



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 Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 15, 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

To a Wild Rose

Edward MacDowell

Lenten Candle Lighting



During the season of Lent, candles will be up front for anyone to light in remembrance of a loved one, a situation needing extra prayer, circumstances in the world that are problematic, or a relationship that is causing angst. People are invited to come up and light the candles before the service, during any of the music, or even during the pastoral prayer.

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 Donna Burnett

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

A Rose Touched by the Sun's Warm Rays

Jean Berger (8:30)

All Are Welcome

Marty Haugen (10:15)

Call to Worship.....the 23rd Psalm

Leader: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.

People: God restores my soul and leads me in paths of righteousness for the sake of the Lord's Holy name.

Leader: Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for God is with me offering a rod and a staff to comfort me.

People: **The Lord prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies, anoints my head with oil and causes my cup to overflow.**

Leader: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever.

***Opening Hymn**

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

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

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 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 Transition to Peer Groups

**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.**

Pastoral Prayer

Sharing Our Prayers with God and Each Other

A Time of Silence for Personal Prayer

Musical Response *C Major Prelude* (excerpt) from *WTC Bk I*

J.S. Bach

***Hymn**

O God, How We Have Wandered

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New Testament Gospel Reading

John 9:1-41

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Anthem

Create In Me a Clean Heart, O God

Carl F. Mueller (8:30)

Down to the River to Pray ✨

Traditional Spiritual (10:15)

Lenten Meditation

There is Blindness and then There is Blindness

Rev. Mendes

Offering Our Gifts to God

Invitation, Offering, and Prayer of Dedication

Offertory

Air from Partita 6 in E Minor (excerpt)

J. S. Bach

***Doxology**

All Glory, Laud and Honor

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**All glory, laud and honor to you, O Christ, we sing,
To whom the lips of children made sweet hosanna's ring!
The people of the Hebrews with palms adorned your way;
Our praise and prayer and anthems we offer you this day.**

Congregational Reflection

Scripture teaches us that during early church's worship services, a time was provided for folks to bear witness to how the Holy Spirit had spoken to them during the worship service or in their lives: theological or scriptural insights, spiritual reflections, personal witness, prophetic guidance, or personal confession or sharing. It was thought that God speaking to one person could positively affect another and draw the community into a closer relationship with God. So here is a little time to do just that.....

***Hymn**

There Is a Balm in Gilead

553

***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

Fantasy

E.L. Ashford

***Please stand if you are able**

- ◆ Sincere thanks to Bethany Blake, the FCCEJ Sanctuary Choir (8:30), and Shay Mendes (10:15) for sharing their amazing 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, you may use the Friendship Pads, email welcome@fcej.org, or call (802) 878-5745. Unless otherwise specified, prayer requests will be printed in the bulletin for a month.

Michael Hahner
Bill Bickford Jr.
Elizabeth O'Beirne & Family
Joe Shields
Jeffrey Basiliere
Elizabeth Stone
Stephanie Repolle O'Flaherty

Audrey MacGibbon
Patty Geiger
Thomas Cencer
Tatyana Szymanski
Jane Piper
Josh Winslow
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

*The flowers on the altar today are given by Terry Potvin
In loving memory of Tom.*

Presented in accordance with our Royalties for Spirituals Project: a practice of valuing musical contributions of enslaved Africans to American worship and song. We honor unrecognized musicians who created these pieces by singing them with reverence, gratitude, and open hearts. Royalties set aside for the use of these songs will go to a local organization that supports African American musicians.

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 April 9.

Easter Cards for Service Members

We are collecting Easter cards to send to our troops that are currently deployed. If you'd like to contribute a card, please drop it off to the church office by **Friday, March 20**. We'll send them all together in a packet for distribution. Mail is always appreciated and Easter is a great time to send thoughts of hope and gratitude.

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 repast 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 are available in the church office. The meal is free; tickets are to save you a seat and ensure that we have enough food. This replaces the traditional Maundy Thursday service.

Pastoral Search Committee

The Pastoral Search Committee has been meeting and preparing to complete the profile of FCCEJ that will be used to recruit candidates for our next settled pastor. We are facilitating a series of 1-hour long cottage meetings to help collect feedback from the congregation. We want to hear from you! A link to the sign up for the meetings is now located on the opening page of the FCCEJ website in one of the flip buttons, or you can scan the QR code. The meetings are being held at FCCEJ and members homes. We hope you can find a time and day which works with your schedule. Please feel free to reach out to committee members if you have any questions.



**NEW DATES
ADDED!!**

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

Free Dinner for Young Families

On the first Friday of each month, we host 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, April 3 from 5:30 to 7 in the Fellowship Hall. Soup, salad, sandwiches, fruit, and dessert.

Age Well Vermont Workshop

Age Well and FCCEJ are hosting a workshop for seniors and their families and caregivers. The event will include information on service and resources that Age Well offers as well as how programs are responding to the changes in federal funding, a Q & A period, and giveaways from Age Well and FCCEJ.

EVENT DETAILS:

- Thursday, April 30 in the FCCEJ Fellowship Hall
 - 39 Main Street, Essex Junction
- Continental Breakfast at 8:30am
- Workshop Begins at 9am
- Event is free

For more information, please contact the church office at: 802-878-5745 or welcome@fccej.org

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? If so, then maybe it's 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, March 29 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. If you need childcare, please contact the church office. Lunch will be provided for all. The class will last about an hour and a half.

Weekly Calendar: March 15—March 22

Please contact the church office with any changes or corrections

Sunday, March 15

8:30 & 10:15am: Worship—Sanctuary & Streaming
9:45am: Pastoral Search Cottage Meeting—Marvin Lounge
11:30am: Confirmation—Marvin Lounge
12:30pm: Music Rehearsal—Sanctuary
1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall

Monday, March 16

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

Tuesday, March 17

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
11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
7pm: Christian Formation—Marvin Lounge
Communications—2nd Floor Program Room

Wednesday, March 18

10am: Bone Builders—Fellowship Hall
11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
5:30pm: Finally @ First Rehearsal—Sanctuary
7pm: Searchers—Marvin Lounge
Lenten Prayer Time—Sanctuary
BSA Troop 624—Fellowship Hall

Thursday, March 19

9am: FCCEJ Staff Meeting—Marvin Lounge
11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
3-6pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop
5:30pm: Reiki Share—Marvin Lounge
6:30pm: Music Lesson—Sanctuary
Cub Scout Pack 630 - Fellowship Hall
7pm: Sanctuary Choir Rehearsal—Sanctuary

Friday, March 20

8am: Coffee Clatter—Martone's Deli
10am: Bone Builders—Fellowship Hall
11:30am: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
1:30pm: Bridge Group—Marvin Lounge
7pm: Burlington Amateur Radio Club—Marvin Lounge

Saturday, March 21

8am: Give It A Go Support Group—Marvin Lounge
The Vine Nepali Congregation—Sanctuary, West Wing
8:30am: Weight Loss Support—Fellowship Hall
110am-1pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop
1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
GMKCS—Gym, 3rd Floor
Claire Black Studio Recital—Sanctuary
4:30pm: Soccer Club Banquet—Fellowship Hall, Kitchen

Sunday, March 22

8:30* & 10:15am: Worship—Sanctuary & Streaming*
11:30am: Pastoral Search Cottage Meetings—Marvin Lounge (Adults)
2nd Floor Program Room (Youth)
1pm: Brown Bag Fellowship—Fellowship Hall
3pm: Community Concerts At First—Sanctuary

Events in italics = Local Community Groups

MINISTRY DIRECTORY

Staff

Senior Pastor: Rev. Mark Mendes [mmendes@fccej.org]
Children's Ministry Coordinator: Elizabeth O'Beirne [childrensministry@fccej.org]
Music Director: Bethany Blake [bblake@fccej.org]
Church Administrator: Jen Kelly [welcome@fccej.org]
Social Media Marketing Coordinator: Andrea Sharp [socialmedia@fccej.org]
Commissioned Assistant Minister: Bob Driver

Music

Chair of Music: Steph Field
Finally @ First Director: Rick Dooley
Men At First Director: Bill Bickford

Officers

President: Terry Stein
Vice President: Kathryn Brennan
Financial Secretary: Ann Gray [finances@fccej.org]
Assistant Financial Secretary: Linda Bogardus
Treasurer: Darryl Koch [treasurer@fccej.org]
Assistant Treasurer: Matt Clark [mattclark48discovery@gmail.com]
Clerk: Alison Wermer
Assistant Clerk: Brenda Dawson
Historian: Ann Gray
Internal Auditors: Dan Petherbridge, Alan Kinney

Committee Chairs

<u>Christian Formation:</u> Terri Livak	<u>Hospitality:</u> Sue Conti
<u>Communications:</u> Francis Gravel, Beth Warren—Co-Chairs	<u>Human Resources:</u> Terry Stein
<u>Deacons:</u> Judy McCullen, Bob Driver—Co-Chairs	<u>Missions:</u> Ann Marie Sullivan
<u>Finance & Pastoral Relations:</u> Kathryn Brennan	<u>Nominating:</u> Lauren Starkey
	<u>Stewardship:</u> Beth Volker
	<u>Trustees:</u> Rob Gibson

Recognized Groups

Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop: Sandy Tallman
Heavenly Food Pantry: Betsy Weischedel, Lisa Clark