



SPIRIT @ FIRST Monthly Newsletter

FIRST
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH *of Essex Junction*

Love. Serve. Grow.

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YOUR PASTOR'S PONDERINGS...

My wife knows how much I love Amy Grant's music and so when she saw that she was coming to the Flynn, she bought tickets as a sweet surprise. Naturally, I was thrilled and loved the concert, especially the second set where she focused on her Christian music for it offered an evangelical freedom to an aspiring minister who grew up in a formal, stayed church. Blame Amy for my zeal and energetic sermonic offerings.

As the day of the concert approached, I realized the only date she was performing was a Church Council night: a meeting I rarely if ever miss! After talking with Church President Judy Larrabee (who did not go to the same concert because of the conflict) she assured me it was okay to attend the concert. With little reluctance, I happily went, knowing that I would miss the by-law discussion as well as the West Wing rental space discussion and a few other choice and important topics.

The meeting went long and the discussions were heartfelt with lots of amendments and emotions, but there was civility and respect amongst everyone present and we moved forward on some very important decisions. It was a good congregationalist meeting and a tribute to the maturity of our congregation and church leaders! All without me.....

We are in the process of moving to where "without me" will become a reality as FCCEJ moves forward with a new Senior Pastor. Council has affirmed an outstandingly talented Pastoral Search Committee and Rev. Paul Sangree of the Vermont Conference will be here on November 2nd for our Special Congregational Meeting discussing the Succession Model of pastoral transitions. Rev. Sangree will preach that day before the meeting and then be available for questions at a lunch after Fellowship Hour. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Soon the Pastoral Search Committee will be meeting and creating a Church Profile so that clergy looking for a call can read all about us and make the decision to send their profile to us for review. For good practice sake, and obvious pastoral boundaries, I will not be taking any part in FCCEJ's search for a new minister: no opinions, no suggestions, no questions. Your new Senior Minister and I will overlap for a short period of time so that they might understand some of the dynamics of the church and its surrounding community. Then I'll leave you with your new Senior Pastor who will be responsible for all the services, pastoral care, and administration of this vibrant, healthy family of faith.

Naturally, people are wondering what the future will be like. Naturally, anxiety over the future will lead to reflection on all sorts of issues and some folks are already thinking and talking about these things. Naturally, people will be drawn to the comfortable. This is all part of the transition and is good. I would encourage all of you to participate in the questionnaires, discussions and meetings that will inevitably come. Everybody's opinion is important.

But the future will be bright and good. Your new pastor will love you as I have. Worship will be great. The love of our people toward each other will continue. And the church leaders who moved forward at the Council meeting when I was off enjoying Amy Grant will still be here and helping to run this great old church.

Looking forward to this mysterious, nerve wracking, Spirit-led transition with all of you,

Rev. Mark

SPECIAL SUNDAYS IN NOVEMBER

Communion will be on November 2nd at the single service at 10am.

It will be observed in the traditional way w/ the elements being passed out to the congregation.

GUEST PREACHER REV. PAUL SANGREE ~ One Service at 10am on November 2, 2025



We are blessed to have the Associate Conference Minister Rev. Paul Sangree from the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ preaching and helping officiate at Holy Communion on November 2. Rev. Sangree will be the staff person from the VTCUCC who will resource and guide our Search Committee as we embark on a process to hire a new Senior Minister. Paul has decades of experience in ministry and offers his expertise to FCCEJ as we enter the process. He is here to help explain the Succession Model that we will be voting on at our Special Congregational Meeting after the service. He will also be joining us for lunch for anyone with questions after Fellowship Hour.

DECORATING THE CHURCH FOR CHRISTMAS ~ November 23, 2025



After the second service, the Deacons welcome anyone who wants to help decorate the church for the Advent/Christmas season to join them in “hanging the greens.” We will hang the garlands, place the wreaths, put up the Christmas Tree with its lights and golden decorations, fill the window sills with Christmas candles, make sure the ribbons hang just right, and listen to Christmas music. We have fun so join us!

ADVENT BEGINS ~ November 30, 2025



In the Christian year, Advent is the beginning, a time when we see the faintest light shining through the darkness foreshadowing a time when God’s true light in Christ comes in the fullness of time and body to the earth. It’s a time when the Hebrew people were awaiting the advent of the Messiah to save them from aimlessness and sin. It’s a time when we remember and perhaps understand a bit how we wait for God to show us a way forward in the midst of our own darkness. The church will be decorated in burgundy this year and we will light the Advent Candle lifting up God’s promises of hope, peace, joy and love. It’s a time that ushers in the great celebration of Christ’s birth and everything that stands for in our lives. Invite your neighbors!

NEW MEMBER’S CLASS OFFERED

Do you like the values of love, justice, inclusion and diversity that we lift up as Christ’s teachings here at FCCEJ? Do you enjoy the warmth of community that we cherish here? Do you like the ways we feed and clothe people in need? Do you like the many groups and organizations that we partner with in order to create a more perfect union in Vermont, our nation and world? Do you love the music that comes from so many different and talented groups in our church? Or do you just love to come and sit in the sanctuary and soak up God’s presence? If so, then maybe its about time you join this great church. Both God and all of us need you to help us spread Jesus’ love around liberally to people who need it and to a world in desperate need of some tenderness and light.

You are invited to attend our New Member’s Class on Sunday, November 16 after the second service around 11:30am in the Marvin Lounge. Come and learn more about the UCC and FCCEJ in a relaxed setting with Rev. Mark and one of our Deacons. There will be child care and lunch will be provided for all. The class will last about an hour and a half.

DEACONS

With the busy start to the program year now behind us and the holidays in front of us, November is a great time to pause and be thankful. Thankful for the hustle and bustle back in the church building, the beautiful music of our many talented musical groups and offered up at our Community Concerts, our missions and ministry’s impact on our community, and possibly even for the excuse the chilly air gives us to curl up with a good book or a good friend. Perhaps you found one or both at the Craft Fest or the Thrift Shop?! And if you are looking for opportunities to connect, we’d love to have you join us later this month, on November 23rd after second service as we decorate the sanctuary for Advent. As always, if you or someone you know needs something, please reach out to your Deacons or church staff. We are here for you.

~ Allison Van Steensburg, Deacon

† ELIZABETH'S EPISTLE †

Faith Formation Offering

- ♦ The Heart to Heart Program through the Humane Society of Chittenden County has been selected for the 2025-2026 faith formation offering.

The Heart to Heart program allows you to symbolically sponsor an animal in HSCC's care while they wait for their new family. This is a great option for those who have room in their heart, if not in their home, to support HSCC and the more than 1,300 animals we care for each year. If the animal you sponsor is adopted during your week of support, your donation will transfer to their furry friends still in our care. (*More information found in the Narthex.*)

Please continue to use the white envelopes in the Narthex for the Faith Formation offering, or write "Faith Formation" on the memo of your check.

Volunteers Welcomed

- ♦ The recruiting for Faith Formation volunteers is an open invite.
If you have been attending FCCEJ for more than 6 months, you are qualified.
Reach out to Elizabeth at ChildrensMinistry@fccej.org.

November Dates to Remember:

- ♦ November 2nd ~ Spiritual friends
Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4
- ♦ November 9th ~ Peer groups
Haggai 1:15-2:9
- ♦ November 16th ~ Peer groups
Isaiah 12
- ♦ November 23rd ~ Peer groups
Jeremiah 23:1-6
- ♦ November 30th ~ All Family Worship

Prayer

"God of hope, you are changing the world with compassion and imagination, springing up love and new life all around. Teach us to wait with wonder by planting seeds of kindness and noticing signs of your presence growing among us." Amen. (miniRevolutions)

Gratefully,

Elizabeth - Children's Ministry Coordinator

MONTANA SERVICE TRIP



The Montana Service Team has been formed and now our fun begins! Planning is in full swing. Over the next eight months our team will meet monthly, fundraise, learn about the Blackfeet community, Global Volunteers, and get to know each other.

Our first Team meeting will be Sunday, November 9th after the 2nd Service. After that, our plan is to move to the first Sunday of each month after the Worship Service.

Meet Our Team: Lisa Clark & Betsy Weischedel (co leaders); Mark Mendes; Andrea Sharp; Laura, Betty & Lily Marthaler; Brenda Dawson; Cathy LaPierre and her daughter Danielle Charlebois; Wendy Wark & Bill Nedde; and Derek and Isaac Lyman.

Save the Date for our Annual Calcutta at the Catamount Center, our biggest fundraiser, Saturday, March 14, 2026. Lots of prizes are awarded throughout the evening. Tickets go on sale in early January.

We also want to say THANK YOU for supporting our BBQ take out lunch. The team raised almost \$1,000! Your generosity supports our team and we are so grateful.

MISSIONS



Join Vermont Interfaith Action's 10th Annual Statewide Convention!

Rooted in the Past with Hope for the Future

Wednesday, November 12 from 9:30am to 3:30pm.

This year, we're excited to gather in person at Hedding United Methodist Church in Barre, VT, with a hybrid option for those who prefer to join virtually.

The day includes:

- Inspiring stories and reflections on interfaith organizing
- A forward-looking report from our Executive Director
- Breakout discussions to explore key concerns and set priorities
- Engaging training and action planning
- A shared lunch with soup, salad, bread & dessert
- Hope-filled multifaith worship and celebration
- Connection with justice-minded people from diverse faiths across Vermont

We ask for a suggested donation on a sliding scale. No one will be turned away for lack of funds.

Whether in person or online, we hope you'll join us in building hope, joy, and agency for a more just Vermont.

Please register by Monday, November 9: <https://www.classy.org/event/10th-annual-statewide-convention/e737907>

HEALTHCARE UPDATE FROM BECCA BALINT

Dear Neighbor,

As you may know, there will be a dramatic reduction in Medicare Advantage plans available to Vermonters starting in 2026. If you are a Medicare Advantage member, you will need to make decisions about your insurance to avoid penalties and ensure you don't have a lapse in coverage. This can be overwhelming news, so I want to make sure Vermonters have all they need to navigate this change. Keep reading to learn more.

What's happening?

Two private insurers — UnitedHealthcare and Blue Cross Blue Shield (Vermont Blue Advantage) — recently announced they will not offer individual Medicare Advantage plans in Vermont as of January 1, 2026. A third insurance company, Humana, will continue to offer Medicare Advantage coverage but only in Bennington, Caledonia, Essex, Orange, Windham, and Windsor counties. Vermonters who live outside those counties will need to enroll in traditional Medicare, and could do so starting October 15, 2025, when the open enrollment period began.

What do I need to know?

UnitedHealthcare and Vermont Blue Advantage currently cover the majority of Vermonters enrolled in Medicare Advantage. These changes are disruptive and will leave tens of thousands of Vermonters with limited choices. Here are options and what available resources to navigate through these changes:

- Coverage on all current plans will continue through December 31, 2025.
- If you lose coverage under your current Medicare Advantage plan, you have the option to enroll in an alternative Medicare Advantage plan during the Medicare Advantage Annual Enrollment Period which is happening right now: October 15 through December 7, 2025.
- If your Advantage plan is discontinued in your area, you will need to enroll in traditional Medicare as well as a Part D plan for drug coverage. CMS requires drug coverage to avoid penalties.
- You will also have a Special Enrollment Period to get a secondary insurance plan, called a Medicare Supplement plan or Medigap. Medigap coverage is optional and there are several Medigap plans available with varying degrees of coverage. Should you choose not to get a Medigap plan, you will be responsible for the cost sharing amounts that Medicare A and B do not cover- this includes hospital deductibles, medical deductibles, and typically a 20% coinsurance for services.

...continued on next page

- The Special Enrollment Period for Medigap plans is also called “guaranteed issue open enrollment” and waives any underwriting. The period lasts for 63 days after your current coverage ends. This means you can enroll in Medigap until March 4, 2026.
- You must provide the discontinuation letter sent by your current insurer as proof you are eligible for guaranteed issue rights and the extended enrollment period. Please do not throw this letter away!

Who can help?

To accommodate the need for assistance, the Vermont Area Agencies on Aging have increased staffing of the Vermont State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) and Help Line at 1-800-642-5119. Counselors are available to answer questions, discuss individual needs, and provide information about Medicare options. Appointments with SHIP counselors are booking quickly. If you aren't able to meet with them before the end of open enrollment, you can also get information online at www.medicare.gov or by calling 1-800-MEDICARE which is staffed 24 hours/day, 7 days/week.

Remember to ask about Part D (prescription drugs) and Medigap plans if you are switching to original Medicare.

If you need assistance with a Federal Agency, please call the Vermont District Office at (802) 652-2450.

Sincerely,

Becca Balint, Member of Congress



As the winter cold creeps in, my thoughts and concerns turn to the many stray and feral cats and kittens who will be out in the cold without food or shelter. I am currently involved with trying to trap one stray cat and one feral kitten using Havahart Traps. Assuming I can capture them, they will spend some time in my heated basement in very large, open cages while I wait for foster homes to be found.

The stray will go to Queen City Cats (802.448.0120) and the feral will hopefully go to From Feral to Furever (fromferaltoforever@gmail.com), both great organizations. I just have to wait for these organizations to have room, meaning to find foster homes.

In addition, I have several insulated feral cat houses outside around my house. This way, if there are any cats or kittens in need in my neighborhood, they will have shelter from the cold. I don't know of any currently, but that could change in the coming months. If I do get a cat occupant, I will also provide wet and dry food and water. The wet food and the water will freeze quickly, so they must be replaced several times a day. Another advantage of providing these shelters is that sometimes they will be used by opossums. These poor creatures have a very tough time maintaining their body temperature, so you will often see them with parts of their ears and/or tails lost from frostbite. Some will recognize these shelters as a safe place to be, so they will crawl in to warm up.

If you are interested in providing feral cat shelters, they are easy to make. There are numerous online sites if you just Google, “How to make feral cat houses.” They can also be purchased online, but don't order the ones that need to be plugged in. These are a possible fire hazard. If you use straw (not hay) as insulation, that will suffice. I also have self-warming mattresses that I purchased through Chewy.com for about \$12 each. They radiate the cat's own body heat back onto the cat. I put these on top of the straw, and I change them frequently, especially if the house is being used because the mattresses get wet from snow on the paws. They're washable but should be air dried. I have a few scattered around inside the house and my indoor cats love them.

If you suspect you have a stray or feral cat in your neighborhood, please don't hesitate to contact me for advice and help. Try to get a picture of the animal if possible. Thanks, in advance, for your kindness!

ANNUAL CRAFT FEST & TOY DRIVE

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8TH

There are fun and fabulous opportunities for everyone at the Craft Fest!

Sweet Shoppe: We are looking for volunteers to make a wide variety of items, so bring out your creativity! Some suggested items include various breads, sweet rolls, cookies, donuts or donut holes, homemade candy/brittle/fudge, any type of bars, popcorn balls, and trail mix. If anyone is doing some canning, a jar or two of pickles, relish, jams & jellies or other items would be welcomed. We are especially looking for all kinds of pies—they are great sellers. Please make sure all contributions are individually wrapped (or in small portions) so no food is directly handled.

Luncheon: Thanks to all who signed up to bring in food and supplies for the Luncheon. Much appreciated. There are still slots open for butternut squash soup (vegetarian) and chili (vegetarian). Please stop by our table after the church services on November 2nd to sign up or contact Janne Giles to make or donate for any of the above food items at giles.janne52@gmail.com.

Accessory Room: Time to get out your jewelry boxes and make a donation. Donations can include pins, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. In addition, we will have a kids table, so any glitzy items include barrettes and headbands. The room includes donations of scarves, hats, & purses/bags. Remember we would love decorative boxes.

Nearly New: We are accepting donations through Friday, November 7th at 5pm which may be brought directly to the gym on the second floor. We are also looking for paper and reusable bags to use at the sale.

Crafters: We are pleased to be hosting the following crafters for your shopping enjoyment:

- **Terri Livak**—Quilted table runners, toppers and placemats, and original watercolors.
- **Sandy Plant**—Hand knitted hats, mittens, and scarves for all sizes and ages in all colors and types of yarn
- **Ginny Coe**—Knit items, hats, scrubbies, knit dolls, animals, and scarves.
- **Patrick Kelly/Maple State Guitars**—Handmade Cigar Box Guitars.
- **Cathy LaPierre**—American girl doll outfits, miscellaneous fun items for stocking stuffers, gifts for the person who has everything.
- **Genevieve King**—Handmade earrings, bracelets, and 3-D printed creations
- **Mark & Karen Mendes**—Handmade Nepalese women's empowerment products which helps street kids with a place to call home, get educated, and live safely with food, medical care and love. Items include bags, hand-felted scarves, puppets and other sundry products.
- **Pam Farnham**—Fused glass ornaments, jewelry, sun catchers, and magnets
- **Jen Ellis (Bernie's Mitten Maker)**—Handmade mittens from repurposed wool sweaters and copies of her book *Bernie's Mitten Maker*, winner of the 2023 Nautilus Silver Metal Award for best memoir.
- **Blue Spruce Grange**—Christmas ornaments and gift tags, adult clothing protectors, walker bags, gift card holders, embroidered greeting cards, counted cross stitch book marks, napkin holders, wooden deer and turkeys, wall hangings, baby blankets
- **Jane Sandberg**—Cards and original watercolors
- **Jessa Abbey**—Crocheted stuffed animals (turtles, octopi, and jellyfish) and key chains.
- **Carmella Cyr**—Sewers small needle books; granny square hats; garden gnome decor sticks; garden decor sticks - mushrooms, flowers, creative designs, junk journal pages, needle felted ornaments and magnets.
- **Paula Wight**—Sock gnomes and holiday shelf sitters made from reclaimed wood.

Silent Auction:

Sincere thanks to the following businesses who donated to the Silent Auction:

- *Park Street Cuts*
- *Mango Thai*
- *Martone's*
- *Auto Zone*
- *On Tap*
- *Panera*
- *Lexi Nails & Spa*
- *ACE Hardware*
- *Uncommon Grounds*
- *Maliwan Restaurant*
- *Mimmos Italian Restaurant*
- *Village Hardware - True Value*
- *Chunk & Juniper Pet Salon*
- *Rays Seafood*
- *West Meadow Farm Bakery*
- *El Gato*
- *Essex Cinemas*
- *Mad Taco*
- *Park Place*
- *McGillicuddy's*
- *Spirit of Ethan Allen*
- *Rocky Ridge*
- *McKenzie Meats*
- *Vespa's*
- *The Dog & Cat*
- *Phoenix Books*
- *JP Restaurant*
- *Box Car Bakery*
- *Maplehurst Florist*

The following are items we have so far for you to bid on:

- *Moscow Mule Basket*
- *Fall Basket*
- *Easter Basket*
- *Blue Kitchen Basket*
- *Snowman Basket*
- *Mother's Basket*
- *Christmas Tea Basket*
- *New Year's Eve Basket*
- *Garden Basket*
- *Christmas Teddy Bear Basket*
- *Baking Basket*
- *Spa Basket*
- *Dog Basket*
- *Stamp Bag*
- *Soup Basket*
- *Vintage Train*
- *Vintage Glass Bowl*
- *Cat Basket*
- *Book Basket*
- *UVM Women's Basketball Basket*
- *Fiesta Basket*
- *Italian Centerpiece Bowl*
- *Treasure Chest Basket*
- *Red Wine Basket*
- *Wine & Accessory Basket*
- *Vermont Products Basket*
- *Entertainment Basket*
- *Hair & Nails Basket*
- *Maple Basket*
- *Men's Basket*
- *Ice Cream Basket*
- *Hallmark Keepsake Tin Village*
- *Pastor's Sermon*
- *Breakfast Group Basket*
- *Holiday Cookies Tray by Betty Busciglio*
- *Cooking Class w/Betty Busciglio*
- *Lasagna Dinner Basket*
- *Children's Bluey Basket*
- *Children's Outdoor Adventure Basket*
- *Heavenly Cents Thrift Store Gift Certificates*
- *Auto Zone Car Wash Basket*
- *McKenzie Meats/ Box O' Meat*

Toy Drive:

This year the Craft Fest Committee is asking for toy donations for our Giving Tree program. Many families are struggling to meet their basic needs, leaving toys far down on the priority list. This is where donating toys can make a significant difference. When you donate toys, you bring happiness to children in need and contribute to a more compassionate society. Your small act of kindness can brighten a child's life in unimaginable ways.

Please consider donating a craft project, Legos, stuffies, games, or a book for the toy drive—please leave them unwrapped. Currently we have over 60 children that need our help. We are also expecting more families to reach out next month for assistance. Your generosity is greatly appreciated. As an added incentive, everyone who brings an unwrapped toy to the Craft Fest will be entered into a drawing for a special gift basket.

Craft Fest is the biggest fundraiser of the year for FCCEJ and we need your help! Volunteer sign ups will be available in Fellowship Hall on November 2nd after worship. We need volunteers to greet shoppers, help in Nearly New, set up on November 7th, and clean up on November 8th. Also need Nearly New volunteers for the gym on Sunday November 9th. You may sign up at our table or contact Linda at lbogardus@myfairpoint.net. Thank you from the Craft Fest Committee!

Cathy LaPierre, Mary Gratton, Gail Cromie, Susan Turner, Maureen McKenzie, Janne Giles, Ruth Casey, and Linda Bogardus



OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

We are an active church with events, groups using our facilities, and myriad ways that we help people in our community and beyond. With such a dynamic community, there are many opportunities to help nurture and grow our ministry and live into Christ's way. OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS lifts up specific needs of our church and ways our members and friends can help. If you feel called to help in one of these asks, please call Jen or Mark at the church office at 802-878-5745. And thanks in advance!

We are looking for someone to.....

1. Snow Angels. Snow Angels assist with keeping our walkways and steps clear and salted during our snowy season. When we expect significant snow fall, we send an email to the group to see who is available for that particular instance. If you're able and willing, we'd love to add you to the team.
2. Coordinate the Easter Breakfast. Plenty of people like to pitch in and help with this project that FCCEJ has been doing for decades. It involves securing and organizing the volunteers to plan, cook, and then clean up after the Easter Breakfast.
3. Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper. This relatively recent addition to the church's schedule is when we gather to enjoy a pancake meal for dinner the night before Lent begins (Tuesday, February 17th, 2026). We need someone to coordinate this event.
4. A Meal Ministry Team. We are hoping to restart the Essex Eats Out Program where we offered a free meal to anyone who walked in on the first Friday of each month. It was a highly successful program. In this uncertain time where people are struggling with food insecurity and loss of benefits, the need is definitely there.
5. Audio/Visual Support. We're looking for a few more people to assist with streaming our worship services. It is not difficult or time intensive. Streaming our services is crucial to reaching out and providing a connection to folks who no longer drive AND to people checking us out before they come in person. We also receive requests to stream memorial services, so that family and friends who are not able to attend in person may still celebrate the life of their loved one.

STEWARDSHIP

As Thanksgiving approaches, what are YOU grateful for?

Reverend Mark talks a lot about gratitude, and how important it is in our daily lives. I'm sure that we're all grateful for our families and friends, for our pets, for the roof over our heads and the food on our tables. But do we thank God often enough for these things? And do we thank God for other, seemingly less important things?

For example, when we witness a beautiful sunset or a rainbow, when we see deer grazing in the field, when we see migrating geese soaring overhead and other such things...do we whisper, "Thank you God?" It may seem silly, but I encourage you to try it...it really does feel good. Actually, when I see the geese I whisper, "God speed." Nature is one of God's greatest gifts and should be cherished.

So, in this season of giving thanks, please remember our church and all that she provides ~ a family who cares about and watches over us, loving and thought-provoking spiritual guidance, music that lifts our spirits and touches our souls and so much more!

When I first came to this church in 1984, I had no idea what pledging was or how important it was for the very existence of the church, making up 75% of our annual budget. I figured that there must be some "entity" that was supporting the church and that the few dollars I put into the offering plate each week was just fluff. When I did finally "get" it, I decided that I would pledge to the church what was leftover after I paid the "real" bills, like the electric bill, cable TV, phone, food, etc.

For many years now, I have pledged based on what this church means to me. Here I feel a true sense of belonging, especially in the choir. I have served on many committees because I want to give back just a small portion of what I have received. This is my spiritual home, and it always will be.

I'm sure that you too are grateful for this church, so I encourage you to pledge what you can, based on that gratitude, and around your table this Thanksgiving, please remember to thank God for First Church.

~ Beth Volker, Stewardship Committee Member

HEAVENLY CENTS THRIFT SHOP NEWS

Once again, we had another successful switchover to Fall/Winter, with record sales the first Saturday after Switchover, \$1,100! We so appreciate the continued support of our community, both those who donate and those that shop. Our switch from Wednesday's 4-7 to Thursday's 3-6 has also brought improved sales. The Shop hours are Tuesday, 10-1, Thursday 3-6 and Saturday 10-1. We will continue to be open on the first Sunday of the month for churchgoers to bring their donations as well as shop.

We appreciate the continued support our community at large provides and always welcome donations of gently used items in good resalable quality. 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 Sandy Tallman, 802-879- 0665.

Heavenly Food Pantry

Volunteers Wanted

Does performing random acts of kindness feed your soul? Do you have a valid driver's license and working vehicle? Do you enjoy meeting new people? Yes? Well, we want you!! Please consider volunteering some time with the FCCEJ food pantry. Volunteer times are flexible—you may choose what works for you.

Our pantry offers deliveries to families, a specialty service not offered by other food pantries in the area. It doesn't take long and it's easy. You arrive at FCCEJ on a food distribution day at a time that works for you, a cart full of groceries is loaded into your vehicle and then you drop it off at a client's home. It's maybe an hour of your time door to door, but usually less.

If deliveries aren't your thing, then consider being a "personal shopper". You assist pantry clients while they select items and volunteer alongside a friendly crew. You have a feeling of walking into "Cheers" (without the alcohol). The team members say hello and know your name! There's laughter, camaraderie, and fellowship. Other options are stocking shelves or meeting the Vermont Foodbank truck for unloading. Interested? Please contact a Food Pantry Committee member or the church office and ask to be added to the Food Pantry Distribution email group.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me in... I tell you the truth, whenever you did this for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me. Matthew 25:35-40

Food Pantry Days/Hours:

Distribution Days:

2nd Monday 5 – 7:30 pm

4th Thursday 3 – 6 pm*

*November and December are 3rd Thursday due to the Holidays

Food Stocking and Sorting:

Mondays at 9am

Wednesdays at 8am

Critical Needs

The Food Pantry continues to need reusable shopping bags as well as baked beans, canned veggies, chunky soups, canned pasta, peanut butter, and cereal. With the discontinuation of SNAP benefits (equivalent to food stamps) in November, we are anticipating a substantial uptick in food pantry clientele and appreciate any and all non-perishable food items as well as sundries.

****We've had a significant increase in requests for feminine hygiene products - specifically pads (moderate, heavy, and extra absorbent). Imagine having to choose between feeding your children or purchasing feminine hygiene products because you can't afford both.**

Food Pantry Committee Members:

Anita Guild, Val Gabert, Suzanne Reardon, Mary Richer, Betsy Weischedel, Lisa Clark, Mark Mendes, Mary Morris

SERMON TALKBALK

Join us every week on Tuesday mornings to discuss Sunday's message and the various elements of the service from the previous week. The group discusses a wide variety of subjects, eats scones from a masterful pastry chef, enjoys fresh coffee, tea, or water, and simply enjoys being in community together. Everyone is welcome. Tuesdays at 8:30-10am in Marvin Lounge.

COFFEE CLATTER @ MARTONE'S—Every Friday Morning from 8-9am

Each week, there is a group of five to ten people that come together to enjoy coffee, a breakfast goodie, enjoyable company, and conversations about whatever people want to talk about, including politics and religion! We meet at Martone's from 8-9am and everyone pays their own way. Everyone is welcome to come and tell us what you really think! Everyone is welcome to not only come but to bring a friend.

LUNCHTIME BOOK GROUP

The midday book group has chosen *Book Club for Troublesome Women*, by Marie Bostwick for November.

The Book Club for Troublesome Women is a humorous, thought provoking, and nostalgic romp through one pivotal and tumultuous American year--as well as an ode to self-discovery, persistence, and the power of sisterhood.

We will meet in the Marvin Lounge on Monday, November 17 at 11:30am.

Newcomers are always welcome. Bring your lunch if you'd like and join us for the discussion.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT SEARCHERS

On Wednesday, November 5, the Searchers group will begin reading & discussing "*The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*". Co-authors Douglas Abrams, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu share their discussion on the nature of joy and the methods to achieve it in the face of adversity. The Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of Tibet, and Archbishop Tutu, a leader in the fight against apartheid in South Africa, bring their experience in overcoming adversity and finding joy in challenging circumstances. Their collaboration offers an intersection of Buddhist and Christian perspectives, informing the book's thematic exploration of *The Role of Adversity and Suffering in Personal Growth*, *The Practice of Forgiveness, Gratitude, Generosity*, and *The Nature and Sources of True Joy*.

Wednesday evenings at 7pm in Marvin Lounge. Books are available in the church office for \$15 each.

BRIDGE FOR FUN

Looking for a friendly game of bridge where there is a wide variety of skill levels and yet everyone present is just there to have some fun? We have it at FCCEJ! We have snacks and coffee and usually get a couple of tables. We play three rounds of six hands and even have a prize for the high score: home made jam from our pastor! We play from 2:30 to 4pm on the first and third Friday of each month and the group is open to both members of the church and community folks that are just looking for a good time playing some bridge. It is a good group to bring a friend.

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

ALLEN, Judy
BUCHSPICS, Lew
CARNEY, Tim
DEWEY, Sam
FAUX, Ron
FRANKENBURG, Peter
GILES, Howard
GORNIAC, Aaron

GROVE, Mary-Ellen
HARRIS, Anne
ISHAM, Easton
LAPIERRE, Cathy
MATT, Sarah
MILLAR BARLOW, Louise
MOOS, Jessica
OWENS, Edward

PORATTI, Beth
SMITH, Frank
STEIN, Am
TALLMAN, Sandy
TURNER, Sally
WARK, Wendy
WOLINSKY, Ava

GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

This is a time of the year during which the loss of someone we love can be particularly painful. The shortening of daylight hours and the approaching holidays can be somewhat overwhelming. It is our hope that offering a monthly support group may be helpful to you or someone you know - and possibly a source of healing. You are welcome to come for yourself or to come learn how to better support a grieving family member or friend. You can just sit and listen if you don't want to talk. We trust learning will occur through our sharing. There is a wisdom in the group!

This is an open group. So you, along with any friends, family members and neighbors are invited to join us. All are welcome!

Sharon Dettenrieder and Mary McHugh are facilitating this group. Both have personal experience with loss along with professional education and experience in leading grief support groups.

Wherever you are along this road of grief, may you experience God's healing presence and love. It is a hard time, but a sacred time. Grief Support Group meets the 2nd Thursday of each month. Next meeting is Thursday, November 13 at 10am in Marvin Lounge.



Wow! It's that time of year again. FCCEJ will have the opportunity to provide Christmas gifts to children in our community through the Giving Tree. There will be a "tree" set up in the Narthex with gift tags on it as well as virtual tags on Sign Up Genius starting on Sunday, November 23. Tags will be available till November 30.

Each child will receive three gifts – two articles of clothing and one toy, book, game or gift card. Once again, if you or your family wants to purchase all three gifts for a child, you will have that option. **Remember to indicate on the sign-ups which tag number/letter you select so that the gift goes to the correct child.**

There is always great anticipation around the Giving Tree in our community.

We hope you will join us again in making this Christmas a season of hope and love for many families in the City and Town of Essex and Westford.

COMMUNITY CONCERTS @ FIRST



Please join us for a solo performance by acclaimed pianist, Diana Fanning, on Sunday, November 16th at 3pm in the Sanctuary.

Ms. Fanning has toured extensively as a solo performer and chamber musician throughout the U.S. and in England, France, Austria, Switzerland, Holland, the Czech Republic, Canada and Germany. Locally, she has performed on numerous occasions as a concerto soloist with the VSO and was featured as soloist in a performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in the debut concert of the Champlain Philharmonic Orchestra. She can also be heard frequently over Vermont Public Radio,

and she is an Affiliate Artist at Middlebury College. Her list of accomplishments goes far beyond this list. For more information, please visit her website at <https://community.middlebury.edu/~fanning/>

We are very fortunate to be able to bring such a talented and renowned performer to our community, so we hope you will take advantage of this opportunity.

Tickets can be purchased through Seven Days at <https://sevendaystickets.com/e/diana-fanning-piano/tickets> or by calling the Church office at (802) 878-5745. Suggested ticket price is \$20, children 12 and under are admitted free. A portion of the concert proceeds will benefit the Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund.

First Congregational Church of Essex Junction



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Essex Junction, VT 05452
Phone: 802-878-5745
Email: welcome@fccej.org

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP:

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

with Holy Communion and Sanctuary Choir ~ Spiritual Friends for PreK-5th

~Other Sundays Throughout the Month~

8:30am - In-person & streamed via YouTube

Music: Bethany Blake directs our Sanctuary Choir and provides accompaniment

10:15am - In-person—Faith Formation for PreK - 8th

Music: Finally @ First Praise Band ~ Streamed on the 3rd Sunday of each month

VISIT US ONLINE:



FCCEJ.ORG



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youtube.com/c/FCCEJ