



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



Christmas Eve—11pm



The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction
A United Church of Christ
Christmas Eve 2025 - 11pm
A Service of Celebration, Carols, and Communion

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder; and his name will be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end."
Isaiah 9:6-7

Prelude
Just a Girl Brandon Health & Lee Thoams Miller
Light of the World Lauren Daigle

An Extravagant Welcome and Announcements
*No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey
you are welcome in this place.*

The Deacon's Greeting
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.

Lighting the Christ Candle Lorinda and Riley Elliott

Call to Worship
Leader: We meet late in the evening during the darkest season of the year to proclaim our faith in the Light.
People: Jesus is the Light of the World.
Leader: We come together on this sacred night to proclaim our faith in an infant child born in Bethlehem so long ago.
People: Baby Jesus is the Incarnation of the Living God.
Leader: We marvel that despite Jesus being the Messiah, his family couldn't find a room in which to stay, used cloths strips and a dungy cave to attend to the child, witnessed smelly shepherds attest to their son's sacredness and fled for their lives to Egypt; despite all these indignities, we still proclaim Jesus to be God's Son.

People: Jesus is the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings and our Mighty God.

Leader: Things are not always what they seem. Tonight, we proclaim that despite appearances, Jesus continues to be the most influential, powerful person that ever walked this earth. His teaching continues to be the touchstone of human civilization; millions of people continue to personally experience his presence; the book about him remains the best selling book of all time; 2.5 billion people continue to worship Jesus, making his faith community the largest in the world.

People: So come, let us worship and soak in the presence of the Living God made known to us in Jesus Christ. Come, let us draw strength from the Source. Come, let us celebrate and sing *O Come All Ye Faithful*.

***Opening Carol**

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant.

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.

Come and behold him, born the King of angels.

O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation.

O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above.

Glory to God, all glory in the highest.

O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,

Jesus, to thee be all glory given;

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;

O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him,

O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Opening Scripture

The Prophecy of Jesus Christ

Isaiah 11:1-9

A Time of Confession

It is an ancient tradition of the church to ask for forgiveness of your sins and to amend all broken relationships before receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion. On this night of all nights, we confess as a community of faith and as individuals our shortcomings, hoping that Christ's continued entrance into our lives might create healthier and more joyful people.

Call to Confession

Leader: Come, let us cast our cares onto our Loving God. Come, let us bring our faults to the table. Come, let us offer our lies and self-deceptions to a Merciful Savior. Come, let us acknowledge all the ways we fall short of who God would have us be.

People: We lay before you O God, the ways we fail to follow in your way.

Leader: As a community of faith, come let us unite our hearts as one as we seek to follow in Christ's ways. Let us also come to lay our private burdens down so that we might leave this place unencumbered and ready to experience life.

Unison Prayer of Confession

All Knowing God, you know we work too hard and are exhausted. Only You know the many ways we neglect our families and friends. Only You know how much time we waste on our screens. Only You know the negative comments we say in our mind's eye against others. Only you know how our desire of things overshadows our desire to know you better. Only You know our insecurities and only You know how much we refuse to take good care of ourselves. We are a mess and need your guidance, God. Help us be better followers of you as we seek to re-create your world in Christ's image.

The Assurance of Pardon

Leader: Are we not lucky to have a God that continues to love us despite the ways we neglect ourselves and God's magnificent creation? Are we not lucky to have minds that can learn, bodies that can be strengthened and communities that can be changed for the better?

People: We are lucky that God has planted within the fabric of our being the ability to grow, change and mature. God continues to inspire us and Jesus gives us the strength, courage and wisdom to do better.

Leader: I declare, your sins forgiven. You are a new Creation. Go and celebrate God's birth and live joyously. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!!!

*Carol

Joy to the World

**Joy to the world! The Lord is come: let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Christ room, and heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.**

**Joy to the Earth! the Savior reigns! Let all their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.**

**Christ rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
The glories of God's righteousness
And wonders of God's love, and wonders of God's love,
And wonders, wonders of God's love.**

Christmas Prayer and Unison Lord's Prayer (trespasses)

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you

Pastor: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Pastor: Let us give thanks to God Most High.

People: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Pastor: Let us pray.....

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

Musical Response O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

**O Come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel..**

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Luke 2:1-20

Anthem by Finally @ First

Mary, Did You Know?

Lowry/Greene

A Brief Christmas Eve Meditation

Why a Baby?

Rev. Mendes

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

*Tonight, we will celebrate Holy Communion by intinction. The minister will direct everyone to come forward to receive the elements. If you are unable to come forward, one of the Deacons will bring the elements to you. The bread is gluten free and the grape juice is non-alcoholic. **Absolutely everyone is welcome at Christ's table!***

During Communion F@F will play What Child Is This by William Chatterton Dix

Spreading the Light of Christ

Rev. Mendes and Riley Elliott will light the Christ Candle and then pass Christ's light to the whole congregation. We ask each person to be careful with your candle. On the way out, please extinguish your candles and place them in the receptacles provided. Thank you.

Megan Shields will play the violin for one verse alone.

Then the congregation will sing three verses.

Then Megan will play one final verse alone.

*A Christmas Carol

Silent Night

Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright.

Round yon virgin, mother and child.

Holy infant so tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night, shepherd quake at the sight

Glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing alleluia.

Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light.

Radiant beams from thy holy face,

with the dawn of redeeming grace

Jesus, Lord, at thy birth. Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

*Pastoral Benediction

*Please stand as you are able

The evening offering will be taken on your way out. Please give generously in the basket provided so the vital work of our congregation and our outreach to those in need may continue unabated.

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

AND TO ALL A GOOD NIGHT!

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA DEDICATIONS

Jenny BournIn memory of Thomas Connelly
Ruth CaseyIn memory of Skip Casey
Bill CoddingtonIn memory of Lynn
Brenda DawsonIn memory of my parents
Jen & Rick DooleyIn memory of Harry Dooley, and Joe & Dot Pine
Riley & Lorinda ElliottIn memory of our parents
Noel FamilyIn memory of Carolyn Hawkes
Janne & Howard GilesIn memory of David & Anne Cozzens
Hoy FamilyIn honor of Guy and Sandra Stone
.....In memory of Thomas Hoy
Joanne IrwinIn memory of Ed & Virginia Irwin
.....In memory of Ed & Dorothea Hilbert
.....In honor of my children and grandchildren
David & Marie JohnsonIn memory of our parents
Mike & Suzanne LawrenceIn memory of Ruth Sumner and Ginny & Robert
Derek LymanIn memory of Phyllis Latuch & Phillis Buchanan
Laura MarthalerIn memory of Lillian Morris
Judy & Kevin McCullenIn memory of our parents
Rev. Mark MendesIn memory of George & Margaret Mendes
Sylvia NyhagenIn honor of friends and family
Elizabeth O'BeirneIn honor of my children, Robin and Noah
Linda Lou ParkerIn memory of Bruce
Jane SchneiderIn memory of Russ Schneider
Gorden & Lauren StarkeyIn memory of our parents, Gorden & Garnet Starkey,
and Rick Busciglio
Cathy StroeherIn memory of my mom, Muriel Lenhardt
.....In honor of my family
Beth VolkerIn memory of my parents, Charlie & Linda Volker,
and Joan McGrath Greve
Carl & Alison WermerIn memory of our parents
Arthur & Mary WinslowIn memory of Noel Winslow
Tobe ZalingerIn memory of Gary "Jake" Tomlinson

MINISTRY DIRECTORY

Staff

Senior Pastor: Rev. Mark Mendes [mmendes@fccej.org]

Ministers of Visitation:

Rev. Ron Faux [revronfaux@gmail.com] / Mary McHugh [mmmchugh@hotmail.com]

Children's Ministry Coordinator: Elizabeth O'Beirne [childrensministry@fccej.org]

Music Director: Bethany Blake [bblake@fccej.org]

Church Administrator: Jen Kelly [welcome@fccej.org]

Music

Chair of Music: Mindy Bickford

Finally @ First Director: Rick Dooley

Men At First Director: Bill Bickford

Officers

President: Judy Larrabee Pomainville

Vice President: Terry Stein

Financial Secretary: Ann Gray [finances@fccej.org]

Assistant Financial Secretary: Linda Bogardus

Treasurer: Dan Petherbridge [treasurer@fccej.org]

Assistant Treasurer: Matt Clark [mattclark48discovery@gmail.com]

Clerk: Brenda Dawson

Historian: Ann Gray

Internal Auditors: Betsy Weischedel, Alan Kinney

Committee Chairs

Christian Education:

Derek Lyman, Terri Livak—Co-Chairs

Communications:

Francis Gravel, Beth Warren—Co-Chairs

Deacons:

Alison Wermer, Judy McCullen—Co-Chairs

Finance & Pastoral Relations: Terry Stein

Hospitality: Sue Conti

Human Resources:

Judy Larrabee Pomainville

Missions: Ann Marie Sullivan

Nominating: Lauren Starkey

Stewardship: Kathryn Brennan

Trustees:

John Burnett, Rob Gibson—Co Chairs

Recognized Groups

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop: Sandy Tallman

Heavenly Food Pantry: Valerie Gabert