



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 **Website:** www.fccej.org



First Service



The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction
The Third Sunday of Advent
December 14, 2025

Our worship opportunities for December 2025 are as follows:

December 14:

1st Service Blue Sunday and Healing Service; 2nd Service Christmas Pageant

December 21st:

ONE Service at 10am w/ Christmas Cantata, Currier Bells and Joyful Noise

December 24th:

5pm—Family Service with Guest Story Tellers

9pm—Lessons and Carols w/ Pre-Service Concert @ 8:30pm

11pm—Communion, Carols & Finally @ First Praise Band

All three services are candlelight services with the sacred birth story shared

December 28th:

ONE Service at 10am with The Blessing of the Bears and Carol Sing



A BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE ~ A TIME FOR HEALING

The Blue Christmas service acknowledges that Christmas is one of the hardest times of the year. Christmas' emphasis on family, joy, giving, and good cheer can be difficult for those who have experienced death, broken relationships, depression, illness, unemployment, and addictions. This Blue Christmas service recalls the darkness the Israelites went through as they waited for the Messiah and reminds us that through the darkness God is there with care, love and an abiding presence AND offers us a chance for healing.

Order of Worship

Prelude

Recit de tierce, from Mass for the Convents

François Couperin

An Extravagant Welcome and Announcements

Rev. Mark Mendes

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

The Deacon's Greeting

Deacon Maureen McKenzie

Our Deacon will welcome everyone to our community of faith; ask if anyone has special joys to share; invite any guest to introduce themselves if they want to, and encourage anyone to fill out the welcome sheet found in the pew to lift up any needs and place it in the offering plate.



Introit

Mama Who Bore Me

Steven Sater/Duncan Sheik

Lighting the Third Advent Candle of Joy.....Heavenly Food Pantry Committee & Volunteers

Call to Worship..... Deacon Maureen McKenzie

Leader: Christmas is a time of great emotions, emotions of joy ***and*** sadness. We celebrate our families ***and*** miss those no longer with us. We eat our fill ***and*** are conscious of those with no food. We are warmed by Christ’s birth story ***and*** find ourselves in the same darkness the Israelites felt. Know that in times of sorrow, God is present.....

People: in the embrace of loved ones,

Leader: in words spoken with compassion,

People: in the quiet places of the heart, in recalled, treasured memories.

Leader:in seeing our loved ones live on in our children and grandchildren.

People: in the warm joyful tears of tenderness.

Leader: Yes, God is there....and God is here. Come, gracious God. Come in quiet hope. Come in gentle assurance. Come in tender mercy. Come with healing to make us whole.

Deacon’s Prayer of Invocation Deacon Maureen McKenzie

*Opening Carol	<i>Our God Our Help in Ages Past</i>	Insert
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Welcoming our New Members	Insert
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- Samantha Caruso
- Matt & Lara Kalix-Crisafi [Ernest and Maia]
- Mike & Suzanne Lawrence
- Bill Nedde
- Cathy Stroeher [joining in absentia]
- Sallie Wager [Dave]

People: Samantha, Matt, Lara, Mike, Suzanne, Bill, Cathy and Sallie, 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 our church. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we continue to grow together in God's knowledge and be witnesses of Christ’s love in this world.

Anthem

Sing We All Noel

Gordon Young

Scripture Reading for Blue Sunday

23rd Psalm

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A Litany of Remembrance

At the end of the litany, everyone is invited to come forward to light a candle of remembrance for someone they have loved or for a circumstance that makes this season difficult. Light the candle saying their name or situation out loud if you would like and then return to your seat.

Leader: We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices, the memories that bind them to us in this season.

People: May God's eternal love surround them and all of us.

Leader: We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking God for the gift of peace.

People: Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.

Leader: We light this third candle to remember our faith and the gift of hope that the Christmas story offers. We remember Jesus came to personally know human life, to teach us how to find positive meaning out of the pain and promises us a place and time of no more suffering.

People: Let us remember Jesus our friend, who shows us the way, who brings us truth, and who bears the light.

*Everyone is invited to come forward
To light their own candle of remembrance.*

***Christmas Carol**

In the Bleak Midwinter

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A Scripture for Healing

Luke 17:11-19

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A Time for Healing

An Invitation for Personal Healing

At this time Rev. Mark will ask all those who are in need of healing to come forward and kneel or stand at one of the healing stations for a personal prayer of power and healing. Then return to your seat.

While people are receiving their prayers for healing the congregation is welcome to focus your thoughts and prayers for healing on them and softly sing the following hymns:

What a Friend We Have in Jesus # 506

There is a Balm in Gilead # 553

Amazing Grace # 547

Take My Life, God, Let It Be # 448

A Concluding Prayer of Healing and Unison Lord's Prayer

for our selves,
our loved ones,
our community,
our nation,
and our world.

Unison Lord's Prayer (trespasses)

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.

Closing Scripture

Matthew 11:28-30

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Offering Our Gifts to God

Invitation, Offering, and Prayer of Dedication

Offertory

Offertoire sur les grands jeux
from Mass for the Convents

François Couperin

***Doxology**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One. Amen.**

***Closing Hymn**

Joy to the World

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*Benediction

Pastoral Litany of Benediction

Leader: May we be gentle with ourselves, remember that we are created in the image of God.

People: **May we go into the world with honesty and thanksgiving, embracing tears, laughter, and all that is good.**

Leader: May the protection of God comfort us, may the courage of Jesus sustain us, and may the tenderness of the Spirit embrace us, amen.

***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.

Postlude

Dialogue sur les grands jeux

François Couperin

*Please stand if you are able

- ◆ Sincere thanks to Bethany Blake, Denise Keating, Lily Pool, and the FCCEJ Sanctuary Choir for sharing their awesome musical talents with us this morning!

OUR PRAYER MINISTRY

If you desire prayers for yourself or a loved one; or if you wish for a call from a pastor, please contact welcome@fccej.org or call (802) 878-5745. Unless otherwise specified, prayer requests will be printed in the bulletin for a month.

Megs
Jane Piper
Gracie O'Malley & Family
Rob Robinson
Allysa Williams
Kathy & Mike Murray
Colleen Kelly and Family
Joe Shields
Heather Rogers
Sean Garvey

Josh Winslow
Victims of gun violence
and their families
Carol Daigle
Patty Giroux
Everyone experiencing uncertainty and fear
in their communities
All those affected by the violence in
Ukraine, Gaza, and around the world
Everyone that may be privately suffering

***The flowers on the altar this morning are given in celebration and appreciation
of this amazing FCCEJ Faith Family.***

Annual Reports Due

Please have your annual reports for each committee submitted to the office (welcome@fccej.org) no later than **Wednesday, December 31**. Word documents or in the body of an email is preferred. Please do not send Acrobat files—source files are required for consistent formatting in the complete report. **Please send only your FINAL draft to the office.** Contact Jen if you have questions or need assistance. Thank you!

Music Notes

Drop-In Choir

Come one, come all, to our next “Drop-In Choir” on January 3. Please arrive by 9:30 am to rehearse, and then join us during the service as we praise God through music! The sheet music will be provided at those warmups, and can also be requested ahead of time if you wish. Please note that Finally @ First Praise Band will be providing the music.

Joyful Noise Children’s Choir

Joyful Noise is singing 2 songs during the Christmas Pageant on December 14, and one song during the service on December 21!

Rehearsals will be in the West Wing:

Sunday, December 14: Pageant Sunday! 9:45-10:05 in the West Wing

Sunday, December 21: 9:30 - 9:50 in the West Wing

Questions? Contact Mindy Bickford mhinsdale5@gmail.com

Early Bird Calcutta Tickets

Early Bird tickets are now available for our 8th Cabin Fever Calcutta to be held on Saturday, March 14, 2026 at the Catamount Country Club. Each \$150 ticket includes a buffet dinner for two plus one Calcutta ball number. Those purchasing tickets prior to January 14th are entered into a drawing, to be held at the Calcutta, for a \$100 cash prize.

Letters to those who joined us last year were mailed late last week with information about how to purchase a ticket. There is also a table in Fellowship Hall where tickets can be purchased. For more information, contact Sharon Dettenrieder at Sharon.dettenrieder@gmail.com.

Proceeds from this event support our Intergenerational Service Trips. Watch for information in the spring about our 2026 domestic trip to the Blackfeet Reservation.

Grief Support Group

2nd Thursday of each month from 10 to 11:30am in Marvin Lounge.

This is open to anyone experiencing the loss of a loved one. The sessions are facilitated by Sharon Dettenrieder, MSN, RN and Mary McHugh, MAPS. Next session is January 8.

Altar Flowers

Flowers on the altar are a wonderful way to remember loved ones or celebrate a special day. We include a note in the bulletin about who donated the flowers and who/what they are honoring. Scan the QR code or use this link to sign up for Sundays in 2026:

www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0545A8AB2FAAF58-53196874-altar#/



Weekly Calendar: December 14—December 21

Please contact the church office with any changes or corrections

Sunday, December 14

Receiving New Members

8:30am: Blue Christmas/Healing Service—Sanctuary
10:15am: Worship w/Christmas Pageant—Sanctuary/
Streaming
11:30am: Youth Group—Youth Room
Confirmation—Marvin Lounge
1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
*2:30pm: The Vine Nepali Congregation—Sanctuary,
Fellowship Hall, Kitchen*

Tuesday, December 16

8:30: Sermon Talkback—Marvin Lounge/Zoom:
[<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89903982036>]
10am-1pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop
10:15am: Intermediate Tai Chi—Fellowship Hall
11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
7pm: Trustees—Marvin Lounge
Communications—2nd Floor Program Room

Thursday, December 18

8:30am: Food Pantry Organizing & Set Up—
Fellowship Hall, Kitchen
9am: FCCEJ Staff Meeting—Marvin Lounge
11am: Music Lesson—Sanctuary
11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Marvin Lounge
12pm: Music Lesson—Sanctuary
3-6pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop
Food Pantry Distribution—Fellowship Hall, Kitchen,
Sanctuary
5:30pm: Reiki Healing—Marvin Lounge
6pm: Music Lesson—Sanctuary
6:30pm: Cub Scouts Pack 630 —Fellowship Hall
7pm: Sanctuary Choir Rehearsal—Sanctuary

Saturday, December 20

8am: Give It A Go Support Group—Marvin Lounge
The Vine Nepali Congregation—Sanctuary, West Wing
8:30am: Weight Loss Support —Marvin Lounge
10am-1pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop
1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
GMKCS—Gym, 3rd Floor, Kitchen, West Wing

Monday, December 15

9am: Food Pantry Organizing—Fellowship Hall,
Kitchen, 2nd Floor Storage Room
11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
Lunchtime Book Group—Marvin Lounge
7:30pm: Group Victory—Marvin Lounge

Wednesday, December 17

8am: Food Bank Delivery—Fellowship Hall
10am: Missions Committee—Marvin Lounge
Bone Builders—Fellowship Hall
11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
5:30pm: Finally @ First Rehearsal—Sanctuary
6pm: Men At First Rehearsal—West Wing
7pm: BSA Troop 624—Fellowship Hall, Gym
Wednesday Night Searchers—Marvin Lounge

Friday, December 19

8am: Coffee Clatter—Martone's Deli
10am-6pm: Giving Tree Gift Distribution—
West Wing
10am: Bone Builders—Fellowship Hall
11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
1:30pm: Bridge Group—Marvin Lounge
*6pm: Burlington Amateur Radio Club—Fellowship
Hall, Kitchen*

Sunday, December 21

10am: Worship—Sanctuary & Streaming
1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
5pm: Marie Johnson Piano Recital—Sanctuary

Events in italics = Local Community Groups