

Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

“Nobody could have seen this coming.”

That refrain has been offered by some political leaders to excuse the slow and inadequate response to the coronavirus outbreak. The truth is we could and should have seen this coming; it was never beyond the realm of possibility or imagination. Big-budget suspense movies like “Outbreak” and “Contagion” hypothesized something like this happening. Beyond the world of fantasy, we may draw on the common historical memory of the Spanish Flu, a horrible influenza that swept the world in the aftermath of the Great War. In more recent times, we were given a taste of what an outbreak might threaten with SARS, MERS, Ebola, and the H1N1 flu. And then, much more recently, there was the news of what was happening in China, then Italy, then Spain.

So, “nobody could have seen this coming” is patently not true. Many did. A more accurate statement would be “nobody wanted to see this coming.” The averted eyes. The turning away from someone in need. The inconvenient truth. The thing we need, and indeed yearn for, spurned. Should we be surprised? Who among us wants to contemplate his or her own mortality? Not many of us. But what is striking is that this dynamic of denial and avoidance doesn’t just feature in reactions to warnings about the coronavirus; it is a central part of the story of Jesus and Easter.

The signs were there. Scripture was fulfilled. The word was spread. Miracles or signs were performed. For those who wished to see, it was evident that Jesus, the Messiah, was coming. But so many chose not to see the import of the Christ’s arrival.

As we contemplate these failures, I think it is important that we not point fingers, or question how “they” could have dropped the ball, how “they” struck out so badly. Instead, we need to wonder if we would’ve done any better. Perhaps we did in the current situation. But how would we have done during that first Holy Week? Where would we have been? With the crowds cheering Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem? That’s possible. Would we have been in the crowd calling for his death? Perhaps. Might we have stood at the foot of the cross? Not likely.

Does this mean there is no hope for us, that we are a bunch of frauds? Not in the least. Real faith requires commitment. True faith requires

Continued on Page 5

SUNDAY SERVICE

Do Your Part to Fill the Cart—From Home!

Greater Lebanon has been struggling with rising poverty and food insecurity for some time, and these challenges have only increased as COVID-19 precautions threaten employment and income.

We are no longer collecting items for our shopping cart at church, but local need is more urgent than ever.

Listen's food pantry on Hanover Street continues to accept non-perishable donations, and they are serving to-go meals during the week in WRJ. Yet the closure of the Listen Store is a huge financial loss. The Haven, too, would greatly appreciate any donations for its financial assistance programs.

In lieu of filling our cart, please consider a direct contribution (online or by mail) to the Haven, Listen, the UV Humane Society, or another local service organization. Thanks to all for fighting poverty in our community.

UV Strong Responds to COVID-19

If you're in need of assistance in these challenging times, or if you're looking for new opportunities to volunteer, UPPER VALLEY STRONG has mobilized its resources for both recipients and volunteers.

Visit uvstrong.org for more information.

FOCUS ON STEWARDSHIP

While regular worship services are suspended, we continue to depend on the offering contributions that you'd normally give on Sundays—in fact, the need is greater than usual. We realize that not everyone can give so generously, especially in these newly austere circumstances, but **we're grateful for contributions of any amount to these purposes:**

Regular Offering—Collected weekly as unrestricted support for FCC's general operations, ministries, and programs. This includes all pledges and payments in our annual stewardship effort.

Communion/Open Door Offerings—Collected on communion Sundays, directly funding our Open Door Ministry for community assistance (gas/food cards, rent/utilities, etc.). Any contribution in a communion envelope goes to this fund, but Open Door gifts may be made at any other time, too.

Special Offerings (e.g., Lenten Lunch Bag Offering, Blanket Sunday, and UCC offerings such as One Great Hour of Sharing)—Each collected once a year, in conjunction with an event or national campaign for a particular mission or service cause.

THANKS TO ALL for so generously supporting these diverse purposes, at FCC and beyond!

All contributions may be made payable to FCC, with any specific purpose (as applicable) written in the memo line, and mailed to PO Box 230, Lebanon, NH 03766.

Children's Community Corner—Lenten Lunch Bag Offering

Despite our circumstances, the CCC will still collect its Lenten offering for two important organizations:

WISE (wiseuv.org) and EPILOGOS CHARITIES (epilogos.org)

WISE seeks to end gender-based violence through survivor-centered advocacy and education. Our Lenten collection will fund welcome bags given to the children and women at WISE's Safe Home. Epilogos seeks to improve lives of people in San Jose Villanueva, El Salvador, a model for focused global outreach and a town dear to many at FCC. Our offering will fund scholarships for students in SJV's school.

In both of these cases, our Lenten offering allows FCC's children to help other children in challenging circumstances, encouraging them to consider stewardship as a way to share God's love.

Whatever Lenten sacrifices you've made, please return or mail all donations to church on or soon after EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 12.

SUNDAY SERVICE

HOLY WEEK WORSHIP AT FCC

All services will be offered as pre-recorded **YouTube** videos, supplemented by worship bulletins, prayer texts, hymns, and sermons, all posted on our website, www.fcclb.org. All services except Good Friday will also be offered as live **Zoom** conferences at the times specified; please look for emails with login information, or contact the church office.

April 5—Palm Sunday

10 am: Liturgy of the Palms

April 9—Maundy Thursday

7 pm: Service of Communion, Tenebrae, Stripping of the Altar

April 10—Good Friday

Quiet Meditation on the Seven Last Words
Service of the Word and Prayer

April 12—EASTER SUNDAY

10 am: Festival Worship Service



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

Special Mission Offering
Spring 2020

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a vital, nationwide UCC offering for mission initiatives around the world. It funds healthcare, education, agriculture, emergency relief, and refugee assistance in over 130 countries. OGHS support is leveraged with local, national, and global service partners to maximize its impact in these areas.

Normally collected everywhere on the fourth Sunday in Lent, OGHS is extended this year because of church closures. We will continue to accept OGHS donations anytime in the weeks ahead. Please give as generously as you can.

THANK YOU!



All contributions may be made payable to FCC, with "OGHS" in the memo line, and mailed to PO Box 230, Lebanon, NH 03766.

COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

To open the **March teleconference** of Council the Rev. Steve Silver thanked everyone for participating in this unusual format, dictated by the COVID-19 crisis. As this situation develops quickly, he emphasized the importance of keeping in touch, maintaining connections within our congregation, and making decisions together.

John Gilliatt reports that the **Board of Governors** has continued to work on estimates for insulation projects at both the parsonage and the church. Parts for the second chancel railing are ready to be installed, and both railings will be painted and finished to match the existing trim. Looking ahead to a June clean-up day, the Board hopes to line the dirt cellar with plastic to prepare for insulation, and they are investigating resurfacing the front walk in concrete rather than the current asphalt. Parsonage sewer line repairs are also needed. Lastly, a subcommittee for renovating the kitchen is assessing proposals from an outside consultant.

We've had estimates for most larger projects for some time, pending a congregational decision to move forward. The Dole Trust, two thirds of which is designated for capital improvements, has substantially accrued and may be used for some of these projects.

Stewardship chair Jon Scott noted that campaign progress necessarily would be delayed by the current COVID-19 uncertainty, but he adds that frequent visitor Lola Baldwin, who has fundraising experience,

would be participating. Jon also pointed out that the suspension of worship services means a decrease in our offering collections. Even if congregation members mail in contributions, we need to prepare for people giving less than they had planned. Jon will work with Steve Silver on how to communicate about this effectively. He also noted that now might be an opportunity to make resources available for estate planning.

Trustees chair Valerie Nevel reported that recent market declines had not been too damaging for the church's investments. She is scheduling total-return distributions for this month and perhaps next as well, in part to counter a delay in the annual disbursement from the Waldo Trust. Valerie has managed cash reserves to minimize the need to sell securities in this down market. Several thanked Valerie for her diligent stewardship of the church's investments.

Treasurer Terry Ellison noted that income and expense numbers are as expected, though he recognizes the challenge of a probable drop-off in offering collections.

Brian Clancy reported for the **Music Committee** that no viable candidates had inquired yet about the organist and choir director position, although he cautioned that it was still relatively early in the process. The position has been listed with the national AGO and various regional chapters, along with the ACDA, the employment website Indeed, and several local organizations and email listserves.

Brian also confirmed that almost all events through May in the Music at the Meetinghouse series have already been canceled because of the virus crisis.

Barb Teeter, beginning her tenure as **Diaconate** chair, reported that the group was trying to acclimate its two newest members. A primary focus at this time is updating the Deacons' member contact lists, to ensure continued connections while we are unable to gather as a congregation. Steve Silver and others recognized that everyone could be helpful in reaching out.

For **Mission and Social Action**, Kathy Beckett confirmed that the March Community Dinner had been canceled, as we're not fully equipped to guarantee safe food preparation and distribution, even on a take-out-only basis. We can, however, continue to promote our shopping-cart beneficiaries. Kathy also reported that visits by Hearts You Hold and Epilogos would be rescheduled once we can resume worship services. She noted the intention to survey the congregation about which mission beneficiaries we should support.

Committee Meetings

In lieu of in-person meetings at church, some FCC groups will continue to meet remotely via Zoom teleconferences.

Church Council will meet using Zoom on April 21 at 7:00. For information about other groups' plans to meet remotely, please contact the church office.

COMMITTEE NOTES

Kathy repeated an MSA request to fund four additional Epilogos scholarships (two middle-school, two elementary) for the school in SJV, for a total of \$480. Council unanimously agreed this could come from Dole mission funds, along with additional support for the Open Door Ministry at this critical time for local outreach.

In his **pastor's report** Steve Silver recognized the challenges of the coronavirus crisis, explaining how we're adapting worship resources to be available remotely, including an online bulletin and sermon text and some livestream component. Steve thanked Susan Sorensen for her willingness to provide music as well. It's important to maintain some routines and attempt to stay

connected, and pastoral care needs have increased. While Holy Week services are unfeasible, it is hoped that we might still hold a sunrise service in Colburn Park.

Steve was happy to report that Eliot Fay had successfully passed his ecclesiastical council evaluation. Eliot's family still plans to return to NH as he prepares for ordination and a pastoral call.

Although our campaign will pause for the moment, Steve expressed gratitude for everyone's patience and community support during this challenging period. He also appreciates that our congregation is fortunate to be in a relatively secure financial position, able to help others in our community.

DIACONATE

In March, the Deacons discussed the lower balance of communion donations, which fund **food and gas cards** for FCC's Open Door Ministry. It was suggested that the congregation be reminded of the monthly communion offering and its purpose.

The Deacons have also received updated member contact lists and considered how social distancing and hygiene concerns would affect **worship practices and fellowship**, including communion service, passing of the peace, and coffee hour. (Although they met prior to the actual cancellation of services, these concerns will likely remain once worship resumes.) In June the

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

courage. And we need to rely upon God for those things to be manifest in our lives. We need the Spirit to grant us perspective, the ability to see new things, especially the Way of Jesus, which is life-giving but also demanding.

The response to statements like "nobody could have seen this coming" is not dumb assent. Nor would it be a combative riposte. Instead, I believe the answer would be another series of questions: "Why couldn't anybody see these things? How then might we see these things? What might we do differently? How can we be alert to those things we overlook?"

The wonder of Easter is that it all happened in plain sight, right there for people to see. But they had to have the faith, the courage, the commitment to look. This year, people may not feel like celebrating. They may feel resurrection has been put on hold for the duration. They would be wrong.

Easter will happen regardless of whether we gather in our church or in Colburn Park. Resurrection depends not on a calendar. Easter and the Resurrection, the promise of new life and hope revived, those things in which we believe, for which we yearn, are also attitudes. Now more than ever, the world needs us to be Resurrection people, prepared for new beginnings, for life renewed.

So be prepared. Be ready. Something big is happening and we should not be surprised, for God told us what he would do in and through Jesus. Darkness will be overcome by light. Despair will give way to hope. Death will fall before new life.

Happy Easter! 

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

Diaconate will serve Community Dinner, with Dawn Troutman offering to take the lead and Larry Doyle providing his cooking and baking help. As we consider our community dinner service amid virus concerns, food preparation safety will be increasingly essential, including the use of gloves and hand sanitizer and the thorough washing or disposal of dishes.

As the Diaconate considered the practice of imposing ashes on Ash Wednesday, the Rev. Steve Silver explained that he has imposed ashes at FCC since arriving ten years ago, having also done so at previous churches. According to his predecessor, the Rev. Richard Slater, an ecumenical service with imposition of ashes has long been the norm at FCC. The UCC does not specify a denomination-specific ritual, but this is an ancient practice followed widely today by the full variety of Christians.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE **Annual Senior Luncheon**

normally served in April or May, will be rescheduled this summer or perhaps in September.

Music at the Meetinghouse

Please note that these events in April and May have been canceled:

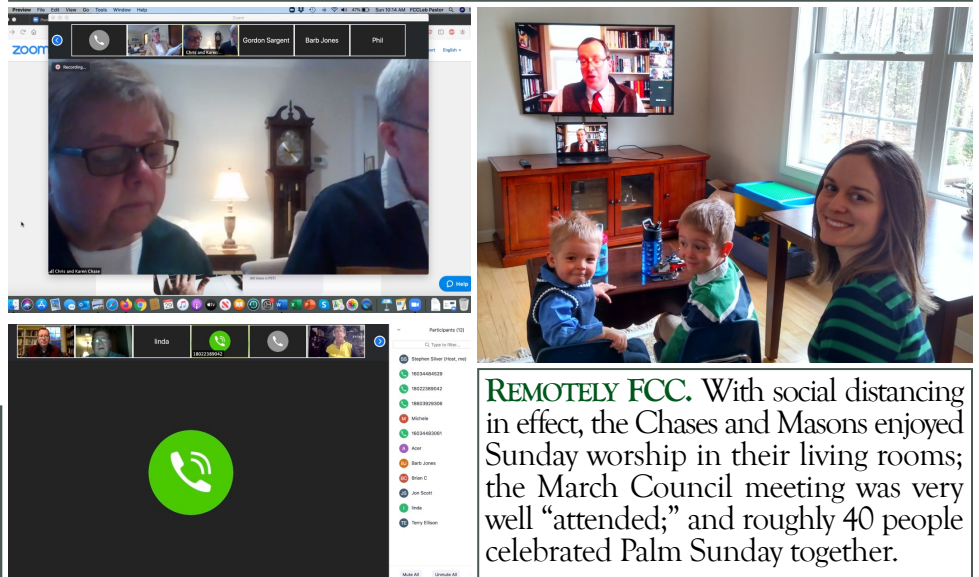
- Anonymous Coffeehouse 4/17
- Classicopia 4/18
- Camerata New England 4/19
- Bel Canto Singers 5/2-3
- UVMC Suzuki Recitals 5/2-3
- UVMC Sing & Play 5/16
- Joe Jewett and Friends 5/16

Call for Submissions to Next Month's Grace Notes How Are You Coping with Corona?

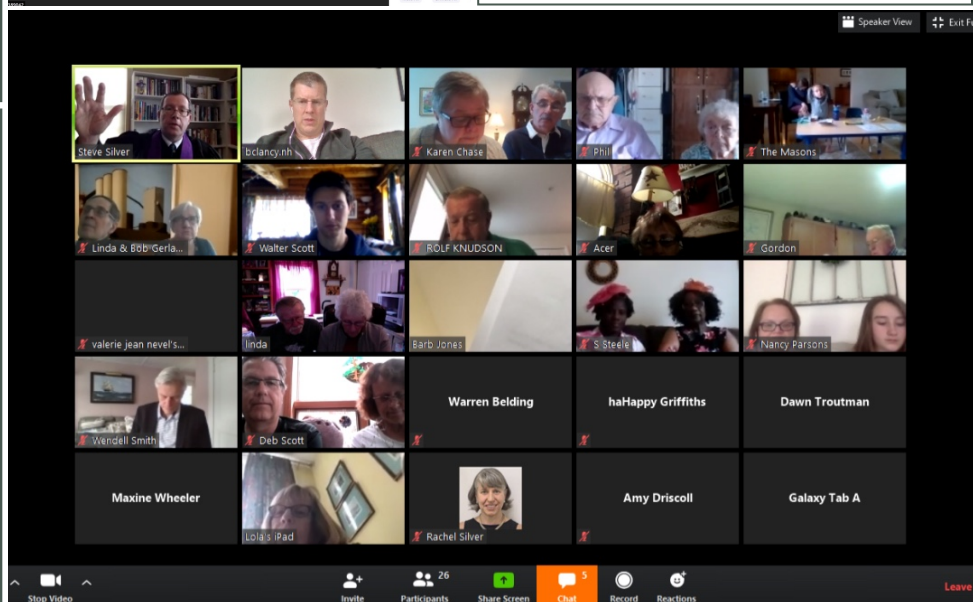
We're all well aware that public-health precautions instituted to contain the spread of COVID-19 have changed daily life dramatically, here in the Upper Valley and in cities and towns all over the world.

For next month's newsletter, we'd like to include some glimpses into how our congregation members have been coping with these strange circumstances. Whether working or remote learning at home, taking up new hobbies and activities, getting out for some socially-distanced exercise, or helping friends and neighbors, **all are invited to share a few words or photos with the rest of the FCC community.**

*Despite our social distance, we remain a congregation.
Let's see and hear what that looks like!*



REMOTELY FCC. With social distancing in effect, the Chases and Masons enjoyed Sunday worship in their living rooms; the March Council meeting was very well "attended;" and roughly 40 people celebrated Palm Sunday together.





Music
at the
Meetinghouse

Open Position: **Organist and Choir Director**

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

First Congregational Church of Lebanon, a 200-member, open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ (UCC), seeks a part-time organist and choir director. Our congregation is fully committed to the vital importance of music in worship, ministry, and community life, and we are generous in supporting it. Our sanctuary is among the finest musical spaces in the area, featuring excellent acoustics as well as a beautiful Steinway L piano and a two-manual Johnson pipe organ (converted in the 1950s to electropneumatic action), both of which are used in worship. The church possesses an extensive music library of both choral and keyboard repertoire. We also host an ongoing, widely appreciated concert series, offering public performances in a variety of genres.

The primary responsibilities of this position are 1) providing and accompanying all music and hymns for one worship service weekly on Sunday mornings, and 2) directing an adult choir of 8-10 singers that rehearses on Thursday nights. We expect a typical weekly commitment of 4-5 scheduled hours at the church, plus flexible, discretionary practice time; overall, the position's responsibilities would constitute 10-12 hours per week. The position also requires participation in special services for Christmas, Lent, and Holy Week.

Applicants should offer an appropriate musical background; proficiency in both organ and piano, as a solo performer and as an accompanist; experience in choral direction; and a basic familiarity with standard, traditional church repertoire. A personal faith commitment in either the UCC or another denomination is preferable, but it is not required. Salary is negotiable, commensurate with qualifications and experience; please indicate any specific compensation requirements you might have. The position also offers professional development funds, four Sundays off per year (not during Advent or Holy Week), and use of the church for concerts and recitals; no other benefits are included. Applications accepted immediately, to start as soon as possible. **Please submit all applications (cover letter and résumé) and/or questions by email to the Church Administrator, at church@fccleb.org.** *First Congregational Church of Lebanon does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other characteristic.*

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

Weekly Worship and Church School: Sundays, 10:00 am • Office Hours: Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9-12
10 South Park Street, P.O. Box 230, Lebanon, NH 03766 • 603-448-4281 • church@fccleb.org • www.fccleb.org
Rev. Stephen R. Silver: silver@fccleb.org • **Music:** music@fccleb.org • **Newsletter Submissions:** church@fccleb.org



First Congregational Church of Lebanon

10 South Park Street

PO Box 230

Lebanon, NH 03766

*DATED MATERIAL
PLEASE DELIVER PROMPTLY*

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

HOLY WEEK ONLINE AT FCC

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