



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



The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction
The First Sunday after Christmas
December 28, 2025

The first Sunday of each month we celebrate the Lord's Supper with one unified service at 10am. The remaining Sundays of each month we offer two distinct worship services. Our first service, at 8:30am, is traditional with our Sanctuary Choir and organ music. Our second service begins at 10:15am and is more contemporary with music from our Finally @ First Praise Band. Our first service is streamed every week, and our second service is streamed on the third Sunday of each month. Our Faith Formation Program for PreK-8th grade occurs during our second service. Our nursery is open for children 6 months-3 years at both services (self-serve at 8:30 and staffed at 10:15).

<i>A Welcoming Community Accepting and Serving All In the Spirit of Christ</i>

Order of Worship

Prelude

As our organist moves to the last prelude piece, let us all begin to quietly center ourselves to enter into the spirit of worship.

An Extravagant Welcome and AnnouncementsRev. Mark Mendes

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

The Deacon's GreetingDeacon 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.

Call to Worship..... Deacon Andrea Sharp

Leader: The day of Jesus' birth is over and our lives are slowly returning to the normal rhythm of life.

People: **It is right and good to celebrate our Lord's birth and do so with abandon, joy and wonder.**

Leader: And yet, Christ's birth lives on in one of faith's unfolding dimensions. God's divine presence still surprises us and calls us to a life of humility, power and awe.

People: **Even though Christmas is over, we still welcome Jesus into our lives to guard, guide, and govern our behaviors.**

Leader: Come, let us worship the God that keeps on giving!!!

Deacon's Prayer of Invocation and Unison Lord's Prayer Deacon Andrea Sharp

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.

The Children's Message

The Blessing of the Bears

The Congregation Sings as the Children Come Forward

Jesus loves the little children,
all God's children of the world.
Whether young or old or new,
Jesus loves us through and through,
Teaching us to love all creatures in the world.

The Congregation Sings as the Children Return to Their Families

God has made us all a rainbow.
Colors dancing 'round and 'round.
In our hair and skin and eyes,
big and little, every size,
God has made us all a rainbow dancing 'round.

Unison Prayer of Blessing

Lord, creator of all things good, we lay before you the things we love best. We treat with reverence our treasures because they remind us of you. They are sacred, for in them you reside, living close to our hand, under our ear, and next to our heart. Thank-you, God, for stuffed animals and special items: may we never take for granted what you have given us. And may we always praise you for the gifts of life. Amen.

***Carol**

What Child Is This

What child is this, who, laid to rest on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping.
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste, to bring him laud, the babe the son of Mary.
Why lies he in such mean estate, where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste, to bring him laud, the babe the son of Mary.
So bring him incense, gold and myrrh, come peasant, King to own him;
The King of Kings, salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him.
This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste, to bring him laud, the babe the son of Mary.

Pastoral Prayer

A Time of Silence for Personal Prayer

Sharing Our Prayers with God and Each Other

***Carol**

Of the Parent's Heart Begotten

118

Offering Our Gifts to God

Invitation, Offering, and Prayer of Dedication

Offertory

***Doxology**

We Three Kings

We three kings of Orient are; Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star
O, star of wonder star of light, star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

***Carol**

Lo, How a Rose E're Blooming

127

Scripture Readings

New Testament Epistle Colossians 3:12-17 [page 201]

Gospel Luke 2:41-52 [page 59]

***Carol**

In the Bleak Midwinter

128

***Closing Carol**

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

129

***Benediction**

Pastoral Benediction

***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

***Please stand if you are able**

- ♦ A big thank you to Ed Guild for providing musical accompaniment this morning!
- ♦ All chairs of committees, officers and leaders of church recognized groups **MUST** get their annual reports into the church office [welcome@fccej.org] immediately or your pay will be docked accordingly!

***The flowers on the altar today are given by Beth Volker
in loving memory of John Denver who would have turned 82 on December 31st.***

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#/



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.

Thomas Cencer
Tatyana Szymanski
Shashannah
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 around the world
Everyone that may be
privately suffering

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!

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.

Early Bird Calcutta Tickets

Early Bird tickets are now available for our 9th 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 18th 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 with information about how to purchase a ticket. Starting in January, there will be 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.

Community Concerts @ First

The Community Concerts at First music series celebrates amazing artists from Vermont and New England and brings our community together. Community Concerts at First is an opportunity to hear great music and raise funds for FCCEJ and our community partners. All concerts are on Sundays at 3pm in the FCCEJ Sanctuary.

- ◆ January 11 ~ Tracy Grammer: Contemporary folk artist
- ◆ March 22 ~ Tom Cleary: Piano virtuoso accompanied by vocalist extraordinaire Amber deLaurentis
- ◆ April 26 ~ Ray Vega: Jazz legend w/ his multitalented Afro-pop group
- ◆ September (date TBD) ~ HairPeace: Americana, Indie Rock (They were amazing last year so we invited them back!)
- ◆ December 3 (tentative) ~ Skylark: Classical string ensemble (Members of the VSO)

Tickets: \$20 requested donation—children 12 and under are free.

Visit www.fccej.org to purchase tickets.

Free Dinner for Young Families

It's Friday night and you've had a long week and do NOT feel like cooking. On Friday, January 9, FCCEJ is hosting a free dinner for families with elementary-age children. No agenda, no program - just come and enjoy a meal that you don't have to cook or clean up! We're still finalizing the details, but the menu will probably be pasta. Vegetarian and gluten-free options will be offered.

5pm to 6:30pm in the Fellowship Hall.

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.

Stay Connected!

Our weekly EConnection contains timely information about the FCCEJ faith community including children/youth happenings, special events, links to online bulletins and worship services, and our current calendar.

Our monthly newsletter “SPIRIT@FIRST” is available by “snail mail” and email, as well as posted on our website.

You may provide your contact information via the Friendship Pad and indicate which communications you are interested in receiving. We promise not to overwhelm your inbox.

Weekly Calendar: December 28—January 4

Please contact the church office with any changes or corrections

<u>Sunday, December 28</u> 10am: Worship—Sanctuary & Streaming <i>1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i>	<u>Monday, December 29</u> 9am: Food Pantry Organizing—Fellowship Hall, Kitchen, 2nd Floor Storage Room <i>11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i> <i>7:30pm: Group Victory—Marvin Lounge</i>
<u>Tuesday, December 30</u> <i>11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i>	<u>Wednesday, December 31</u> <i>10am: Bone Builders—Fellowship Hall</i> <i>11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i>
<u>Thursday, January 1</u> New Year's Day—Office Closed <i>11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i>	<u>Friday, January 2</u> <i>11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i>
<u>Saturday, January 3</u> <i>8am: Give It A Go Support Group—Marvin Lounge</i> <i>The Vine Nepali Congregation—Sanctuary, West Wing</i> <i>8:30am: Weight Loss Support —Marvin Lounge</i> <i>1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i>	<u>Sunday, January 4</u> 10am: Worship—Sanctuary & Streaming 11:30am: Service Trip Team—Marvin Lounge <i>1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i>

Events in italics = Local Community Groups