



# FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH *of Essex Junction*

*Love. Serve. Grow.*

## ***A Welcoming Community, Accepting and Serving All in the Spirit of Christ***

*The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction, United Church of Christ, is an Open and Affirming congregation, embracing diversity and affirming the dignity and worth of every person, because we are all created by a loving God. We seek to live Christ's call for compassion, justice, healing and wholeness in life. Therefore, we welcome into our community persons of every race, gender, age, sexual orientation, faith background, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, mental and physical ability, economic and social position, gender identity and expression, level of education and family structure. We invite all to share in the life, leadership, ordained ministry, lay ministry, worship, sacraments, responsibilities, fellowship, blessings, and joys of our congregation as we seek to grow together in faith and love.*

**1 Church Street  
Essex Junction, VT 05452**

**Phone:** 802-878-5745 **E-mail:** [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org) **Website:** [www.fccej.org](http://www.fccej.org)



*First Service*

**The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction**  
**Fifth Sunday in Lent ~ New Member's Sunday**  
**March 17, 2024**

*We offer two different worship services: our First Service with organ and traditional choir is in-person and streamed and begins at 8:30am with access via our webpage: [www.fccej.org](http://www.fccej.org). You can watch that service any time thereafter. Our Second Service with our praise band is live in the sanctuary at 10:15am and it is streamed on the 3rd Sunday of the month. On the first Sunday of each month we celebrate communion and have a single service at 10am and is in-person and streamed. Our Faith Formation Program for all children is in person and starts at 10:15am. Listen Assist Headsets are available in the Narthex and next to the elevator and can be used with or without hearing aids.*

*Our Nursery is open at all services.*

***Currently, mask usage is up to each individual.***

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Prelude	Trio from Suite on the First Tone	Clérambault**
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Welcome Greeting and Announcements

*No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey  
you are welcome in this place.*

Opening Sacred Reading

*Today, there will be a number of readings from the book, Alcoholics Anonymous, a book that has saved many millions of people and transformed their lives into a faithful witness to God.*

The Sacred Reading

*"I have come to believe that hard times are not just meaningless suffering and that something good might turn up at any moment. That's a big change for someone who used to come to in the morning feeling sentenced to another day of life. When I woke up today, there are lots of possibilities. I can hardly wait to see what's going to happen next."*

Alcoholics Anonymous

Deacon's Prayer of Invocation ..... Alison Wermer

*Opening Hymn	<b><i>Guide Me, O My Great Redeemer</i></b>	<b>#18 [vrs. 1 &amp; 2]**</b>
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Children's Message

Entering into God's Realm: Step 1.....Putting God First

*The first few steps to align ourselves with God is simply to get our egos out of the way and put the Divine first....to get past our self-centered ways and admit that we are not the center of the universe and in control of all things.....to stop blaming and trying to control others and instead to seek God's will for our lives first.*

## A Sacred Reading in Our Affirmation of God

*"I simply had to believe in a Spirit of the Universe,  
who knew neither time nor limitation."*

Alcoholics Anonymous

**\*Hymn of Need**

***Standing in the Need of Prayer***

**#519 [vrs. 1 & 4]\*\***

## Deepening Our Relationship with God: Step 2....Our Need for Repentance

*Once we determine we are not the center of the universe, it is clear that we fall short of who God has made us to be. We sin, we commit wrongs against our neighbors, we hurt others, we diminish life....there are many ways to understand it but in the end God calls all of us to take a searching and fearless moral inventory and seek forgiveness from those who we have wronged. This is the heart of Jesus' message and he demands that we not only forgive others but love them.*

## A Sacred Reading in Our Journey Toward Health

*"We sometimes hurt those we love because they need to be "taught a lesson," when we really want to punish. We were depressed and complained we felt bad, when in fact we were mainly asking for sympathy and attention. This odd trait of mind and emotion, this perverse wish to hide a bad motive underneath a good one, permeates human affairs from top to bottom. This subtle and elusive kind of self-righteousness can underlie the smallest act or thought. Learning daily to spot, admit, and correct these flaws is the essence of character-building and good living. An honest regret for harms done, a genuine gratitude for blessings received, and a willingness to try for better things tomorrow will be the permanent assets we shall seek."*

Alcoholics Anonymous , 12 Steps, 12 Traditions

## A Time of Confession

### Calling Everyone to Confess their Wrong Doings

**Leader:** We all hurt ourselves and others. We all deny God's presence and sway over our lives and the world. In order to be healthy, we must humbly acknowledge our shortcomings and seek resolution with God, our neighbors and ourselves.

**People:** Let us come before God as a family of faith.

### Unison Prayer of Confession

**Powerful and Merciful God, we pretend to be you and let our egos get in the way of living a healthy life. We self-deceive. We make our own rules. We try to control. We fall short yet refuse to be held accountable. We are addicted to substances, people and bad habits that draw us away from you and separate us from everyone else. We escape into our own worlds. We deny ourselves love, health, maturity and meaning. Forgive us and help us to make things right with our fellows. We pray for your help to get beyond ourselves, amen.**

### The Assurance of Pardon

Leader: God loves us with abandon. God forgives our wayward behaviors. God inspires us to be more than we are. God always welcomes us into the waiting arms of home.

**People: Thank you, God and give us the courage to accept your gifts of mercy so that we might experience true joy.**

### Making Amends Right Here and Now

***One of the keys to being right with God and ourselves is to have the courage and humility to make amends with those we have wronged. Not doing so allows the wrong to fester and diminish our own spirit. Taking this step allows our acceptance of God's love to flow in and through us. Everyone is strongly encouraged to spend a few minutes writing a letter during the anthem to make things right with someone you have wronged.***

Sanctuary Choir Anthem

*A Place in the Valley*

Don Besig\*\*

### Living into a Life of Faith: Step 3.....Daily Living

*The last steps in our journey toward a deeper relationship with God is to realize that it is a life-long process. Day in and day out, we need to put God first and constantly reflect on our behaviors and take steps to make relationships right as we go. Being in a right relationship to God happens every day and with time and practice becomes a way of life.*

### Final Sacred Reading for Living the Faith

*"When I stopped living in the problem and began living in the answer, the problem went away."*

Alcoholics Anonymous

### A Witness to God and Our Journey

***One of the key ways in which we grow in the faith and move toward God is when we witness to God in our lives, when we share the ways where we have struggled and come out stronger....when we share the ways in which our Divine Companion has journeyed with us. It has always been a vital part in following Jesus to share your faith.***

Sharing One's Spiritual Journey ..... Ruth Casey

### Welcoming Our New Members

Becky Beerwald

George and Peg Coolidge

Nancy Daniels

Rob and Marjorie Gibson

Kim Sonntag

**Congregational Welcome**

Deacon to the Congregation: Jesus calls us to spread God’s extravagant love to all peoples and nations, offering everyone the gift of grace. Do you who witness this rite of membership, promise your support to these new members so that they might live a life where Christ’s joy and meaning is manifested?

**People: Becky, George, Peg, Nancy, Rob, Margie, and Kim, we welcome you with joy in the communion life of this church. We promise you our friendship and prayers as we share the hopes and labors of the church of Jesus Christ at First Church. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we continue to grow together in God's knowledge and love and be witnesses of our risen Savior.**

Pastoral Prayer..... Rev. Mark Mendes

**Unison Serenity Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

**God grant me the serenity  
To accept the things I cannot change;  
Courage to change the things I can;  
And wisdom to know the difference.  
  
Living one day at a time;  
Enjoying one moment at a time;  
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it;  
Trusting that Jesus will make all things right  
If I surrender to God’s Will;  
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life  
And supremely happy with God  
Forever and ever in the next.**

**Loving God, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And do not let us fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.**

**Musical Response and Candle Lighting**

*During the first five Sundays of Lent, we will provide a time for folks to come up and light a candle for a loved one who has died or for someone in your life in need of prayer. While we light our candles, the Irish Blessing will be performed—music by Bob Chilcott.*

**\*Hymn** ***Amazing Grace*** **#547 [vrs. 1, 2, 3]\*\***

\*Benediction

Pastoral Benediction ..... Rev. Mark Mendes

**\*Sung Community Benediction**

**Go Now In Peace**

**Go now in peace. Never be afraid.  
God will go with you each hour of every day.  
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.  
Know God will guide you in all you do.  
Go now in love, and show you believe.  
Reach out to others so all the world can see.  
God will be there, holding you in love.  
Go now in peace, in faith and in love.**

\*Please stand if you are able

*\*\* The morning offering will be taken via a basket on your way out  
to save time in what proves to be a jammed packed worship service.*

Sincere thanks to Bethany Blake, the Sanctuary Choir, and Judy Pomainville for sharing their musical talents with us this morning!



**12 Steps of Spiritual Renewal**

1. We admit we are powerless over the things of the world that keep us from God and that our lives have become unmanageable.
2. We believe God / Jesus can restore us to sanity.
3. We decide to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand the Divine.
4. We make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admit to God, ourselves, and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We open ourselves to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly ask God / Jesus to remove our shortcomings.
8. We list all persons we had harmed, and become willing to make amends to them all.
9. We direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continue to take daily personal inventory of the wrongs we commit, promptly admit it and work to make amends.
11. We seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand the divine, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. After our own spiritual awakening in following these steps, we try to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## OUR PRAYER MINISTRY

If you require prayers for yourself or a loved one; or if you wish for a call from a pastor, please contact [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org) or call (802) 878-5745.

Those impacted by the fires in Hawaii  
Everyone affected by the recent floods  
Victims of gun violence and their families

Albert  
Ozzy and Family  
Andrea & Steve Sharp  
Russ Wilson & Cathy Galbraith  
Juliana Faux  
Family and Friends of Joyce Jacobs  
Marie Johnson

Bruce Blackman  
Frank Smith  
Connor Bryce and Family  
Ruby and Family  
Michael Flynn  
Bruce Gianuzzi

Maureen Evans & Family  
All those suffering due to violence in  
Ukraine and the Middle East  
...and all persons affected by COVID19

*The flowers on the altar are  
in honor and celebration of the life of Joyce Jacobs.*

### CONNECTIONS:

Signup Online! <https://bit.ly/3dwsHji>

Our "Weekly Update" eConnection: <http://bit.ly/3rlsISv>

Our monthly "SPIRIT@FIRST" eNewsletter\* <http://fccej.org/v5/category/newsletters/>

\*available in a printed, snail-mailed format

### ONGOING PROGRAMS!

- ♦ **Sermon Talk Back**, Tuesdays at 8:30am in Marvin Lounge & Zoom:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89903982036#success>
- ♦ **Tai Chi Class**, Tuesdays at 10:15am in the Fellowship Hall
- ♦ **Yoga @ First**, Tuesdays at 5pm in the Sanctuary
- ♦ **Coffee Clatter**, every Friday @ 8am at Martone's
- ♦ **Lunchtime Book Group**, 3rd Mondays @ 11:30am in Marvin Lounge
- ♦ **Bridge Group**, 1st & 3rd Fridays @ 1:30pm in Marvin Lounge



FACEBOOK

[bit.ly/39039ht](https://bit.ly/39039ht)



INSTAGRAM

[bit.ly/3rlfgZf](https://bit.ly/3rlfgZf)



INTERNET

[fccej.org](https://fccej.org)



YOUTUBE

[bit.ly/3oPpBv9](https://bit.ly/3oPpBv9)

## **Weekly Calendar: March 17 - March 24**

**\*Please contact the church office with any changes or corrections\***

### **Sunday, March 17**

8:30 & 10:15am: Worship, Sanctuary/Streaming  
10:30am: Faith Formation (PreK-8th)  
11:30am: Youth Parent Meeting, Program Room  
*1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship, Fellowship Hall*

### **Tuesday, March 19**

8:30am: Sermon Talkback, Marvin Lounge  
10:15am: Tai Chi, Fellowship Hall  
10am-1pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop  
*11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship, Fellowship Hall*  
5pm: Yoga @ FCCEJ, Sanctuary  
7pm: CE, Marvin Lounge  
Communications, Program Room  
HRC, Conference Room

### **Thursday, March 21**

9am: FCCEJ Staff Meeting, Marvin Lounge  
*Essex Art League, Gym*  
11am: Youth Ministry Team, Conference Room  
*11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship, Fellowship Hall*  
1pm: Service Trip Leadership Team,  
Marvin Lounge  
*6pm: Music Rehearsal, Sanctuary*  
7pm: Sanctuary Choir Rehearsal, Sanctuary  
Open & Affirming Sub-Committee,  
2nd Floor Program Room  
*Cub Scouts Pack 630, Fellowship Hall*

### **Saturday, March 23**

*8am: The Vine Nepali Congregation, Sanctuary*  
*Give It A Go Support Group, Marvin Lounge*  
*9am: Weight Loss Support Group, Fellowship Hall*  
10am-1pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop  
*1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship, Marvin Lounge*

### **Monday, March 18**

8:30am: Food Pantry Organizing, Fellowship Hall  
11:30am: Lunchtime Book Group, Marvin Lounge  
*Brown Bag Fellowship, Fellowship Hall*  
*7:30pm: Group Victory, Marvin Lounge*

### **Wednesday, March 20**

8am: Food Pantry Delivery Drop-off,  
Fellowship Hall, Gym, Kitchen  
10am: Missions Committee, Marvin Lounge  
*11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship, Fellowship Hall*  
4pm-7pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop  
5:30pm: Finally @ First Rehearsal, Sanctuary  
7pm: Searchers, Marvin Lounge  
*BSA Troop 624, Fellowship Hall*  
7:15pm: Bell Choir Rehearsal, Sanctuary

### **Friday, March 22**

8am: Coffee Clatter, Martone's Market  
*11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship, Fellowship Hall*  
*6:30pm: Blue Spruce Grange, Fellowship Hall*

### **Sunday, March 24**

#### **Palm Sunday—Choir Cantata**

8:30\* & 10:15am: Worship, Sanctuary/Streaming  
10:30am: Faith Formation (PreK-8th)  
11:30am: Junior Youth  
*1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship, Fellowship Hall*

*Events in italics = Local Community Groups*