

# SPiRiT @ FiRST

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

FIRST  
CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH of Essex Junction

Love. Serve. Grow.

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## Your Pastor's Ponderings.....

*The new research raised the possibility that just as we are cognitive, physical, and emotional beings, we are also spiritual beings. In other words, it's possible that we are built to be spiritual and that spirituality might be a fundamental and necessary part of our human inheritance that contributes to our mental health.....that spirituality isn't just a belief, but something each of us is born with the capacity to experience.*

*The Awakened Brain by Lisa Miller: page 58*

In our Wednesday Night Searchers Group, we have been reading Lisa's Miller groundbreaking book, *The Awakened Brain*. In the book, she explores the healing efficacy of religion and spirituality on depression and anxiety, especially among adolescence. She is a scientist and is fascinated in proving the connection between spirituality and healthy living. She works with control groups and brain scans, she talks about quantum physics and the interplay between the physical and spiritual world. She speaks about Jung's interest in serendipitous events in our lives and how they point to deeper truths about the structure and scope of reality. One of the theories she purports is the genetic nature of spirituality within the human condition, that religion and spirituality are not something we learn to do or statements of belief we spout but an inherent and genetic part of the human condition. And like any discipline of the mind or body, we can deepen those innate gifts or let them languish. Her hope is that with her studies and insight, we might better be able to deepen those gifts and thus be more effective in taking care of ourselves and being healthy.

For example, she looks at study after study that show that folks who either go to church or have a personal spirituality have significantly greater odds of dealing with depression, addiction, anxiety and suicide. She clearly states that being a part of a church or having a personal relationship with a higher power is by far the most significant treatment in dealing with these heart wrenching problems. In one study of teens across the country, she found that teens with a strong spirituality were 35 – 75 % less likely to experience clinical depression. She continues by saying there are “no other mental health intervention, clinical or pharmacological, for adults or adolescences, had anything close to those prevention rates”. She continues by saying that adolescences with a strong personal spirituality were 40-80% less likely to develop substance dependence or abuse.

One of her great lines is that if we as parents knew that a new medication would decrease the risk of depression in our youth by 40-80 % and substance abuse by 35-75 %, then we would naturally race out to get that medication and demand that our kids took it. Then why, she ponders, do parents not protect their children by simply taking them to church and working with them to develop their spirituality?

Besides the efficacy of spirituality and religion in mitigating the devastating effects of depression, anxiety and suicide, she hypothesizes that our innate spirituality is connected to a universal life force that unites the physical and spiritual worlds. She is trying to scientifically prove this so that we as a species can then tap into the universal life force [God for religious people] and use it for our own health and humanity's future. She hypothesizes that when we are out of kilter with this universal life force, that it results in depression, anxiety and the like: natural outcomes of being out of sync with God.

One of the members of our group, a Deacon, reflected that this work and line of reasoning could just be the next great religious revival and the interplay between science and religion just might reawaken the spirituality in all of us. At the very least, anyone dealing with issues of anxiety, addictions or depression should come to church and learn to tap into the healing powers of spirituality. It is the best proven medicine for the ills that ail our society these days.

See you in church.....

Rev. Mark

# **SPECIAL WORSHIP SERVICES IN MARCH**

## **One United Communion Service**

### **ONE Service @ 10am ~ Sunday, March 3**

Almost everyone has been appreciative of our two worship services merging together in one great Communion Sunday. It is nice to come together with a larger congregation to celebrate Christ's sacred meal of the Last Supper. Its great to see friends you have been missing as they go to the other service as well as meet new members that you have not gotten to know yet. And so, as per the Deacon's vote, we will continue to meet together as one family of faith on the first Sunday of every month at 10 am; in March that will be on March 3rd. Hope to see you all there. This month the worship service will be shaped in line with Taize' Services which is a little more contemplative and with some antiphonal musical responses.

### **Pulpit Swap with Rev. Devon Thomas**

#### **Sunday, March 10**

FCCEJ was thrilled to be Devon's home church as he went through the ordination process and we were so proud when he received a call to serve three different UCC Churches out in the Jeffersonville area of Vermont. For five years, Devon preached at three different churches every week, visited three different groups of members, and learned how the organizations run by observing and participating in three completely different church structures and traditions. Needless to say Devon is now a deeply seasoned pastor. Most recently, Devon has been called to be the settled pastor at Ascension Lutheran Church in South Burlington. Our denomination has a relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America [ELCA] to honor and welcome clergy from each tradition to serve in the other denomination. Devon did just that when he accepted the call from Ascension Lutheran to be their pastor. To stay in touch with someone we watched go through the ordination process, the Deacons and Rev. Mark thought it would be a great idea to have Devon and Rev. Mark switch pulpits one day and so on March 10th, Rev. Devon Thomas will preach and lead worship at FCCEJ and Rev. Mark will preach and lead worship at Ascension Lutheran. Be sure to come and see how Devon has matured in his role as ordained clergy!!!

### **A.A. Styled Worship / Receiving New Members**

#### **Sunday, March 17**

A member of FCCEJ invited Rev. Mark to help celebrate as they received a three year sobriety chip. He gladly accepted the invitation and showed up to find our own Fellowship Hall filled with people working to give up drinking. The AA Group hosted at FCCEJ is the oldest one in town, and it has been meeting here for over four decades. During their AA meeting Rev. Mark was flabbergasted to notice the similarities to worship services with unison readings, prayers, and times when folks spoke about how their higher power entered their lives and changed them for the better. They spoke about how the power of God had transformed their lives. They spoke about times when they struggled and had to repent and make peace with folks they had hurt. They ended with the Lord's Prayer and then had an informal time of fellowship. Our Sunday morning worship services at 8:30 and 10:15 on March 17th will use this tried and true worship method practiced every day with millions of people. It will be good to draw from a group within our church to widen our view and experience God in a new and different way. This is naturally a good Sunday to bring a friend!

We are also excited to welcome 7 people into active membership this Sunday!

### **Lenten Prayers**



During the 6 weeks of Lent, the staff at FCCEJ has pledged to pray for all active members and constituents in our faith community. Each week, starting on February 18 and going until Easter, we will publish a list of names in the Sunday worship bulletin. These are the people that will be prayed for that week. If you have a specific prayer request, please send it to [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org) or call the church office. If not, we will pray as the Spirit moves us. All prayer requests will remain confidential unless we hear otherwise.

Please feel free to pray for the folks on the list as part of your Lenten journey. By Easter morning, everyone at FCCEJ will have been lifted up in prayer.



# **HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE**

## **Palm & Cantata Sunday**

**March 24**

We will all be treated with magnificent music at both services [8:30 & 10:15am] on Palm Sunday when Bethany Blakes leads the Sanctuary Choir in singing this year's Musical Cantata: *Come Walk With Me* by Pepper Chopin. The Cantata leads us through the events that occurred during Holy Week when Jesus met his destruction and death at the hands of the Roman Empire and to the relief of the Jewish religious leaders. The Cantata will serve as the sermon that week. As an added bonus, we will have a baptism and the child's grandfather will be sharing his spiritual journey. You will not want to miss this service!

## **Maundy Thursday Service** **Thursday, March 28 at 6:30pm**

The word Maundy comes from the Latin word, *mandatum* - to mandate or command. In the midst of the last supper, Jesus gives three commands in the meal he shared and the lessons he taught on that Holy Thursday night so long ago; lessons that still teach us the essence of the faith. The three things he mandated are:

1. To wash each other's feet / learn to serve others
2. To share food together and remember his last meal
3. To love your neighbor as yourself. Service, community, and a deep and abiding love.

On Maundy Thursday we will lean into these truths as we talk about the faith around a simple meal of soup and bread and as we participate in various religious activities: foot washing, healing station, prayer, etc. The service is done downstairs in the Fellowship Hall and is informal and since it is so hands on, younger folks might just appreciate it more.

Traditionally, we start this service at 6pm, but we are also distributing food at our Food Pantry and they are normally open until 6pm. So the Food Pantry will cease operations early at 5:30 [thank you] and the service will begin at 6:30pm.

## **Good Friday Service** **Friday, March 29 at 7pm**

Good Friday at 3pm is when Jesus was crucified. The way Jesus is treated leading up to the crucifixion contains some of the most brutal scenes in the bible: personal brutality, gloating and mockery, authorities running amok by reinforcing their power at the cost of an innocent's death and of course everyone cheering for him to be put to death. And in the midst of all of that Jesus reminds people to forgive and even love your enemies; he heals a centurion's ear that was cut off in passion, he listens as his words are twisted and falsely used against him; and he never gives up his faith and trust in a loving God. On Good Friday, we remember humanity's reaction to God's loving son in the hopes that we can behave better journeying into the future. Good Friday is Good because Jesus on the cross forgives humanity of their sin and shows us a different way to live. It is good because Jesus models what the better way is as he deals with the religious and political authorities as well as the mass of people surrounding him. It is good because there are a few instances during these interchanges that show forth courage, faith, strength of character and love. The service starts at 7pm in the sanctuary and everyone is invited.

# **EASTER SUNDAY**

**March 31**

## **~Ecumenical Easter Sunrise & Breakfast - 6:30am~**

Each year, we gather at the Holy Family gazebo with Father Charlie Ranges and a host of various denominational folks from the community as we celebrate Christ's resurrection at the break of day. This practice goes back to the earliest of traditions in the early church. Everyone is welcome to watch the sun rise and sing of God's glory. The service lasts no more than 30 minutes, after which everyone is invited back to the FCCEJ Fellowship Hall for our traditional Easter Breakfast, which formally starts at 7am.

## **~Worship Services @ 8:30\* and 10:15 - In-person and streaming\*~**

We will celebrate Christ's resurrection and the hope of eternal life at our regularly scheduled Sunday worship services on March 31. Both the Sanctuary Choir and Finally @ First have great music planned. Everyone is welcome to our most significant liturgical celebration of the year. Both services will be All Family Worship; nursery care will be available for infants through 3 years.

## Laurie's Lens

Did you figure out **what you are giving up for Lent or what you are taking on?** I did. I'm reading my UCC daily devotions again for Lent. The UCC has daily devotions that can show up every day as an email in your inbox. I chose to go with their UCC Lenten daily devotion called Bend. You can find it here:

<https://www.thepilgrimpress.com/products/bend-2024-lent-devotional?pos=1&sid=d5f4f21a1&ss=r&variant=40798378721347>

Maybe you decided to order a copy of the book *Twas the Season of Lent* by Glenys Nellist and read her family devotion each day and have her lovely poem in your hands to reflect on as you journey through lent. It comes in hard cover or on Kindle: [https://www.amazon.com/s?k=twas+the+season+of+lent+nellist&crd=2BGXTB8CDGVK9&sprefix=twas+the+season+of+lent%2Caps%2C87&ref=nb\\_sb\\_ss\\_ts-doa-p\\_2\\_23](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=twas+the+season+of+lent+nellist&crd=2BGXTB8CDGVK9&sprefix=twas+the+season+of+lent%2Caps%2C87&ref=nb_sb_ss_ts-doa-p_2_23)

Lent is a time of reflection, wonder, prayer, meditation, and quiet time that helps to bring you closer to God and Jesus, and hopefully helps us to see those God moments in your life a little clearer. I hope you are finding ways to connect with your fellow FCCEJ family here in the building, but also in the community as we move from winter into spring and feel the evermore warming rays of God's sunshine in our midst.

***Pretzel Sunday is March 17th***—a Sunday that many here at FCCEJ don't like to miss. Many hands help make this special day even more so. Please mark your calendars and see if you can participate this year. You can volunteer and enjoy the fellowship early in the morning at 7am in the kitchen as we mix up dough, roll out the first pretzels and help the church come alive with this wonderful smell. Maybe you'd rather arrive a little later, so come at 9am, 10:15am or 11:15am to help throughout the morning as we keep the ovens going, put out pretzels for both of our coffee hours and put our kitchen back in order again.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0545A8AB2FAAF58-fccej#/>

***On Palm Sunday, March 24th***, we wave palms in worship and then there is an opportunity to fold yours after service into a cross to keep in your bible or another place through the season or all year long. Our ***Lenten Scavenger Hunt*** will also be on this day following the 10:15am service. There will be Lenten symbols hiding inside the building; collect your scavenger sheet, find the symbols, then collect a prize bag when you are done. Elizabeth is arranging for the children to color the symbols during Faith Formation peer time on the two Sundays leading up to March 24. All ages are welcome to participate.

***On March 31st we are hosting our annual Easter Breakfast.*** We will be serving from 7am to 10am in the Fellowship Hall. This will be a similar menu to the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper (pancakes, bacon, sausage, fruit, and the addition of scrambled eggs). Join us as we celebrate the risen Christ with food, fellowship and an opportunity to serve others and be served by your church family at FCCEJ. CE is also hosting an Easter Egg Hunt that will start at 9:30am. Collect instructions at the table in the Fellowship Hall so you will know where to look. We hope you can join us.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0545A8AB2FAAF58-easter#/>

Blessing & Peace for your Lenten Journey,

Laurie Chipman

Christian Education Director

### **Vacation Bible Camp**

Mark your calendars now!

August 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Mornings 9am-12noon OR All-Day 9am to 4pm (\$100 / camper ~ scholarships available)

**Campers** ~ Toddlers with a Parent & PreK up through current 5th graders

**Register Online!** Take a moment and sign up today! Campers and all volunteers can register on this link: [www.fccej.org/v5/grow-in-faith/vacation-bible-camp/](http://www.fccej.org/v5/grow-in-faith/vacation-bible-camp/)

**Volunteer Youth (6th – 12th grade) & Adults of All Ages**

**Music Station ~ Science Station ~ Craft Station ~ Game Station ~ Reflection & Snack Station  
Drama folks ~ Puppeteers**

Be a Camper Group Leader ~ Station Leaders or Helper ~ Set up the weekend before Camp ~ Work on a project before camp week.

Yes! We are recruiting for VB Camp and it takes many volunteers to make this program run. Connect with Laurie or another VBC volunteer. We are happy to chat and answer your questions. Volunteer for the full week or on the mornings/days that work for you.





# Faith Formation News

**\*\*Watch for Family Ministry emails in your inbox\*\***

As we continue our journey through Lent, Spiritual Friends will be remembering Jesus' last supper. Peer groups will read scripture about Jesus washing the disciples' feet, Peter's denial and remembering Jesus' death to celebrate Palm Sunday. We will all proclaim Jesus has risen on Easter during an all-family worship.

May Lent be a time of reflection of Jesus' continual love for us!

Elizabeth Miller, *Children's Ministry Coordinator*

## Faith Formation March Calendar

**March 3** ~ Spiritual Friends (PreK—2nd)

One Service at 10am

**March 10, 17, 24** ~ Peer Groups

**March 31—Easter** ~ All Family Worship

## J.A.M. (Jesus And Me)

March 3rd at 11:15ish (after our 10am single worship service).

All 3rd – 5th graders are invited to stay after church with a parent.

Come build community and get to know each other better. Practice lighting the worship candles, play a game, and have a light snack.

## Faith Formation Offering

**2023-2024—Lahaina Fire Relief**

**Current total \$617.75**

Remember to use the small white bible story envelopes on the Narthex shelf so that your offering goes to help those in Lahaina. Loose money in the offering plate goes to our general church budget.

Our children and youth created cards to send to the children, along with a check to purchase raincoats.



## Youth Ministry

**A time to build self-confidence. Unwind. Build Community with those around you.  
Come feel the love that God hands out to all so freely.**

### ‘Our Youth’ Bulletin Board

Do you have an event coming up? Laurie would like to hear all about it and add it to her calendar in hopes of attending and support our youth in the community. Please reach out and let her know what's on your calendar.

### Youth Ministry Info Board

Located in the office hallway by the stairs. You can find JHY & SHY calendars, Youth Registration forms, Nursery & VB Camp job applications, and Adult Volunteer Safe Conduct forms for anyone volunteering in our programs.

### Youth Calendar:

**March 3** ~ off ~ school break weekend

**March 10** ~ JHY (6th-8th) 11:30am-1:30pm

**March 17** ~ Pretzel Sunday & Youth Parent Meeting, 11:30am

**March 24** ~ JHY, 11:30am-1:30pm

*SHY & Parents please send feedback to Laurie – meet March 17 from 1-3pm or March 24 from 2-4pm?*

**March 31** ~ Easter Breakfast (sign up & help)

*Save the Dates:*

**March 17th ~ Pretzel Sunday**

Come early at 7am and mix up dough or 8am to roll pretzels, or 8:30am to bake. You can even come during second service and help the children roll pretzels.

**May 5** ~ COTS Walk ~ JHY & SHY

**July 28-31** ~ New England Regional Youth Event @ Silver Lake Camp & Retreat Center, in Sharon, CT for all youth ages 13-18. Youth are invited to join together and attend this awesome experience! RYE will be a place to grow your spirit and connect with other youth from all over New England. This beautiful outdoor ministry site features swimming, boating, and a challenge course for team building. *More details coming soon.*

### Nursery Staff (Senior High Youth & College Students)

Reminder to staff to sign up on the calendar for slots (first come first serve). Calendar dates now go out through January. On the 1st Sundays of the month you will arrive 15 minutes earlier for our 10am service. Others who would like to join the staff, please contact Laurie for an interview and orientation. You earn \$20 per worship service.

# Missions Committee

## Spectrum Vermont



Imagine you're a teenager and you have nowhere to sleep, eat, shower or wash your clothes. Pretty awful? Yes.

Cue **Spectrum Vermont**! They offer a variety of crucial services for teens and young adults. There's the Drop-In Center where they can eat, shower, do laundry, get extra clothing, or use a computer. The staff also offer help with applying for jobs, applying for state benefits, or identifying stable and safe housing options. The Drop-In Center has two locations - at 177 Pearl Street in Burlington or at 223 Lake Street in St Albans. Vermont Spectrum offers coaching and mentoring for basic life skills such as continuing their education or finding and keeping a job.

Vermont Spectrum has resources to refer youth to healthcare or counseling. They also offer multicultural opportunities – there is a help desk that is staffed 6 hours a day, 5 days a week (including Essex High School, Essex Middle School and Albert D. Lawton Middle School in Essex!) and the staff speak several languages.

There are many volunteer options available – mentoring (this is their biggest need), providing a meal (you can also provide a gift card for a meal), and even sorting donations. The staff are also looking for young adults, aged 18 to 26, with tutoring experience to help in the Resource Space for multicultural and New American young people. Be sure to check Spectrum Vermont's website for more information on volunteering!

[www.spectrumvt.org](http://www.spectrumvt.org)

And let's not forget **Detail Works**! This car and truck detailing service gives youth on-the-job experience. AND – there will be 2 prizes at the Calcutta on March 9 for car or truck detailing, each one for \$125!

## Valentines for Veterans

Sincere thanks to everyone that brought in Valentines for our veterans!  
Your cards and well-wishes were greatly appreciated!

## Stewardship

Did you know that there are ten special offerings highlighted throughout the year? Every month (except July and August) we spotlight one of these offerings. The list of offerings and associated months are listed below. You can also see this list on our website at <https://www.fccej.org/v5/giving/ways-to-donate/>. You don't have to donate to them all, but you can pick and choose which ones are meaningful to you. Although we focus on only one special offering at a time, we are happy to receive your gift for any of these funds at any time of year. Thank you for your support!

- **January- One Great Hour of Sharing:** supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the UCC within Wider Church Ministries.
- **February- African American Spirituals:** supports a local gospel choir as a way to honor African American composers who were never paid for their work and whose songs are among our favorites, and are frequently part of worship.
- **March - Pastor's Fund - Easter Offering:** is used at the discretion of our minister to provide support for heating bills, emergencies, food etc. for both members of our church and community.
- **April - Outdoor Ministry:** provides funding for camping weekends and other outdoor activities.
- **May - Per Capita:** dues paid by the churches of the Vermont Conference to support common ministries.
- **June - Strengthen the Church:** supports congregations across the UCC in many ways.
- **September - Seminary Sunday:** supports the education of future ministers.
- **October - Neighbors in Need:** is a special mission offering of the UCC that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States.
- **November - Food Pantry - Thanksgiving Offering:** supports the Heavenly Food Pantry at FCCEJ
- **December - Christmas Fund:** provides direct financial support to those who served the church and are facing financial difficulties.

# **Planned Giving**

## **Support FCCEJ Through Your Will ~ Giving that Grows**

Many friends and church members include FCCEJ in their estate plans. A gift through your will (a bequest) is a common way to make a difference in our church and leave your legacy as we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all. Charitable bequests generally fall into the following categories:

- The residuary bequest directs that FCCEJ receives either everything remaining in your estate or a designated percentage of your estate after all necessary costs, all general bequests, and all specific bequests are satisfied.
- The general bequest specifies that FCCEJ receives a designated sum from your estate's general assets. For example, you might make a general bequest of \$25,000. This type of bequest is easily arranged and is considered a "primary charge" against your estate which means it will almost certainly be fulfilled.
- The percentage bequest states that FCCEJ receives a predetermined percentage of your estate – 10% or 25%, for example.
- The specific bequest directs that one particular property, such as a certain piece of real estate, stock, or some other designated property, be transferred to FCCEJ.
- The contingent bequest as the name implies- is "contingent" on some event. Usually, you might make a primary bequest for a loved one with the contingency that if the loved one is not living after your lifetime, the bequest will pass to FCCEJ.

The Planned Giving Committee is planning another Estate Planning Seminar/Wills Clinic to be held at FCCEJ in the April/May timeframe. Watch the newsletter and church bulletin for the specific date.

The Committee suggests that you consult your attorney or financial advisor, prior to writing/updating your will/estate plan. If you have already included FCCEJ in your will/estate plan, please inform Rev. Mendes or the church office.

Your Planned Giving Committee:

*Kathryn Brennan, Dave Johnson, Darryl Koch, Matt & Kaki McGeary, Dan Petherbridge,  
Judy Pomainville, Rev. Mark Mendes*

## **Important Facility Reminders**

### **Parking**

The FCCEJ parking lot spaces have been laid out to maximize traffic flow. It's crucial to only park in these designated spaces, except for active loading or unloading. When drivers park outside the lined spaces, it creates dangerous conditions for other drivers, pedestrians, and emergency vehicles if they were needed. Remember that we have a contract with the medical offices across Church Street to use their parking lot for overflow parking. Particularly on our single service Sundays, please consider parking in that lot and leave the FCCEJ spaces open for visitors and those that may be dealing with mobility issues.

### **Scheduling**

All groups must schedule their meetings and events through the church office. Weekly calendars are posted at the entrance to the Fellowship Hall and Church Office, as well as printed in the bulletin, sent via the weekly email, and available online through our website. One look and it will be apparent that our facility is a busy one. Please remember to keep the office updated with your schedule so that our calendars are as accurate as possible.

### **Facility Safety**

Access to our buildings is via key cards, which can be programmed for a single door, or multiple, depending on the need. If you currently have an access card, but no longer need it, please contact the office. Conversely, if you are chairing a committee and now need a card, we're happy to provide one. Please remember to lock whatever entrance(s) you use when your event is complete, regardless of whether there are other groups meeting or not. Thank you!



## Important Upcoming Events

### Community Concerts @ First

presents

# Va-et-vient



**SUNDAY, MARCH 10 AT 3PM**

Concert Proceeds Support: Steps to End Domestic Violence & FCCEJ  
Suggested Donation: Adults-\$20 / 10 & under-free  
Tickets:  
<https://sevendaystickets.com/events/va-et-vient-3-10-2024>



SCAN ME



First Congregational Church - 39 Main Street, Essex Junction - 802-878-5745  
[www.fccej.org/v5/calendar-news/concert-series/](http://www.fccej.org/v5/calendar-news/concert-series/)

## Sweetheart's Ball

6:00-8:00



March 22

A dance and dinner for Senior Citizens  
Join us to enjoy pasta and music.

Essex High School Cafeteria

Email [sgovernment@ewsd.org](mailto:sgovernment@ewsd.org)  
to RSVP (encouraged)

### All Church Leadership Workshop

As a Congregational Church, we have new committee members and officers come on board every year as we rotate new members into our administrative structure. Folks who have served for a certain period of time are rotating off of their respective roles to either take a break or switch to another role. Each year, our new members bring new ideas and energy to their tasks, which is one of the great gifts of our way of doing things. However, the downside is that we need to teach everyone how our system of church governance works. How do committees relate to staff members? How do you submit reimbursements for expenses? Where does Church Council fit into the mix? Who is responsible for making the day to day decisions of the church? Who elects chairs, and is there help in learning how to run a meeting? All of these questions and more will be answered at the All Church Leadership Retreat. Everyone interested in learning about how the church runs is welcome to attend but we especially encourage all officers and committee members to attend. It will be held on Saturday, March 23rd from 9-11am in the Fellowship Hall.

### FCCEJ to Host VTCUCC Annual Meeting

**April 19-20**

The Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ [VTCUCC] asked our church if we would host their annual meeting. The Vermont Conference's Annual Meeting hosts UCC delegates from across Vermont to discuss the state of the wider church and conduct its business. Like our Annual Meeting, they will pass a budget, elect officers and committee members, listen to how the conference is doing, and simply re-connect with old friends and meet new ones. We say good-bye to members who passed away the previous year and welcome new clergy. There are seminars, meals, and an opportunities for workshops and presentations. The theme this year is *Christians Engaging with Artificial Intelligence*, which should be quite interesting. As we move closer to the event, we will need volunteers to usher, direct folks where to go, set up and clean up after prepared meals from Red Panda, tech support, and generally helping the event to run smoothly. We have also arranged to have a separate registration for FCCEJ folks so all we will have to pay for is the food. If you are not interested in the food, you should be able to just come and enjoy the presentations. There will soon be a sign up for volunteers but if you know that you want to help, feel free to email or call Rev. Mark and let him know.



## **Lenten Prayer Opportunities**

Lent is a time when we seek to connect with God a little more than we normally do. It is a time of intentionality and reflection; one key element in this renewed emphasis to connect with God is prayer. We talk with God a little more, we reflect on our relationship with God a little more, we discern God's presence in our lives and world a little more. Thus, we deepen our prayer life during Lent and we have a couple of opportunities to do so in church; it will be good for you, honest!

The first opportunity is to **pray for our members**. Each week throughout Lent, the worship bulletins and weekly email include names of our members to remember in our prayers. It is our hope that all of us will simply pray for each other during Lent. When going through the names, think about them and what's going on in their lives and focus prayers on their needs. If those specific needs are unknown, simply raise them up and pray for their health, wholeness and happiness. Just remember, a church that prays together, stays together!

The second opportunity is an old tradition that harkens back to when Jesus asked his disciples to join him and pray while he is in the garden immediately prior to being arrested. The disciples, like many of us as we pray before bed, fell asleep. The ancient **Prayer Vigil** answers Jesus' call to pray, from the moment of Christ's death at 3pm Friday afternoon, to the moment of his resurrection at 7am Easter morning: 40 hours. Individuals, couples, or families are encouraged to sign up for one hour. You will have the Sanctuary to yourself to pray, or read scripture, or sing hymns, or simply to sit in silence and soak in God's presence. Once your hour is complete, people are asked to let the next person in so they can have the same experience. We will break the prayer vigil for the Good Friday service and for the Nepali worship so there will only be 35 slots available. You can sign up on the clipboard in worship or by calling the church office [802 878-5745] and tell Jen your time preference.

## **Prayer Shawls Needed**

During the Season of Lent, we offer free prayer shawls from our extensive collection to give to people who either need one for themselves or know of someone in their lives who would benefit from such a gift. In addition, our two Ministers of Visitation have begun offering a prayer shawl to the folks they visit. Although we are not completely out of prayer shawls, it would be prudent for those of you who knit to make one of two for our collection. They should be large enough to wrap around one's shoulders or put over your legs. As completed, please drop off at the church office and thanks.

## **Deacons**

Greetings from the Deacons!!

We are looking forward to joining you all for our remaining Lenten Services in March, culminating on Easter Sunday on the 31st. I so enjoy the flickering candles on the altar as we remember and/or pray for loved ones. I hope you do, too. Holy week will offer many choices for you to participate in this holiest time of our calendar. I look forward to the cantata that Bethany and our choir will perform on Palm Sunday. On Maundy Thursday we will have a light supper in Fellowship Hall, with several stations following the simple meal that will provide chances for meditation and reflection. Or perhaps you would want to sign up for an hour of silence to sit in the sanctuary by yourself during the weekend. Finally, we can then shout out our 'ALLELUIAS' at the good news at Easter Sunday services!!! Keep an eye on March bulletins for details!

As always if you have comments or suggestions for our services through the year, I encourage you to contact any of the Deacons to discuss!

Respectfully submitted by Maureen McKenzie

## **Ushers & Greeters**

The Hello Church Family,

My name is Aimee Koch, and I serve on our wonderful church's Greeting and Ushering Committee. I ask you to consider greeting/ushering in March and April. Here are the time commitments for each service:

- First of the Month Single Service: 9:40-11:15
- First Service: 8:10-9:15am
- Second Service: 9:55-11:15am

Below is the link to the Sign-Up Genius. Not comfortable signing up online? No problem! I'm more than happy to sign you up! Email me - [aimkath@comcast.net](mailto:aimkath@comcast.net) and I'll get you on the calendar. Include the date and service time at which you're willing to serve.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60BoA48AAAD2CA2FF2-fccej2#/>

Thank you so much for considering volunteering in one of our services and for your support in helping us continue to Love, Serve and Grow!

~Aimee

## Grief Support Group

**2nd Thursday of each month ~ 10-11:30am in Marvin Lounge.**

This group is open to anyone experiencing the loss of a loved one. The sessions are facilitated by Sharon Dettenrieder, MSN, RN and Mary McHugh, MAPS. Both Sharon and Mary have years of experience in leading Grief Support groups as well as personal experience with loss. Next session is 2/8. Please contact the church office for more information: 802-878-5745 or [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org).

## 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. Join us Tuesday evenings, from 5-6:15 in the Sanctuary. Wear comfortable, non restrictive clothing. Bring a mat or borrow one. Donations (to FCCEJ) welcome, but not required.

## FCCEJ Family Camping Weekend



**Friday, August 9 - Sunday, August 11, 2024**

**Button Bay State Park**

13 sites are already booked!

If you would like to contribute to the cost, you can mark your check "FCCJ Outdoor Ministries".

**Our weekend looks like this:** Arrive Friday afternoon/evening (time that works for you) and set up your site. Join the group for an evening campfire in our common area around our large red canopy. We'll move a

couple of close by picnic tables so we can have a couple of meals together (lunch & supper of BYO to the table and a dish or item to share if you wish). Saturday will be a day of fun and activities, on your own and/or with others. Last year some took a bike ride, others with the pool. We played corn hole, cards and got a little crafty. Glow sticks were a favorite of many. It's a very relaxed weekend with no set schedule. There will be great koinonia (fellowship) with others here from your First Church family.

**FCCEJ Camp Scholarships await you!** For children, youth, adults or families. Connect with Laurie or Rev. Mark if you are planning to attend one of our UCC summer camps - Horton Center (NH), Silver Lake Conference Center (CT) or Pilgrim Lodge (ME). Scholarships can also go toward sending your child for full day VB Camp in August.

Attending a week of 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!

**News from Horton Center Camp** (*our UCC camp outside Gorham, NH on the top of Pine Mtn.*)

Hello everyone!

My name is Tivvi Pare and I am the new Executive Director of Horton Center, the Outdoor Ministries Site of the New Hampshire Conference UCC. Though I am new to this role at camp, I am not at all new to Horton Center. I spent at least one week every summer at Horton Center from 3rd grade through the summer following my high school graduation and have been on staff in various roles since. I even got to be a staff member for a week at Rock Point with the VT Outdoor Ministries group in 2017. I am excited to connect with Vermont churches, families and youth to invite you all to come experience the magic of an extravagant camp welcome and loving Christian community in the splendid White Mountains at HC. Please feel free to reach out to me to introduce yourself, ask questions about camp, or just to say hey! My email address is [tpare@nhcucc.org](mailto:tpare@nhcucc.org) and the camp phone number is 603-545-9660. I look forward to getting to know you soon and seeing you up at Horton Center this summer!

Shalom, Tivvi Pare (she/her)

Executive Director of Horton Center NHCUCC

**[www.hortoncenter.org](http://www.hortoncenter.org)**

## SERMON TALKBACK

Have you ever heard Rev. Mark say something in his sermon that piqued your interest or curiosity? Did you ever hear a sermon where you wanted to argue a bit about what was said or have a deeper conversation around the themes and lessons gleaned from God? Do you ever just want to belong to a group that supports each other and talks about significant issues of life and faith? Did you ever want to go to a group and receive free coffee and goodies? Well, if you answered yes to any of these questions, then feel free to come to Sermon Talkback every Tuesday morning from 8:30 to 10am. We get 15 to 25 people each week in the Marvin Lounge and we have some pretty enlightening conversations. We laugh a lot, and when someone is in need of some extra support, we give it.

## COFFEE CLATTER

Do you like to talk? Do you like to drink coffee and enjoy a muffin or scone? Well if you do, then come to Martone's on Friday morning from 8-9am for a time of communing with other folks from the church. There are no pre-arranged subjects or study materials so come and bring up anything you'd like to discuss and be assured, there will be others interested in expressing their opinion!

## CHRISTIAN BRIDGE

On the first and third Fridays of every month, we meet in the Marvin Lounge to have some fun playing bridge. There are all types of skill sets playing and we have snacks, drinks [non-alcoholic] and fun! In February, we will meet on Feb 1 and 15 from 1:30 – 4pm. We generally have two to three tables and play two to three rounds. The high score gets a free homemade jam from the minister's stores. We are also blessed to have a number of non-church players who just come to play, laugh and enjoy life. This is a great group to bring a friend.

## WEDNESDAY NIGHT SEARCHERS

Our Searchers Group is currently studying *The Awakened Brain* by Lisa Miller. In her book she proposes scientific proof that religion and spirituality are not only a part of humanity's DNA but both help mitigate better than any other form of treatment the negative aspects of depression and anxiety. The subject matter allows anyone to come and participate in the discussion whether or not you have read the book or come to all sessions. We have just discussed the first two chapters so there is a lot more material to go over.

Once we complete the book, or if the group so desires, we will turn our attention to the 4th season of *The Chosen*, a great series of presentations on Christ's life and ministry. They are very well done and if possible, starting on February 21, we will watch an episode each week and discuss it. Be sure to avail yourself of this tremendous group and bring a friend with you. We meet every Wednesday night from 7-9pm in Marvin Lounge.

## MARCH BIRTHDAYS

LAGRANGE, Arthur	03/01	CLARK, Lisa	03/10
JOHNSON, Dave	03/02	STAPLETON, Renee	03/10
FRISBIE, Bart	03/03	JOHN, Liam	03/11
VOLKER, Beth	03/03	SHARP, Joshua	03/12
BLACKMAN, Bruce	03/04	TRUAX, Faith	03/17
MARTHALER, Betty	03/04	HARTMANN-FERLAND, Avery	03/18
MARTHALER, Tony	03/04	PETTINGILL, Siobhan	03/18
OWENS, Izzy	03/04	GOODHEART, Cathie	03/19
RODDY, Jonathan	03/05	GRENON, Mara	03/20
BICKFORD, Bill	03/06	TAYLOR, Toni	03/21
BURNETT, Donna	03/06	STAPLETON, Emmerson	03/24
LEACH, David	03/06	WARK, Caitlin	03/25
MOOS, Makaylah	03/06	JONES, Bill	03/26
WARREN, Beth	03/06	PALMER, Sean	03/26
BLAKE, Bethany	03/07	SHEARER, Thomas	03/27
BERO, Parker	03/08	WERMER, John	03/29
DOOLEY, Jen	03/08	CUNNINGHAM-FIRKEY, Eva	03/31
SINKEWICZ, Amanda	03/09	STONE, Elizabeth	03/31



**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:**

**~First Sunday of Each Month~  
One Service at 10am**

with Holy Communion and Sanctuary Choir

**~Other Sundays Throughout the Month~**

**8:30** - In-person and streamed via [youtube.com/c/fcej](https://youtube.com/c/fcej)

Music: Bethany Blake directs our Sanctuary Choir and provides accompaniment

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

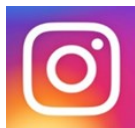
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