



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 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
“Ask the Pastor Sunday”
February 8, 2026

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).

*A Welcoming Community Accepting and Serving All
In the Spirit of Christ*

Order of Worship

Prelude

Largo

G. F. Handel

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 Deacon Paula Sargent

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

*Berceuse
(excerpt)*

Charles Gounod

Call to Worship Deacon Paula Sargent

Leader: Come, let us gather together to celebrate life, unite in common purpose and seek to create a more just and loving world.

People: We offer ourselves up to this community knowing that our presence strengthens the ministry and calls us to participate in building Jesus’ kingdom in our little corner of Vermont.

Leader: Come, let us unite as we worship and praise our God.

Opening Epiphany Reading About Jesus

*Opening Hymn

Beautiful Jesus

44

Deacon's Prayer of Invocation and 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.

The Children's Message

Pastoral Prayer

Sharing Our Prayers with God and Each Other

A Time of Silence for Personal Prayer

A Musical Response

Lily of the Valley
(excerpt)

Wassily Sapellnikoff

Anthem

Soar Like an Eagle

Jay Althouse

New Testament Scripture Readings

Gospel

Matthew 5:13-20

The Beatitudes Continued

[page 3]

Epistle

I Corinthians 2:1-12

[page 128]

*Hymn

I Love to Tell the Story

522

Sermon

Ask the Pastor

Rev. Mark Mendes

Around the anniversary of Rev. Mark's Call to become our Senior Pastor, he provides a Sunday where members of the congregation are encouraged to ask him questions by writing it down on the sheet provided in the bulletin. The Deacons will collect the questions during the hymn immediately prior to the sermon. Everyone is invited to ask any question concerning FCCEJ, faith, Christian Ethics and life, theology, ecumenical or interfaith work, or anything else if appropriate in nature.

Offering Our Gifts to God

Invitation, Offering, and Prayer of Dedication

Offertory

Dona Nobis Pacem (congregation join in!)

376

***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.**

***Hymn**

Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us

583

***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

Tarantella

Felix Mendelssohn

***Please stand if you are able**

- ◆ A big thank you to Bethany Blake and the FCCEJ Sanctuary Choir, for providing the beautiful music 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.

Joe Shields	Elaine Tornello	Victims of gun violence and their families
Jeffrey Basiliere	Patty Geiger	Patty Giroux
Shatique Brown	Thomas Cencer	Everyone experiencing uncertainty and fear in their communities
Elizabeth Stone	Tatyana Szymanski	All those affected by the violence around the world
Mary Ellen Grove	Jane Piper	Everyone that may be privately suffering
Stephanie Repolle O'Flaherty	Gracie O'Malley & Family	
Friends and Family of Linus Kinner	Rob Robinson	
Audrey MacGibbon	Josh Winslow	
	Carol Daigle	

*The flowers on the altar today are given by Ginny Coe
In loving memory of her son, Tom.*

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- **Chili Grab-N-Go:** TODAY, February 8—After each service in Fellowship Hall
- **Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper:** Tuesday, February 17—6 to 7pm in Fellowship Hall
- **Ash Wednesday Service:** Wednesday, February 18—7pm in the Sanctuary
- **Daylight Saving Time Begins:** Sunday, March 8—Spring Forward or be late to church!
- **Cabin Fever Calcutta:** Saturday, March 14—5pm at Catamount Country Club
- **Community Concerts At First presents Tom Cleary & Amber deLaurentis:** Sunday, March 22—3pm in the Sanctuary
- **Seder Meal:** Saturday, March 28—6pm in the Fellowship Hall. Reservations are required—the event is free but seating is limited.
- **New Members Class:** Sunday, March 29—11:30am in Marvin Lounge

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 on our website. Please share your contact information via the Friendship Pad and indicate which communications you are interested in receiving.

Calcutta Tickets

Check out the Intergenerational Service Team table in Fellowship Hall and chat with a Team Member to learn more about their June trip to the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. Tickets for the 9th Cabin Fever Calcutta, to be held on Saturday, March 14th at the Catamount Country Club, support this service trip. Each \$150 ticket includes a buffet dinner for two plus one Calcutta ball number. For more information, contact Sharon Dettenrieder at Sharon.dettenrieder@gmail.com.

Free Dinner for Young Families

On the first Friday of each month, we are hosting a free dinner for families of elementary-age children. No agenda, no program—come and eat and visit with other families. Next dinner is Friday, March 6 from 5:30 to 7 in the Fellowship Hall. Menu TBA.

Bible Study: Esther

Join us in exploring the book of Esther. We will be using a study guide by Max Lucado - "You Were Made for this Moment." If you would like to order the study guide (\$11), please let Mary McHugh know or call the Church Office. The guide will be helpful, but you can join the study without it. Next sessions: February 13, March 13 and 27. 1:30 to 3pm in Marvin Lounge.

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 February 12.

CCAF presents Tom Cleary & Amber deLaurentis

Come and enjoy an afternoon of jazz, with Tom Cleary on piano and special guest Amber deLaurentis providing vocal accompaniment on Sunday, March 22 at 3pm in the Sanctuary.

A portion of the concert proceeds will support Age Well Vermont.

\$20 suggested donation, free for children 12 and under.

Tickets are available online with the link below:

<https://sevendaytickets.ticketsauce.com/e/tom-cleary-jazz-pianist>

Pastoral Search Update

The Pastoral Search Committee has had three meetings and made great progress in learning about the process through the VT Conference and Paul Sangree; elected officers; Chair: Cathy Shearer, Chaplain: Bob Driver, Secretary: Jen Dooley and also in setting the first few dates for focus group meetings to solicit everyone's input and thoughts about what is important in looking for our next FCCEJ Pastor. Please look for signups to attend a focus group coming in the next few weeks as we get that set up online and also if you would consider hosting a focus group in your home with 8-10 folks and two facilitators from the committee.

Pastoral Search Committee:

Judy Allen, Matt Clark, Jen Dooley, Bob Driver, Micah Heaney-Forbes, Marian Lawlor, Betty Marthaler, Laura Marthaler, Kaki McGahey, Amy McIntyre, Cathy Shearer

Weekly Calendar: February 8—February 15

Please contact the church office with any changes or corrections

Sunday, February 8 8:30* & 10:15am: Worship—Sanctuary & Streaming* 11:30am: Youth Group—Kitchen, Youth Room Music Committee—2nd Floor Program Room <i>1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i> <i>2pm: Mid-Point Meeting—Marvin Lounge</i>	Monday, February 9 9am: Food Pantry Organizing—Fellowship Hall, Kitchen, 2nd Floor Storage Room 11:30am: <i>Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i> 1pm: Food Pantry Set Up—Fellowship Hall, Kitchen, Storage Rooms 5:30pm: Food Pantry Distribution—Fellowship Hall, Kitchen, Sanctuary <i>7:30pm: Group Victory—Marvin Lounge</i>
Tuesday, February 10 8:30: Sermon Talkback—Marvin Lounge/Zoom: [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89903982036] 10:15am: Intermediate Tai Chi—Fellowship Hall 10am-1pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop <i>11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i> <i>6:30pm: BSA Three Rivers District Roundtable—Fellowship Hall, 2nd Floor Program Room</i> 7pm: Deacons—Marvin Lounge	Wednesday, February 11 <i>10am: Bone Builders—Fellowship Hall</i> <i>11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i> 5:30pm: Finally @ First Rehearsal—Sanctuary 7pm: Searchers—Marvin Lounge BSA Troop 624—Fellowship Hall
Thursday, February 12 10am: Grief Support—Marvin Lounge <i>11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i> 3-6pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop <i>6pm: Music Lesson—Sanctuary</i> 7pm: Sanctuary Choir Rehearsal—Sanctuary	Friday, February 13 8am: Coffee Clatter—Martone's Deli <i>10am: Bone Builders—Fellowship Hall</i> <i>11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i> 1:30pm: Bible Study—Marvin Lounge
Saturday, February 14 <i>8am: Give It A Go Support Group—Marvin Lounge</i> The Vine Nepali Congregation—Sanctuary, West Wing <i>8:30am: Weight Loss Support —Marvin Lounge</i> 10am-1pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop <i>1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Marvin Lounge</i> GMKCS Lunar New Year Celebration—Fellowship Hall, Kitchen	Sunday, February 15 8:30 & 10:15am: Worship—Sanctuary & Streaming 11:30am: Confirmation—Marvin Lounge <i>1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall</i>

Events in *italics* = Local Community Groups

LENT at FCCEJ

SHROVE TUESDAY PANCAKE SUPPER

Back when fasting and sacrifice were the primary ways in which one accessed and centered on God, the night before Lent began, people feasted on the things not allowed during the season. Sugar, fat, and anything else in the house that wouldn't last for the six weeks of Lent. Now we experience and find God in non-sacrificial ways; through acts of kindness, intentional Christ-like behaviors, spiritual disciplines, reading scripture, prayers, sowing peace, and simply spending more time communing with the Divine. **HOWEVER**, we still like the idea of having a Pancake Dinner with lots of sweet toppings and plenty of bacon! Join us for a church-wide meal on Shrove Tuesday, February 17 from 6 to 7pm. Invite a friend that likes to eat!

ASH WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 18 AT 7PM

After the celebration of Easter, Lent was the first season that grew up in the church. It was a time for folks interested in joining the church to learn about what it meant to follow Jesus and be a part of his movement. Many such programs lasted a year with Lent being the culminating part of the process where fasting and prayer led to a public decision and baptism on Easter morning. Ash Wednesday marked the beginning of this final period where one dedicated themselves to Jesus. Wholly putting trust in Jesus meant that even in death when you turn to dust, you belong to and are a part of Christ Jesus. The service highlights our dependence on God for life and eternity. From death to resurrection, from Lent to Easter, we belong to Christ Jesus our Lord. Come and explore these themes at a long cherished service where ashes on the forehead or wrist will be offered.

THE SEDER MEAL—SATURDAY, MARCH 28 AT 6PM

We are pleased to once again offer a Seder Meal during Lent. This is the Passover meal and mirrors the meal that Jesus and his disciples experienced at the last supper. During the Seder meal, we will remember the Passover story and eat dinner together. We are limited to 75 people due to space constraints; tickets will be available starting February 18. The meal is free; tickets are simply to save you a seat and ensure that we have enough food. This will replace the normal Maundy Thursday service.

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 February 22 and continuing until Easter Sunday, we will include a list of names in the Sunday worship bulletin and weekly email. These are the people that will be prayed for that week. If you see your name and have a specific prayer request, please send it to 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. By Easter morning, everyone at FCCEJ will have been lifted up in prayer.

As part of your Lenten journey, you are invited to join the staff in praying for the FCCEJ community. The FCCEJ Sanctuary will be open for prayer and meditation every Wednesday evening from 7 to 9pm, starting on February 25 and ending on April 1.