



# SPIRIT @ FIRST

Monthly Newsletter

FIRST  
CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH *of Essex Junction*

*Love. Serve. Grow.*

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### A PASTOR'S PONDERING...

My last meeting before vacation was with the HRC as we discussed all of our employees in an evaluative way. We discussed how each employee lived into their goals from last year and looked to future goals for the coming year. We looked at places where each employee could improve as well as their outstanding qualities. We discussed the wider life of the church since those discussions are intimately tied into our employees. These are crucial discussions in the life of any organization, especially the church.

Naturally, HRC discussed me! When I was a young minister, I felt quite a bit of anxiety during these types of meetings and sometimes reacted defensively. However, as I have grown older, I have seen them as discussions that bring out the truth of whomever expressed themselves and as a means to overcome barriers and shortfalls so that the church can become a healthier and more vibrant place. These discussions often involve both a micro and a macro view of the church and her employees and touch upon key guiding principles of church life and faith.

One of the fascinating aspects of our discussion was my role as we move into my last year of ministry at First Church [August denotes my one year left mark]. We discussed how as I move into my last year, my role may shift a bit to be more concerned with some of the roles of the traditional interim minister. This includes highlighting unhealthy dynamics of the church so that we might change the way we function together so the new person does not have to deal with "our" dysfunction.

We spoke about three areas where my behaviors could shift a bit to prepare FCCEJ for their new Senior Pastor: worship, administration and pastoral care. In worship, I hope to shake things up a bit with different liturgies and shifts in the way we do things on a Sunday morning. Administration is tricky for in some ways I need to be more proactive and be more honest when I see behaviors or dynamics that are unhealthy. Many ministers, including myself, hold back on these uncomfortable discussions because it can make one's daily life more conflicted and troublesome and no one like that! In another way, I need to step back so that the various committees can be empowered to accomplish their tasks without my constant influence/nagging. It was an interesting discussion and if you have insight or ideas from your own journey, please share them with myself or with the Pastoral Relations Committee. The last area concerned pastoral care and the discussion focused on the many relationships I have with folks who do not come to church much, or at all, but have a relationship with me; maybe I officiated at their wedding or funeral or helped them with a personal problem. My goal is to connect those folks to the church and to be open to the new minister who will take my place.

Overall, these discussions helped a great deal and although we did not resolve all the issues involved or come up with clear and concise ways to deal with these sensitive yet crucial topics, it was a good start. I think it is a great congregational model to have the entire church think about these issues and work with me to prepare the church for her next pastor. After all, it is YOUR CHURCH and I would encourage everyone to participate in my last year of ministry here as FCCEJ transitions into a new pastoral relationship.

Get ready, its going to be a wonderous and rocky ride!

Summer blessings,

Rev. Mark

## SUMMER PREACHING SCHEDULE

**ALL SERVICES THROUGH SEPTEMBER 6 START AT 9AM**

Communion is served on the first Sunday of each month

- ❖ June 28th            Rev. Mark Returns from Service Trip—Montana Team Shares
- ❖ July 5th             Pastor Bob
- ❖ July 12th            Mary McHugh
- ❖ July 19th            Member in Discernment Josh Sharp
- ❖ July 26th            Rev. Dr. James Ross from UVM
- ❖ August 2nd          TBD
- ❖ August 9th          Rev. Mark Back in the Pulpit

## DEACONS

Summertime at First Church has a reputation for being a little “quieter” but that is a misnomer. Our worship has a slightly different feeling since we’re all together for a single service every weekend at a different time, each Sunday has a different musical offering, and we get to hear from guest preachers while Rev. Mark enjoys a well-deserved vacation. There is still A LOT going on at church. Most of the groups continue to meet throughout the summer, the Food Pantry and Thrift Shop still support our neighbors, committees still meet (although many take a break in July), and there are activities planned.

Speaking of activities – I just got home from the first of the **3 Summer Evenings** events that the Christian Formation Committee is hosting. They are keeping very busy this summer – and giving us an opportunity to get together for fellowship and fun. We enjoyed a fantastic meal, crafts and activities, and a campfire with smores and camp songs. It really was delightful! I encourage you to come to any of the sessions that you can. It’s laid back and fun!

On a different topic – if you are having a gathering with ice cream, I’m pleased to share Judy McCullen’s recipe for hot fudge sauce. It’s the sauce that is famous from Ice Cream Sunday, and your friends and family will enjoy it as a sweet treat at a reunion, 4th of July picnic, or some other celebration. Here ya go:

### **Judy McCullen’s Famous Hot Fudge Sauce**

Ingredients:

- 4 oz semi-sweet chocolate (use bar chocolate, not chips - I use Ghirardelli)
- 6T granulated sugar
- 1/2 c heavy cream
- 1/4 c light corn syrup - you need this to avoid crystals in the sauce and for the shine
- 3 T unsweetened natural or Dutch processed cocoa powder
- 1/8 t salt
- 2 T unsalted butter
- 1 1/2 t vanilla extract

In heavy medium saucepan, whisk chocolate, sugar, heavy cream, corn syrup, cocoa and salt together until chocolate is melted. Whisking occasionally, allow mixture to come to a boil. Boil for 3 minutes or until mixture temperature hits 220° F (the temperature is very important, so an instant read thermometer is a great tool). Remove from heat and stir in butter and vanilla until well combined. You can store it in the refrigerator in an airtight container for up to a week. To rewarm, heat over low heat on the stove or in the microwave. Enjoy!

~Andrea Sharp, Deacon

## **STEWARDSHIP**

### **Why Your Annual Pledge of Support is so Important**

Have you ever wondered where FCCEJ would be without your annual pledge of support? Our collective financial support, our gifts, account for 75% of the annual budget. Not only do these funds keep the lights on, but they also fund our vitally important outreach efforts in the community and beyond. The monies raised help to sustain the church in so many ways.

However, not everyone who supports First Church lets us know by completing a pledge card during our annual campaign. Many people give regularly, year after year, but because their gift is not “officially” documented, it ends up in “loose offerings.” We benefit from all contributions, but because our Finance Committee then doesn’t have knowledge of this undocumented gift, it can’t be counted in the pledge of support total at the end of our campaign. This total figure is vitally important information for the Finance Committee as they create the budget for the following year. Therefore, it would be very helpful if you could let us know your anticipated support amount for the following year, during our fall stewardship campaign.

If you’ve completed a pledge of support card and something happens that makes it impossible for you to complete your financial intention, fear not, the church understands that life happens.

If you have any questions about your annual financial support of the church, the annual stewardship campaign or anything else financial, please don’t hesitate to speak with a member of your Stewardship Committee ~ Anna Izzo, Alex John, Heather Stein or Beth Volker.

One final note, our Financial Secretary, Ann Gray, has two requests/reminders for everyone:

1. If you contribute to the church using bill pay through your bank or credit union, she suggests that you not only indicate a start date with an amount, but that you also include an end date as well... perhaps December 31<sup>st</sup>.
2. If you write one check to the church to cover multiple donations—such as a donation to the Food Pantry and one to the Thrift Shop—please indicate on the memo line how much money is to be allocated to each. This will ensure that your contributions make it to the intended places.

As always, thank you for your continued generosity and support of First Church!!

## **PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE UPDATE**

We are crossing our t’s and dotting our I’s on the final Profile that will be posted, and hope to have it go live the first week of July (holiday schedules permitting). After we complete the profile, which describes who we are and what qualities we are seeking in a senior pastor, we send it to the Vermont Conference to post it on their website. We will then share the link on our church website. After it is posted, candidates can apply through the UCC portal. The UCC will perform a background check, and then forward the candidates to the Search Committee for review.

Thank you to everyone who participated in a cottage meeting, offered their opinions and suggestions, and supported the committee.

## **† ELIZABETH'S SUMMER EPISTLE †**

### **Family Faith Resources**

During the summer months, you will find resources in the Narthex from Threads Within. You will find tools to help your families grow closer to God and each other. Monthly "Faith Threads" weave faith into everyday life through the values of fun, community, growth, trust, gratitude, creativity, patience, respect, love, compassion, faith and perseverance.

You're encouraged throughout the summer to read the Scriptures, ask questions, pray together, take part in the spiritual practices, and find God in your everyday life!

### **Dates to Remember:**

- ★ June Summer Evenings ~ 5:30 to 7:30 ~ FCCEJ parking lot
- ★ July 22 - Moses' journey into the wilderness
- ★ August 19 - Street dance with tunes provided by SuperSounds
- ★ September 13th - Welcome Back Sunday - Peer Groups - \*One Service at 10 am\*
- ★ September 20th - Peer Groups during 10:15 service

### **Volunteers Welcomed**

- ★ Volunteers are essential in having a meaningful faith formation ministry. Understanding life's busy schedules, the time commitment is flexible. It's helpful to have a network of peer group leaders to fill in when needed.
- ★ Please consider volunteering next year, and sharing your heart with the children of FCCEJ.
- ★ If you are interested in more information about the children's ministry peer groups, please reach out to Elizabeth at [ChildrensMinistry@fccej.org](mailto:ChildrensMinistry@fccej.org).

### **Faith Formation Offering**

- ◆ The Heart to Heart Program through the Humane Society of Chittenden County is the 2025-2026 Faith Formation offering recipient.
- ★ *Please continue to use the white envelopes in the Narthex for the Faith Formation offering, or write "Faith Formation" on the memo of your check.*

### **Prayer**

*Loving God of laughter, show us how to have fun throughout these summer months. Help to remind us to see the joy in the eyes of the children as the summer days bring more play and possibly less hectic schedules! Thank you for giving us a sense of humor and the ability to enjoy your beautiful world. Amen.*

Love and Light,

*Elizabeth* - Children's Ministry Coordinator

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## **CHRISTIAN FORMATION COMMITTEE**

### **Three Summer Evenings!**

On July 22 plan to join us between 5:30 and 6 for a quick bite to eat, then our programming will start at 6:15. Each evening we will be using some (if not all) of our parking lot for the event, so if you are able, please park offsite. Our plan is to conclude by 7:30, with clean-up being done by 8.

We will explore Moses' journey in the wilderness, and on August 19 we will have a street dance, with music provided by Supersounds! Look for save the date cards in the bulletin.

# Let Your Impact Shine



**Be a bright spot in your community!**

Every \$2.50 reusable Fight Hunger Bag sold at our selected Hannaford store during August sends \$1 to our organization, helping us continue our mission and create local impact.

**BENEFITING ORGANIZATION:**

**Heavenly Food Pantry  
39 Main Street  
Essex Junction, VT 05452**

**AT THIS STORE LOCATION:**

**78 Marshall Ave  
Williston VT**



[hannaford.2givelocal.com](http://hannaford.2givelocal.com)

**Fight Hunger Bag Program**

## MISSIONS

### LAWN SALE



The annual Craft Fest Summer Lawn Sale is **Saturday, August 15th from 9am to 1pm**. We'll be accepting kitchen items, books, children's toys, holiday items, puzzles, baskets, bath items, paintings, frames, jewelry, and furniture. Any furniture which hasn't sold can be picked up at 1pm. If not picked up, then the item will be left for free.

Please note: no early shoppers.

Items can be dropped off at the church starting July 6th in the West Wing. Signs will be up indicating where to leave your items. Items can also be dropped off that Saturday starting at 7am on the church lawn. We appreciate volunteers to assist with the event. Volunteers are needed for the following:

- Friday, August 14th from 4:30—5:30pm—setting up Tents
- Saturday, August 15th from 6:30—7am—setting up tables
- Saturday, August 15th from 1—2pm taking down tents and putting tables back in the church.

All proceeds from the sale benefit the general budget. There will also be a bake sale hosted by the Missions Committee, and a food drive to supplement the Heavenly Food Pantry. If you have any questions or wish to volunteer, please contact the church office.

### JOSH PALLOTA HOUSE



The Missions Committee continues to support Josh Pallotta House in Winooski. Josh's House VT is for Veterans & current military personnel. It's a designed recreation/wellness space offering meeting and study areas, a large communal kitchen, video games, and a state-of-the-art gym. Many of the veterans being served at the Pallotta house are recovering substance abusers. These veterans rely on sugar items to get them through their addiction. Missions is has agreed to sponsor a soda drive during July, August & September. You can drop the soda anytime while the church is open. The drop-off place will be in Fellowship Hall. Signs will be posted to provide the exact location. **Remember—sugar soda only, no diet.** Thank you for your support!

### Pizza Party

Last month the Missions Committee hosted a pizza party at Josh's House. Veterans and current military personnel, along with an envoy from FCCEJ, enjoyed pizza from Vespa's. Great conversations were held by all. We were particularly blessed to have Jane Piper come and share her stories of Vietnam. (Also, the veterans who attended learned that Rev. Mark is very good at pool.) We look to sharing another meal with our military personnel in the Fall.

### J.U.M.P.—Joint Urban Ministry Project



JUMP's mission is *"To promote the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of people by providing compassionate care, direct assistance to meet basic needs, and advocacy"*. JUMP assists with food vouchers, utility payments, thrift shop vouchers for clothes and necessary household items, laundry vouchers, gas vouchers, and bus passes.

### Calling All Bakers & Treat Makers!

Missions is hosting a bake sale in conjunction with the lawn sale on August 15th. We are asking the FCCEJ community to assist in the sale—and we know there are several extremely talented bakers! Shoppers really look forward to grabbing a tasty treat while browsing through our summer treasures. All items can be brought to the church on Friday, August 14th, clearly marked for bake sale. (*Editor's note: If quality control is needed, please drop off a sample at the church office.*) Items can also be dropped at the church on Saturday August 15th starting at 7am. Our goal is to raise \$350 in baked goods donations, thanks to your generous gift of time & talents.

## AGE WELL – SAVE THE DATE



Please join us on Thursday September 17th at 9am in Fellowship Hall. A light breakfast will be served at 8:30am. The event is free and open to the public.

Age Well's State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) will be providing information on insurance. Some of the issues to be discussed will be the following:

- Assessing eligibility for Medicare benefits
- Making informed decisions about your benefits
- Knowing where to locate more help
- Protecting yourself against fraud

The event will provide plenty of time after the presentation for questions and answers.

If you wish a specific subject to be discussed at the event, please let the church office know. Thank you.

### COTS—Committee On Temporary Shelter



COTS is seeking donations for their Back-to-School Drive which supports their **Back to School Bonanza**.

The COTS **Back to School Bonanza** is a free, kid-centric community event where any Vermont student in need can get ready for a successful school year in a dignified, stress-free, fun environment. The goal is to foster confidence through picking out school supplies and a backpack, choosing first day of school outfits, getting a haircut, and so much more. It is set up like a carnival so that students can have fun while they get ready for a successful school year. Please consider donating money and new supplies to COTS. You can also donate through their Amazon Wish List: Search for *2026 COTS Back to School Wishlist* in your Amazon Account.

The **Back-to-school Bonanza** will be held Saturday, August 1st in the parking lot at COTS; 95 North Avenue in Burlington from 12pm to 3pm. The rain date is the following Saturday.

### Heavenly Food Pantry

The Food Pantry continues to need reusable shopping bags as well as cereal, baked beans, canned fruit and veggies, chunky soups, ready-made pasta (Spaghetti-O's, etc.) drip coffee (regular and decaf), empty one-dozen egg cartons, and feminine hygiene products - specifically pads (moderate, heavy, and extra absorbent). You can drop donations off at FCCEJ —there are carriages at the office and parking lot entrances, or you can bring donations to the food drive at the Lawn Sale on Saturday, August 15.

We also always appreciate volunteers—either for organizing, set-up, during the distribution times, or to make deliveries in the Essex area. Contact the church office for more information.

### LEGALLY ENTERING THE CHURCH OR NOT

A bill just passed in the Vermont legislature, S. 209, which would prohibit all levels of law enforcement from entering establishments such as hospitals, mental health facilities, houses of worship, or homeless shelters to apprehend someone. The bill still needs to have Gov. Scott sign it into law or veto it. This would offer our church some legal security in turning law enforcement away who might be targeting folks at our food pantry or worship services. This is just an update and we will wait to see what Gov. Scott does.

In the meantime, you may notice that rooms in the FCCEJ facility have signs on or near each door with the following statement: "*This room is a designated private space*". The only rooms that do not are the Sanctuary, Fellowship Hall, and Gym. It is illegal for law enforcement officials to enter private spaces without a judicial warrant signed by a judge. The warrant must specifically name the person they are attempting to apprehend.



## “CRITTER CORNER”



By Beth Volker

### PLEASE Always Choose Kindness, Compassion and Understanding

Lately, I’ve heard a number of friends and neighbors lamenting the moles and/or voles messing up their lawns, mice in their garages or basements and a number of other complaints about “pests” and how best to get rid of them.

I would ask you to first consider that these so-called “pests” were all created by the same God who created us, and that they, like us, are just doing their best to survive. And the way they go about that is also God-given, even though we may not always appreciate it and it may “inconvenience” us.

In regard to mice in your basement and/or garage....**I beg you NOT to use glue traps!** They are the worst kind of torture imaginable. The trapped creature lies stuck to the glue, alive and in extreme pain as it slowly dies of thirst and starvation. The cruelty that we humans are capable of inflicting on these helpless creatures is unfathomable to me. If used outdoors, birds and chipmunks are often victims as well. And, **I also implore you NOT to use rodenticides.** Yes, you poison the mouse, but that rodent is then taken by an owl or hawk. They eat some of the mouse and feed the rest to their young. The mouse dies, the owl or hawk dies, and their young die. Yes, you may have killed the mouse, but you’ve also killed a number of critters higher up in the food chain.

There are better, much more humane methods for politely asking mice and other rodents to vacate the premises. Here are just a few:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Pest Vault Mouse Repellent Pouches, rated 9.9/10 | 3. BugMD Vamoose! rated 8.8/10                |
| 2. Fresh Cab rodent repellent, rated 9.3/10         | 4. Grandpa Gus’s Pouches, rated 8.0/10        |
|   | 5. Mighty Mint Peppermint Spray, rated 7.5/10 |

Moles are small, furry mammals who burrow underground hunting insects, earthworms and grubs. In the process, they aerate your soil by pushing dirt to the surface as “mole hills.” Yes, these dirt piles can be unsightly but just pick them up and toss them into your garden or pound them down. It’s not that big a deal and it takes so little time.

Voles are also small, furry mammals and they are active year-round, digging burrows and creating surface runways. Sadly, they can damage gardens and trees by gnawing bark and roots.

In order to discouraging moles and voles in a humane manner, here are some suggestions:

- |   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. ChaseRiff Mole Repeller, rated A+    | 4. BORHOOD Mole Repeller, rated C |
| 2. Victor M9012 Mole Repeller, rated B+ | 5. X=PEST Mole Repeller, rated C  |
| 3. Cvtayn Mole Repeller, rated B        |                                   |

Additional Suggestions:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. VermiX Stake Pulse Pro, rated 9.9          | 4. BORHOOD Solar Mole Repellent, rated 8.0 |
| 2. AECITY Solar Mole Repellent, rated 9.3     | 5. Letyet Solar Mole Repellent, rated 7.5  |
| 3. outtkitywi Solar Mole Repellent, rated 8.8 |  |

All are available online. Some may even be available in your local hardware or feed store.

*Continued on next page...*

In answer to the question that I'm sure you are asking....yes, I DO have both mice in my basement and moles in my yard. The mice live in the unfinished portion of my basement. I rarely see them, but I do see their droppings. I simply sweep them up. I don't bother them, they don't bother me. The moles make their mounds in my front yard, so I pick them up while mowing the lawn....easy and quick.

In closing, I implore you to always choose kindness, compassion and understanding. Be tolerant and appreciate every creature for the part it plays in creation. God equipped each of us with all the tools we need to survive. God also gave us this one planet to share. It belongs to each of us equally. Please make room on your property and in your neighborhood for all the critters who choose to share your little corner of the world. Thank you!

### **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 2026:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0545A8AB2FAAF58-53196874-altar#/>



### **HOSPITALITY**

Hospitality Committee members are taking the month of July off, so there will be no food or beverages for Fellowship in July.

We are looking for a donation of to-go containers to use for after funeral receptions and special events. We have gone through our inventory quickly and are asking for donations to be left in the kitchen. Thank you for your help with this.

Lastly, are you looking for a way to get involved with the church community? We are looking for people to bake goodies for funeral receptions or help with the set up/clean up of the reception. Please contact Sue Conti at [sueconti@comcast.net](mailto:sueconti@comcast.net) if you are interested in participating in this important aspect of our ministry.

*Dear FCCEJ Hospitality Team,*

*We the family of Bill Bickford Sr are so pleased with the warm and lovely gathering which happened at the church on June 13 to celebrate Dad's life. We see his warm smile beaming over every aspect of the event.*

*You all played such a big part in making the spirit of the gathering just as Dad wanted it. The goodies were perfect and delicious. The setting of the Fellowship Hall was beautiful and welcoming. You made it look easy as you worked together seamlessly to keep the tables stocked, and the beverages flowing. The guests were content!*

*Many many thanks for your efforts, and for being such an important part of our farewell to Dad.*





**First Congregational Church of Essex Junction**



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Essex Junction, VT 05452  
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Email: [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org)

**SUNDAY MORNING ALL-FAMILY WORSHIP**

**JUNE THROUGH LABOR DAY**

9:00 - In-person and streamed via [youtube.com/c/fccej](https://youtube.com/c/fccej)

Music: Bethany Blake leads our musical offerings \* Finally @ First Praise Band is on summer hiatus

*\*Communion is served on the 1st Sunday of each month \* All are welcome at Christ's table\**

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