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

ONA
OPEN & AFFIRMING

The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction

First Sunday of Advent
November 29, 2026

Our worship opportunities during the year offer two services: one traditional with our outstanding organist and Sanctuary Choir at 8:30am and one less traditional with our Fantabulous Finally @ First Band and our Faith Formation Program for our children at 10:15am. We meet together with communion on the first Sunday of each month at 10am. Everyone is welcome to join us as a precious child of God. Each week our service is streamed for all to see live or whenever they would like; check it out on our web page at fccej.org.

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

Order of Worship

An Extravagant Welcome and Announcements ..... Rev. Mark

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

Deacon's Greeting ..... Deacon Gary Hartmann

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.

Introit *Prepare Ye (The Way of the Lord)* Stephen Schwartz

Call to Worship and Lighting the Advent Candle: The Prophet's Candle

Leader: Today, we begin the season of Advent, a time when we light candles to remember the light that came to the world so long ago in the person of Jesus Christ.

People: Lighting the prophet's candle remembers a day when darkness reigned in Israel as they were defeated, deported and depressed. Darkness reigned because the people were lost.

Leader: Today, we remember the prophet Isaiah who reminded the Israelites of God's power and past deeds of glory so that they would remember and turn back toward God.

People: Isaiah exposed how the people never called on God's name or sought to take hold of God and how their righteous deeds were like a filthy cloth. The prophet's candle reminds us that Jesus brings justice and righteousness into our darkness.

[*light one of the purple candles*]

Leader: God's prophets are still speaking, let us have the grace to hear them. Amen.

Opening Hymn** ***Sing Out Earth and Sky **Marty Haugen**
[handout]

Deacon's Prayer of Invocation and **Unison 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.**

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 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.

Scripture Readings:

Old Testament	Prophetic	Isaiah 64:1-9	[page 538]
New Testament	Gospel	Mark 13:24-37	[page 39]

Special Music Anthem *Light of the World* Lauren Daigle

Advent Meditation *Keep Awake* Rev. Mendes

Offering Our Gifts to God
Invitation, Offering and Prayer of Dedication
Musical Offering *Just a Girl* Brandon Health and Lee Thomas Miller

***The 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.

Pastoral Prayer

Sharing Our Prayers with God and Each Other

A Time of Silence for Personal Prayer

Musical Response ***O Come, O Come, Emmanuel***

O come, O come Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

Hymn** ***Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn **#107**

Benediction

Pastoral Benediction

***Sung Community Benediction**

Let There Be Peace on Earth

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be!
With God our Creator, family all are we,
Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.
Let peace begin with me. Let this be the moment now.
With ev'ry breath I take, let this be my solemn vow;
To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally!
Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

*Please stand if you are able.

❖ Sincere appreciation to Finally @ First Praise Band, under the direction of Rick Dooley, for sharing their wonderful musical talents with us this morning!

The flowers on the altar today are given by Ruth Casey, in memory of Skip Casey,
And from the children of Robert Ferris, in remembrance of his birthday.

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: 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, you may use the Friendship Pads, email welcome@fccej.org, or call (802) 878-5745. Unless otherwise specified, prayer requests will be printed in the bulletin for a month.

Family and friend of Lyn Beliveau	*Tom Bennett and Family*
Mike LaMoy	*Nick Hella*
Josephine Lawrence	*Bob Hahner*
All those affected by violence around the world	*Fran Thomas*
Mike Allen	*Remi and Family*
Bill Bickford Jr.	*Myrna Dooney*
Michael Lafoy	*Audrey Sawyer*
Allan and Barbara Reith	*Jane Piper*
Laura Cunningham-Firkey and Family	*Fletch Coolidge*
Phil Bourn, all troops currently deployed, and all those adjusting to being back home	
Everyone that may be privately suffering	*Flood victims in Nepal and surrounding areas*
Everyone experiencing uncertainty and fear in their communities	

Bickford Meal Train

There are more dates for the Bickford Meal Train if you are interested in providing support during this challenging time. The Meal Train allows friends and family to sign up to provide a meal on a particular day, helping Bill and Mindy without them having to coordinate meals themselves.
Here is the link: https://mealtrain.com/vmdwe6
The link provides information about the Meal Train, including available dates, meal preferences, and delivery instructions.

Drop In Choir

Come one, come all, to our "Drop-in Choir Sunday" on 12/6! Warm up with the choir at 9:30 and then sing simpler music with us during the service as we connect with God through music! The sheet music will be provided at the warmup and can also be requested ahead of time if you wish. For more information, email bblake@fccej.org.

FCCEJ Annual Caroling Outing - Saturday 12/5

Calling all FCCEJ folks AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS: We are trying to get the biggest group yet to sing carols at assisted living facilities on Saturday 12/5. All are welcome, and we always have a blast-the residents are invited to sing along! Some of the residents are FCCEJ members!

If you can't make it to all three locations then come to the one(s) that work for you (just follow your ears to find our room location or ask an employee).

You can wear red, white, green, gold, or your ugliest Christmas sweater and reindeer antlers. Lyrics and music will be provided on site, and Bethany will accompany on piano.

Here are the details:

- 1 pm at Maple Ridge* 2 Freeman Woods, Essex
- 2:15 pm at Mansfield Place* 18 Carmichael St, Essex
- 3:30 pm at Williston Place 422 Blair Park Rd, Williston

**At both Maple Ridge and Mansfield Place, we will lead a second caroling session for memory care residents.*

If you are interested in carpooling, please let Bethany know. Invite your friends and come spread some holiday cheer!

Heavenly Food Pantry

Our food pantry continues to successfully support families with food and sundries on a bi-monthly basis. While all donations of non-perishables and feminine hygiene are gratefully accepted, we are in desperate need of Pasta Sauce, Pasta, Canned Green Beans, Corn, Peas, White and Brown Rice and Baby Wipes. Items can be dropped off in the carriages at the parking lot and Church Street entrances. December distribution dates are Monday, 12/14 from 5:30pm to 7:30pm and Thursday, 12/17 from 3pm to 6pm. Thank you for assisting with this important ministry of FCCEJ!

Grief Support

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

Bible Study

Advent Lectionary Readings will be explored on December 11 at 1:30 – 3pm in the Marvin Lounge. Some key words: watch, wait, prepare, comfort. A key idea: trust in the Spirit of the Lord who brings light, healing, peace and justice!

Giving Tree

The response to the Giving Tree has been amazing! While we are all out of tags, there are still opportunities to support the program. Several families missed the initial cut-off date, but we've arranged a second distribution day so that we may assist as many as possible with holiday gifts. Feel free to drop off a new, unwrapped toy in the "Toy Drive" boxes, located around the building. Suggestions are Legos, Duplos, Board Games, Coloring Books, Crayons/Markers/Colored Pencils, Crafts, and Activity Sets. Gift cards are also welcome – please bring those directly to the church office during the week. Phoenix Books, Amazon, Target, Walmart, Barnes & Noble, and McDonald's are all requested frequently.

If you have tags from the tree or Sign Up Genius, here are important reminders:

1. Purchase your gift(s), wrap them, and **include the tag on the outside of the wrapping**. Please use a gift bag or box for gift cards, too.
2. Drop off your gifts at the tree on Sunday morning or the office during the week.

Gifts are due Sunday, December 6

There is always great anticipation around the Giving Tree. We hope you will join us in making this Christmas a season of hope and love for many families in our community.

Stay Connected!

Our weekly E-Connection 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.

Weekly Calendar: November 29 – December 6

Please contact the church office with any changes or corrections

Events in italics = Local Community Groups

Sunday, November 29 8:30* & 10:15am: All Family Worship—Sanctuary & Streaming* 9:30am: Music Rehearsal – West Wing *1pm: Brown Bag—Fellowship Hall*	**Monday, November 30** *8:15am-3:30pm: Bluebird Montessori* 9am: Food Pantry Organizing—Fellowship Hall *11:30am: Brown Bag—Fellowship Hall* *3:45 & 4:30pm: Music Lesson – Sanctuary* 6pm: Sanctuary Choir Rehearsal - Sanctuary
Tuesday, December 1 *8:15am-3:30pm: Bluebird Montessori* 8:30: Sermon Talkback—Marvin Lounge/Zoom 10am-1pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop *10:15am: Intermediate Tai Chi – Fellowship Hall* *11:30am: Brown Bag – Fellowship Hall* *6:30pm: BSA Troop 624 District Meeting – Fellowship Hall* 7pm: Church Council – Marvin Lounge	**Wednesday, December 2** *8:15am-3:30pm: Bluebird Montessori* *10am: Bone Builders—Fellowship Hall* *11:30am: Brown Bag—Fellowship Hall* *3pm: Highland Dance Class – Gym* 5:30pm: Finally @ First Rehearsal - Sanctuary *Cub Scouts Pack 630 Den Meetings – Fellowship Hall, 3rd Floor, Program Room* 7pm: Searchers – Marvin Lounge *BSA Troop 624 – Fellowship Hall*
Thursday, December 3 *8:15am-3:30pm: Bluebird Montessori* *8:30am: Essex Art League – Fellowship Hall* *10:30am: Music Lesson - Sanctuary* *11:30am: Brown Bag—Fellowship Hall* 3pm-6pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop *6pm: Music Lesson – Sanctuary* 7pm: Sanctuary Choir Rehearsal - Sanctuary	**Friday, December 4** 8am: Coffee Clatter – Martone's *8:15am-3:30pm: Bluebird Montessori* *10am: Bone Builders – Fellowship Hall* *11:30am: Brown Bag—Fellowship Hall* 1:30pm: Bridge Group – Marvin Lounge 5:30pm: Young Families Dinner – Fellowship Hall, Kitchen, Gym
Saturday, December 5 *8am: The Vine Nepali Congregation—Sanctuary* *Give It a Go Support Group – Marvin Lounge* *8:30am: Weight Loss Support Group – Fellowship Hall* 10am-1pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop *1pm: Brown Bag – Fellowship Hall* *GMKCS – Gym, 3rd Floor, Program Room*	**Sunday, December 6** 9:30am: Music Rehearsal – West Wing 10am: Worship—Sanctuary & Streaming 11am-12pm: Heavenly Cents Thrift Shop 11:30am: Service Trip Team – Marvin Lounge *1pm: Brown Bag—Fellowship Hall*