallman, 879-0665. We are open for shopping and receiving donations on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 10-1 and Wednesday evenings from 4-7pm.

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### Heavenly Food Pantry

The Heavenly Food Pantry will be open to families residing in Essex, Essex Junction and Westford Monday, May 8 from 5:30pm to 7:30pm and Thursday, May 25 from 2pm to 6pm. There are no income requirements to visit the food pantry and a variety of food is available to everyone.

So far during 2023, the Food Pantry has picked up and delivered over 10 tons of food! Thank you to all our dedicated volunteers who come in several times during the week to organize and sort everything as well as pick up food from various locations.

The Food Pantry is always in need of reusable shopping bags as well as baked beans, chunky soups, canned pasta, and small bags of cat/dog food. We continue to need volunteers who are able to deliver to our clientele that are unable to visit the food pantry in person. Please contact the Church Office if you are interested and as always, thank you for your support of this meaningful and important ministry in our community!

### **Essex CHIPS Book Club**

Attention parents and caregivers of 4th-8th graders! Essex CHIPS invites you to join us for Pages, a book club for Parents and Caregivers. The book we will discuss is Middle School Matters: The 10 Key Skills Kids Need to Thrive in Middle School and Beyond-and How Parents Can Help. We will meet Tuesdays, April 18, May 9, May 23, June 6 and June 20 from 5:30pm-7pm. We will provide child care for 4th-8th graders during the meetings. The first discussion will be focused on chapters 1-4. If you don't have time to read everything, please still come to the discussion. We will serve dinner to both the children and caregivers. If you have younger children who require childcare, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate them.

Essex CHIPS Teen Center is located at 2 Lincoln Street, 2nd Floor.

### **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").
- ⇒ **Send money via PayPal.** We accept electronic donations! Visit [paypal.me/fccej](https://paypal.me/fccej). (A PayPal account is not required to donate money.)



# Stewardship

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, FCCEJ 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, faith formation resources, outdoor ministry camp for youth, 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 \$14.65 per individual member. We will be asking for this donation on Mother's Day, May 14th. Please give now and if possible double your offering to cover the dues for members who can't give at this time. Of course, donations are always welcome any time of the year. The giving tab at [www.fccej.org](http://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, Emily Guziak, Alex John, Heather Stein, Beth Volker, Beth Warren*

## Deacons

Greetings to all in this lovely month of May! (Spring is my favorite absolute *favorite* season!) The Deacons had a busy time with Lenten and Easter seasons, helping Mark with readings, sanctuary preparations and cleanups (SO many candles with wicks to trim, so many matches!). Now we look forward to assisting Mark with programs aimed at member visits, follow-up with families that had children recently baptized, small welcome baskets for new members and new visitors. As always, any of the deacons may be approached with any questions or concerns you may have regarding our church services. If we cannot answer, we have direct access to those who can, and will get back to you!

*Sincerely, Maureen McKenzie*

## **2023 COMMUNITY CONCERTS @FIRST MUSIC SERIES**

The Community Concerts at First music series celebrates amazing artists from Vermont and New England. This is an opportunity for the Essex community to gather and enjoy great music together while supporting local and global mission outreach.

Tickets: 802-878-5745 <https://sevendaystickets.com/events/118903>

- ◆ **July 9th - Jon Gailmore Family Concert**
- ◆ **September 24, 2023 - Bethany Blake**
- ◆ **November 12, 2023 - Cantiamo Choral Ensemble presents a "Musical Feast"**

All concerts are at 3pm in the FCCEJ Sanctuary.



**SCAN ME**

# Heartfelt Thanks

Dear Church Family,  
Thank you for my lovely Easter basket and for Mary delivering it. It's so nice of you all to remember me. I hope you all had a joyous Easter as I did with a pancake breakfast and attending worship service with my family!

Love & prayers,  
Rose Drost

Thank you so much for the beautiful Easter basket and all the goodies. I feel blessed to be part of such a loving, caring community!

Connie Marshall

Dear Easter Basket People,  
Janne and Howard Giles delivered an Easter basket to me and it was full of so many things (12!). I had so much fun discovering each one. Thank you all, and especially the person who wanted me to receive one.

Mary Richer

Dear FCCEJ Family,  
We hope you all had a Happy Easter. The basket that was done for Bob and me was just lovely. He had a lot of fun pulling the things out and showing them to me. They were lovely and the cookies delicious! The basket itself was a nice size and held Easter goodies until Sunday evening. Thank you for thinking of us.

Fondly,  
Bob and Marilyn Vincent

Dear 1st CC Folks,  
Thanks for the fun Easter basket delivered to my door. ☺ I'm enjoying the yummy goodies, personal care items, and brain stimulation as well as the other items. Thanks for the special delivery and thinking of me.

Warmly,  
Valerie Smith

Thank you for the delivery of the lovely Easter basket filled with treats. It's wonderful to be remembered and cared for.

Russ & Alma Wilson

Thank you so much for the wonderful Easter basket. I shared it with a friend and former neighbor who is now at Maple Ridge.

Sylvia Nyhagen

Thanks so much to the people who put together the Easter basket. So many nice gifts. It's nice to be remembered!

Shirley Kent

Many thanks to the church family for the lovely Easter basket.

Lyn Beliveau

Dear Church Family,  
Thank you for the Easter basket filled with fun and useful gifts. We hope to see everyone soon. We are with you via YouTube every Sunday.

Grace & Bill Jones

## MAY BIRTHDAYS

MEILLEUR, Sena	05/01
PARKER, Collin	05/01
PETTINGILL, James	05/01
SHARP, Steve	05/01
MITTL, Steve	05/02
SCHNEIDER, Jane	05/02
FOSS, Donald	05/03
GIANNUZZI, Anna	05/03
NUTTING, Lester	05/03
TUCKER, Jean	05/03
HOY, Jacob	05/04
GRAY, Don	05/05
PARKS, Grace	05/06
RUSHFORD, Carolyn	05/06
CUNNINGHAM-FIRKEY, Laura	05/07
BLAKE, Pam	05/08
KINNEY, Anna	05/08
DROST, Rose	05/09
BOTTAMINI, Mike	05/10
HARRIS, Allie	05/10
HOY, Jennifer	05/11
KEATING, Denise	05/11
OWENS, Gretchen	05/11
PETTINGILL, Anniella	05/11
LINDHOLM, Eric	05/13
MAYVILLE, Alec	05/13
CALHOUN, Jordan	05/14
HIGGINS, Rich	05/14
JOHN, Alex	05/14
BLAKE, Dave	05/18
BEEBE, Wayne	05/19
PINDERS, Danielle	05/19
CIEPLICKI, Betsy	05/20
EHLER-VOCK, Kyle	05/20
FRANK, Marlene	05/20
HOY, David	05/20
RELYEA, Becky	05/24
CARLSON, Maryann	05/25
MILLER, Elizabeth	05/25
RICHER, Mary	05/25
WOOD, Susan	05/25
STAPLETON, Orion	05/26
WARREN, Mary Anne	05/26
MCDONALD, Deanne	05/27
MCKENZIE, Maureen	05/29
WERMER, Leo	05/29
PALMER, Amanda	05/31
PETTINGILL, Alyssa	05/31

## THE SEARCHERS

The Wednesday Night Searchers is a group that explores our faith and how it applies to our lives and world. During Lent, we began watching a tremendous new TV series called "The Chosen" that portrays a pretty accurate picture of Jesus, his disciples and the culture and context in which he lived and did his ministry. We've enjoyed it so much that we are going to continue with the series through May. Join us on Wednesday nights from 7-9pm at the church or watch the episode at home [new.thechosen.TV] and join the discussion with those present at church via zoom [ID# 889 3269 5920].

## SERMON TALKBACK

Do you ever get home and discuss Rev. Mark's sermon and wonder how he reached the conclusion he did, or totally disagree with how he 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 tasty treats. You can also join via Zoom, ID# 740 803 865. All are welcome.

## COFFEE CLATTER

Every Friday morning at 8m, join Pastor Mark at Martone's Market & Café for an hour of lively conversation and friendly banter. Grab a cup of coffee and/or a tasty treat and spend some time in community.

## BRIDGE GROUP EXPANDED!!

Our bridge group had decided to expand their meeting times to twice a month: the first and third Fridays of every month from 1:30 - 4pm. Last month, we had three tables and still had a number of "regulars" missing. We also are a more informal and fun loving group than others out there and welcome people of all skill levels to come and learn and or better your game. We have snacks and beverages and even a prize for the winner. Our group also warmly welcomes folks from outside the church so bring a friend.

### **Yoga @ First**

Come 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 Sanctuary. 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 beginner class of slow, controlled motions that aid in strength and balance. There is no charge for the class but donations to FCCEJ are appreciated. Contact Betty Adams for more information: adamsvt123@gmail.com. Sponsored by Age Well.

### **Lunchtime Book Group**

The Lunchtime Book Group meets Monday, May 15th, at 11:30 in the Marvin Lounge. This month we will discuss "THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES" by Peter Wohlleben. This timeless book highlights the interconnectedness of forest ecosystems and offers fascinating insights about the fungal communication highway known as the "wood wide web," the difficult life lessons learned in tree school, the hard-working natural cleanup crews that recycle dying trees, and much more. Bring a brown bag lunch and plan to join us for discussion and fellowship. All are welcome!

### **City of Essex Junction Pride Event**

**Saturday, June 3, 2023**

The City of Essex Junction is organizing the FIRST EVER Essex Pride Event at Maple Street Park on Saturday, June 3rd. As an Open and Affirming Congregation, we have been asked to participate in this grand event by hosting yard games for young children and their families. We need ideas, joyful volunteers, and workers to present our church as the welcoming place we know it to be. If you are interested in helping out, let Rev. Mark know. If you have a great idea but cannot make it, then forward your idea to Rev. Mark.

**First Congregational Church of Essex Junction**

1 Church Street  
Essex Junction, VT 05452  
Phone: 802-878-5745  
Email: [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org)

**ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED**

**Sunday Morning Worship:**

**8:30** - In-person and streamed via [youtube.com/c/fccej](https://youtube.com/c/fccej)  
Music: Bethany Blake directs our Sanctuary Choir and provides accompaniment

**10:15** - In-person—Faith Formation for PreK - 8th grade  
Music: Finally @ First Praise Band

*\*Communion is served on the 1st Sunday of each month at each service—all are welcome at Christ's table\**



**FCCEJ.ORG**

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**FIRSTCONGREGATIONALEJ**

When you go out into the woods and you look at trees, you see all these different trees. And some of them are bent, and some of them are straight, and some of them are evergreens, and some of them are whatever. And you look at the tree and you allow it. You see why it is the way it is. You sort of understand that it didn't get enough light, and so it turned that way. And you don't get all emotional about it. You just allow it. You appreciate the tree. The minute you get near humans, you lose all that. And you are constantly saying, 'You're too this, or I'm too this.' That judging mind comes in. And so I practice turning people into trees. Which means appreciating them just the way they are.

**Ram Dass**