



FIRST  
CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH of Essex Junction  
*Love. Serve. Grow.*

# Spirit @ First

October, 2026

**"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,  
'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'**  
**And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"**

**Isaiah 6:8**

## IN THIS ISSUE:

October  
Special Sundays  
~Page 2~

Elizabeth's Epistle  
Desert Challenge  
Winner  
~Page 3~

Stewardship  
Fall Clean-Up  
Deacons  
Hospitality  
~Page 4~

Missions Update  
Food Pantry  
Heartfelt Thanks  
~Page 5~

Craft Fest 2026  
~Page 6~

Looking Ahead  
~Page 7~

Connection  
Opportunities  
~Pages 8, 9~

## Pastoral Ponderings

We have a sacred task ahead of us. Not many churches are gifted with this divine responsibility. The very future of Christ's church actually depends upon us for this task. And on top of these truths, the task is one of joy, pride and great celebration. An occasion that should fill the sanctuary with love.

### **On October 25th at 3pm, we are all called to ordain Josh Sharp**

And add Rev. to his name as he continues to do ministry as an Associate Pastor of the Mystic Congregational Church in Connecticut.

Our God worked on Josh for a long time and kept bugging him until he finally relented and said yes. Our Faith Formation teachers had a field day trying to answer his questions and contain his energy. Rev. Gackenheimer delighted in trying to cajole Josh to use a filter as the confirmation class visited other religious traditions that did not live up to Christ's call of extravagant love. The Deacons delighted to have such a young outstanding young adult serve with distinction. The Local Church Discernment Committee [LCDC] cherished their time standing up for Josh during the entire Member In Discernment [MID] process. When he preached a coming out sermon in the FCCEJ Sanctuary, all of us present were filled with tears of affection and then later pride as his skill in preaching blossomed over the years.

Josh is one of us and he brings honor to our church for hearing and answering his call to Ordained Ministry in the United Church of Christ. He has observed God's guiding hand in the sentiments and actions of our members and in the extravagant love so freely offered by all of you. We are all so proud of Josh!!! And I am so proud of all of you for being a part of Josh's call to ministry!

Ordination is a group experience. Good supportive parents help. It requires the official support of a local congregation. But it also requires an association of churches as well as the Vermont Conference and the National Instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ. Working together over years of meetings and discernment at so many different levels we get to this point of celebration.

*continued on next page...*

On October 25th, all of these various aspects of the United Church of Christ will come together to ordain Josh. Champlain Association Churches will be present as well as folks from the Vermont Conference's Ministerial Standards and Standing Committee [MSSC] who have worked with Josh to fine tune his skills and gifts in preparation for ministry. Rev. Gackenhelmer will be back to preach Josh's ordination sermon. VTCUCC Minister and President Dr. Lynn Bujnak will be here to pray over Josh and his future ministry. Josh's family and friends will be here. Prayers and good wishes from seminary professors, employees from the various churches where Josh has worked, and colleagues will all be here either in spirit or in person.

And we, the members and friends of FCCEJ need to **PACK** the place and fill the sanctuary for just such an event. And the final act of ordination will be the laying on of hands where everyone who is connected and feels called to Josh and his ordination journey can come forward and participate.

Then we party in the Fellowship Hall with food and gifts.

The Ordination will start at 3pm and beforehand there will be a BRIEF Champlain Association Meeting at 2:30pm where representatives of the 15 churches of the Champlain Association will conduct their business. Our members are welcome at that meeting as well.

See you all on October 25th at 3pm. Wear Red!

Blessings,

Rev. Mark

## Special Sundays in October

### October 4 - Mission Sunday

#### One Service at 10am

On October 5th, we honor FCCEJ's embrace of living into Christ's mission by focusing on some of the ways our church helps others.

**First**-We will hear first-hand stories of the ways our Montana Service Trip volunteers helped out on the Blackfeet Reservation this past summer.

**Second**-We will assemble L.I.F.T. [Living in Faith Together] bags so that we can distribute them when someone expresses a need.

**Third**-Our Sanctuary Choir will sing *Canticle of the Turning*, which uplifts God's Spirit helping to turn the world toward justice and mercy as embodied by Martin Luther King's sentiment that the arc of the world is bent toward justice. And in addition to these tremendous happenings, we will share Holy Communion (in the traditional way with Deacons passing out the elements), and enjoy an expanded choir with the "Drop-In" choir.

### October 11 - Committee Fair

Our congregation has members that come from many different denominations and or religious backgrounds. Each denomination and church operates a little differently with some led by their clergy and others led by democratic policy. Our church's governing body is the congregation and officers and committees are elected to accomplish certain tasks of running the church. The ministers and staff work with all of these folks with resources and ideas. Together, we make it work. The heart of this structure is committees and we have a bunch. They work with Rev. Mark with worship, help our children learn about God, organize Fellowship Hour after worship, oversee the music program, and insure that our building and grounds are well maintained. These committees do the work and make the decisions, but in doing so also serve as a great way to get to know people. On October 11th, many of our committees will be represented in Fellowship Hall before and after the worship services to share with folks what they do. Come and learn and maybe express interest for a particular committee. Or just come and learn how we make it all happen at FCCEJ.

### October 25 - Celebration Sunday

#### Services at 8:30 & 10:15

As a Congregational Church we have no overseeing body that supports us financially. The only limits to the ministry we lean into are our own: volunteers, facility functionality, and of course the money we collect to support our staff, ministries and outreach. We own our church and our ministry. We commemorate this in a very public way on October 25th when we CELEBRATE our members and their commitment in supporting FCCEJ. Everyone is invited to bring their gift/pledge card up to the altar and rejoice in the health and vitality of our congregation. If you have already sent your pledge card in, then there will be a card that states that fact so everyone may participate.



# Elizabeth's October Epistle



## Nature Theme for Whole Church Events

We began our Faith Formation year with planting seeds of Hope! Nature provides us glimpses of God's love for us in our daily lives. The Christian Formation Committee plans to have a few events throughout the year to share in the delights of nature. Please keep up to date with announcements in the bulletin and monthly newsletters.

## The Seasons of the Church Year:

The Season after Pentecost is the period between the Day of Pentecost and the First Sunday of Advent. This season makes up half of the calendar year, and its liturgical color is green. It is a time to focus on the life and growth of the Church in the world, empowered by the gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

## Dates to Remember



- October 4th - Spiritual Friends - One Service at 10 am
- October 11th & 18th - Peer Groups - during 10:15 am Worship Service
- October 25th - Bible Sunday - Peer groups during 10:15 am Worship Service

## Volunteers Welcomed and Needed!

- Volunteers are essential in having a meaningful faith formation ministry. Understanding life's busy schedules, the time commitment is flexible.
  - Please consider volunteering 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 via email: [ChildrensMinistry@fccej.org](mailto:ChildrensMinistry@fccej.org).

## Prayer

*God of wisdom, your love is like rich soil in a bountiful garden, nourishing vibrant life. May we be like gardeners planting seeds of compassion and care, choosing to love God and our neighbors in all that we do. Amen.*

Gratefully,

Elizabeth, Children's Ministry Coordinator

## Oreo Cookie Cake Recipe

by Lou Ann Pioli

- 1 package Oreo cookies, crushed to bite-sized pieces (1 use Double-Stuf)
- 1 (8oz.) package cream cheese, slightly softened
- 2 packages instant vanilla pudding
- 3 cups milk (1 use whole or 2%)
- 1 (8oz.) container Cool Whip

**DESSERT  
CHALLENGE  
WINNER!**

1. Beat cream cheese until light and fluffy (at least 5-7 minutes), scraping bowl as you beat.
2. Add pudding and milk and mix until thickened.
3. Fold in Cool Whip and  $\frac{1}{2}$  Oreo cookie pieces until well mixed.
4. Spoon into a bowl or rectangle baking dish.
5. Sprinkle remaining Oreo cookie pieces on top.
6. Refrigerate until ready to serve.
7. Enjoy!

# Stewardship

Our Stewardship theme for 2027 is: *Bridge to the Future of FCCEJ*

In 2027, we as a church will face a big change as we say farewell to our beloved Rev. Mark and welcome a new minister to lead us into the future. As many churches struggle to survive, FCCEJ is financially secure, thanks to the faithfulness and generosity of our congregation. We freely donate our time and treasure to keep FCCEJ vibrant and visible in the surrounding community. This should make us a highly attractive community of faith for any minister looking for a new Christian community to lead.

We don't want to give away too much, but *we are on a mission to boldly go where no one has gone before...*

If you come to church, or tune in online at either service on Sunday, October 18th, you will learn the "secret" of a successful stewardship campaign. The cast is currently in rehearsal so we can provide you with an informative and entertaining skit. Please plan to join us on that day.

Your Stewardship Committee is:

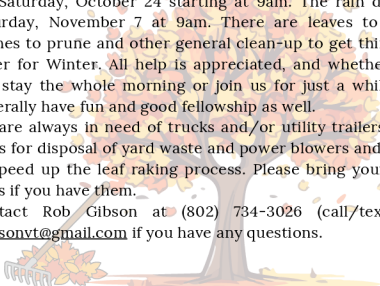
Alex John, Rev. Mark Mendes, Heather Stein and Beth Volker

## Fall Clean-Up Day

The Trustees have scheduled the annual Fall Clean-up Day for Saturday, October 24 starting at 9am. The rain date is Saturday, November 7 at 9am. There are leaves to rake, bushes to prune and other general clean-up to get things in order for Winter. All help is appreciated, and whether you can stay the whole morning or join us for just a while, we generally have fun and good fellowship as well.

We are always in need of trucks and/or utility trailers with sides for disposal of yard waste and power blowers and tarps to speed up the leaf raking process. Please bring your own tools if you have them.

Contact Rob Gibson at (802) 734-3026 (call/text) or [rgibsonvt@gmail.com](mailto:rgibsonvt@gmail.com) if you have any questions.



## Deacons

I'm pretty sure it was just a few minutes ago we were celebrating July 4th....and here we are at the beginning of Fall!

Welcome Back Sunday is behind us and Halloween, Stewardship, Craft Fest, Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas all in front of us.

The Good Lord keeps spinning out time ahead of us and guides our hopes and wishes and prayers into the sometimes scary future.

May God's caring light stay on our shoulders!!

-Maureen McKenzie, Deacon

## Requests from Your Hospitality Committee

The FCCEJ Hospitality Committee consists of an amazing group of volunteers. They make sure we have coffee and snacks during Fellowship Time after Sunday worship, provide cookies and snacks for memorial services, maintain and organize the main kitchen, and so much more!

Lately, there have been several items removed from the main kitchen, unfortunately when they've been needed for events. If you need to borrow something from FCCEJ, it's important to please check with the church office and make sure there isn't another group or event that will need the item.

On the flip side, if you have an event that uses the main kitchen, please make sure the trash is emptied, dishes are scraped, and then run through the sanitizer. If there is leftover food, please communicate to Sue and the church office what's to be done - donated, used for Sunday, up for grabs by another committee? Also, PLEASE do not purchase any condiments without checking to see what is already in the kitchen.

If you have any questions, please contact the office or Sue Conti, Hospitality Chair. Thank you!

## Missions Committee Update

- A luncheon sponsored by the Missions committee for Josh's House is scheduled for Friday, November 6th at noon. Betty Busciglio will be making a homemade meal of pulled pork, coleslaw, sweet potato fries, and cookies. We'll be honored to have members of the Vermont Air Guard for lunch. Everyone is invited to attend. If interested, please let the church office know. We'll be carpooling from FCCEJ.
- We are having a special service on Sunday, November 1st at 10am to recognize veterans and current service members. We'll be presenting a small thank you gift to everyone. The service will include veterans from the church speaking. A light brunch will be available after the service. Please encourage all service members and families to attend.
- Missions Committee will again assist in the activities around the Giving Tree. We'll be asking for help with handing out tree gift tags, organizing gifts, handing out gifts in December, and getting toys & candy ready for kids. If interested in helping, please contact the church office.



## Heavenly Food Pantry

The Food Pantry is seeing a significant uptick in families that are needing our services. We continue to need reusable shopping bags as well as empty one-dozen egg cartons, baked beans, canned fruit, chunky soups, ready-made pasta, and feminine hygiene products - specifically pads (moderate, heavy, and extra absorbent).

We also need to expand our volunteer base. We need people for organizing, set-up, assisting during the distribution times, and to make deliveries in the Essex area. Please contact the church office for more information.

### • Food Pantry Days/Hours:

#### ◦ Distribution Days:

- 2nd Monday 5 - 7:30 pm
- 4th Thursday 3 - 6 pm\*

\*November and December are 3rd Thursday due to the Holidays

## Heartfelt Thanks

To the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction,  
Thank you for your meaningful contribution to American Red Cross  
Disaster Relief to help people affected by disasters of all kinds.  
With your support, we turn heartbreak into hope.  
With Sincere Gratitude,  
Marie Banin, NNE Volunteer



**American  
Red Cross**

Dear Pastor Mark,

We had a fun and exciting GMKCS Summer Camp from July 27-31, 2026. We are grateful to use the FCC space. We are giving a donation to express our gratitude for allowing us to use your church for the summer camp.

God bless your church for doing the great work to spread the love of God to the community.

Grateful,

Jiyon Huang

Principal, Green Mountain Korean Cultural School

# Craft Fest 2026

## Saturday, November 14

There are fun and fabulous ways for everyone to be involved in the annual Craft Fest! Here are the opportunities:



- **Sweet Shoppe:** We are looking for volunteers to make a wide variety of items, so bring out your creativity! Some suggested items include various breads, sweet rolls, cookies, donuts or donut holes, homemade candy/brittle/fudge, any type of bars, popcorn balls, trail mix. If anyone is doing some canning, a jar or two of pickles, relish, jams & jellies, or other items would be welcomed. We are especially looking for all kinds of pies. Please make sure whatever you contribute is individually wrapped (or in smaller portions) so that no food is being directly handled. For more information or to sign up for an item, please email Mary Gratton at [mgrat14@comcast.net](mailto:mgrat14@comcast.net).
- **Luncheon:** Calling all cooks! The luncheon team would appreciate assistance with the following: Butternut squash soup, meat chili, vegetarian chili, and Mac and cheese. All dishes may be brought to the kitchen anytime on Friday November 13th or Saturday morning before Craft Fest begins at 9am. Your crockpots will be available for pick up on Saturday and Sunday.
- **Accessory Room:** Time to go through your jewelry boxes and do a purge! Donations can include pins, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. There will also be a section just for kids so we're looking for kid's books, stuffed animals (clean & in good condition), hair bands/clips, and fun jewelry - the glittery the better! The room also includes scarves and pocketbooks.
- **Nearly New:** We are looking for gently used items such as kitchenware, small appliances, dishes, linens, board games, puzzles, children's books, dolls, small gardening equipment, collectibles, books, CD's, mirrors, wall art, picture frames, vases, baskets, candle holders, lamps and holiday items. We are also looking for paper bags and reusable bags to use at the sale. **We will accept donations from Sunday, November 1 through Friday, November 13.**
- **Silent Auction:** The Auction is well on the way to having a lovely selection of gift baskets but will always graciously accept donated baskets and gift cards! Please be sure that anything you want to donate to Silent Auction gets to us by November 7th, the week before the Christmas Craft Fest, so that we can have our descriptions and values written up. If you have any questions, please e-mail Susan Turner - [susanblackturner@gmail.com](mailto:susanblackturner@gmail.com).

**Crafters:** The committee is pleased that all tables for this year's event are spoken for. We have a great variety of crafters for your shopping pleasure. A list of everyone will be in the November newsletter.

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED:** We will need volunteers to greet shoppers, monitor silent auction, work in sweet shoppe, help in nearly new, setup on Friday and clean up on Saturday. Also need cleanup crew for the gym on Monday morning.

### Please note:

Sign-ups will be in the Fellowship Hall on October 25, November 1, November 8 between & after worship.

Thank you from the Craft Fest Committee: Mary Phelps, Mary Gratton, Gail Cromie, Janne Giles, Ann Gray, Maureen McKenzie, Susan Turner, Alyssa Lasher, Carolyn Toof and Linda Bogardus.

If you have any questions, please contact the church office.

## Looking Ahead

Here's a quick sneak peek of events in the upcoming months:

### **Sunday, November 1**

One Service at 10am - Communion Sunday  
Veteran Recognition & Drop-In Choir during worship  
Community Concerts at First presents Skylark at 3pm in the Sanctuary

### **Saturday, November 14**

CRAFT FEST - 9am to 3pm (See page 6 for details)

### **Sunday, November 22**

Giving Tree in the Narthex  
Hanging the Greens (decorating for Advent/Christmas) after worship

### **Thursday, November 26 & Friday, November 27**

Thanksgiving Holiday - Church Office Closed

### **Sunday, December 13**

Service of Contemplation at 8:30  
Christmas Pageant at 10:15

### **Sunday, December 20**

Sanctuary Choir Christmas Cantata - One Service at 10am  
Pride Service - 3pm in the Sanctuary

### **Thursday, December 24 - Christmas Eve**

Family Service at 5pm  
Christmas Concert at 8:30pm  
Carols & Candlelight Service at 9pm  
Candlelight and Communion Service at 11pm

### **Sunday, December 27**

One Service at 10am  
Carol Sing and Celebration



**What do you call a  
pumpkin that works  
at the beach?**  
A life gourd.

**Did you hear the  
one about the  
grouchy apple?**

It was a crab.



**What do you get if  
you run over a  
pumpkin?**

Squash.



## Sermon Talkback

Everyone knows that Rev. Mark preaches some sermons that are a bit provocative and even edgy. And he uses the bible to come up with some pretty crazy theological insights that are sometimes doctrinally challenging. At the very least, he preaches some sermons that raise a lot of questions and almost demand a little unpacking and discussion. Well, if you like that stuff and you want to attend a group that loves and supports each other, come to our Sermon Talkback group every Tuesday from 8:30 - 10am in the Marvin Lounge. There's always fresh coffee, tea selections, and usually a pastry or two. Come and listen. Come and express an opinion. Come and challenge Rev. Mark's assertions. Come and taste a bit of the Holy Spirit as we talk about scripture, the bible, the church and life in these crazy days.

## Lunchtime Book Group

The book for October is *Theo of Golden* by Allen Levi.

*A story of giving and receiving, of seeing and being seen, this is an unforgettable novel about the power of generosity, the importance of connection, and the quiet miracles that happen when we choose kindness and wonder.*

The Lunchtime Book Group meets on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of each month at 11:30 in Marvin Lounge. All are welcome - feel free to bring a lunch or just come for the discussion.

## Friday Morning Coffee & Conversation

If you like waking up early and starting the day with some good conversations and friends, you are welcome to join the Friday Morning Conversation Group at Martone's every Friday morning from 8-9am. Everyone buys their own drink and goodie, if desired, and we just talk about anything that comes up: gardening, travels, aches and pains, church life, good tv shows or movies, children, pets, projects, family life, and sometimes even God. It is informal and organic in nature and we laugh quite a bit. Everyone is welcome whether they are a member of the church or not.

## Bridge Group

People of all skill levels are invited to come and have some fun playing bridge on the 1st and 3rd Friday of every month from 1:30 - 4pm. We have some old pros in the group as well as some novices playing and learning. There is a lot of table talk and no condemnation or judgement. We have snacks and the winner gets a jar of Rev. Mark's homemade jam. Come, and bring a friend - everyone is welcome!

## Bible Study

Bible Study upcoming dates topic:

October 23 & Nov 13:

Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians.

We meet from 1:30-3pm in Marvin Lounge. Led by Mary McHugh.

## Grief Support

Grief Support Group meet monthly on the 2nd Thursday. This is a safe place to share, question, and learn about the grief journey. Next meeting is October 8 in the Marvin Lounge from 10-11:30am. Facilitated by Mary McHugh and Sharon Dettenrieder.

## 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? Do you enjoy the warmth of community that we cherish here? Do you like the ways we feed and clothe people in need? Do you like the many groups and organizations that we partner with in order to create a more perfect union in Vermont, our nation and world? Do you just love the music that comes from so many different and talented groups in our church? Or do you just love to come and sit in the sanctuary and soak up God's presence? If so, then maybe it is about 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. We are offering a New Member's Class to any and everyone who shows up on Sunday October 18<sup>th</sup> after the second service (around 11:30am) in the Marvin Lounge. Child care is available with advance notice - please call the church office to make arrangements [802 878-5745]. A deli-style lunch will be provided for all. The class lasts about an hour and a half.



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

BABINGER, Gail  
BOYD, John  
BURNETT, John  
CHADURJIAN, Mark  
COOLIDGE, Warren  
CURRIER, Bernie  
DOOLEY, Rick  
GIBSON, Margie  
GOEDKEN, Andrea  
HAYES, Deanna  
HEWETT, Anne  
HOFFMAN, Kim  
HOPKINS, Marti  
HOUGHTON, Carl  
HYDE, Paul  
JACKSON, Michelle  
KEITHCART, William  
LEAVITT, Dick  
LEAVITT, Sylvia  
MCHUGH, Mary  
MITCHELL, Marilyn  
MOOS, Jonah  
PALMER, Liam  
PARKER, Holly  
PAUL, Beth  
PETHERBRIDGE, Bonita  
STARKEY, Gorden  
WATT, Aliyah  
WERMER, Alison  
YANDO, Maarit

**SHARE YOUR GIFTS WITH THE BROADER CHURCH!**  
Vermont Conference, United Church of Christ Leadership Call

Did you know our Vermont Conference is made up of 118 local churches across 7 Associations? Our Conference boards and committees thrive when they reflect the diverse gifts, professional backgrounds, and voices of people in our pews! We are actively seeking lay leaders and clergy with gifts or experience in:

- Finance/Budgeting & Stewardship • Outdoor/Youth Ministries • Governance & Administration
- Justice & Witness/Racial/Eco • Property/Legal & Facilities Care • Communications & Digital Tech

**HOW TO GET INVOLVED OR NOMINATE A NEIGHBOR:**

1. SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW to fill out a 2-minute interest form on your phone:
2. OR VISIT ONLINE: [vermontucc.org/leadership-interest](http://vermontucc.org/leadership-interest)
3. TELL YOUR PASTOR: Let your local pastor or board chair know you are interested in serving on a Conference committee!

*"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord."*  
— 1 Corinthians 12:4-5

**First Congregational Church of Essex Junction**  
1 Church Street  
Essex Junction, VT 05452  
Phone: 802-878-5745  
Email: [welcome@fccej.org](mailto:welcome@fccej.org)



**Sunday Morning Worship:**

~First Sunday of Each Month ~ One Service at 10am~  
with Holy Communion and Sanctuary Choir ~ Spiritual Friends for PreK-5th  
~Other Sundays Throughout the Month~  
8:30am - In-person & streamed via YouTube  
Music: Bethany Blake directs our Sanctuary Choir and provides accompaniment  
10:15am - In-person—Faith Formation for PreK - 8th  
Music: Finally @ First Praise Band ~ Streamed on the 3rd Sunday of each month



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**youtube.com/c/FCCEJ**