



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

By the time you read this, Advent will have already started. The clock will be ticking, the sands running to the bottom of the hourglass, as we make our way to Christmas. The days will be filled with various gatherings, end-of-year work responsibilities, present purchasing and wrapping, and visits with family and friends, all accompanied by, honestly, an occasionally deep yearning for just more time, although I know the calendar is set and the number of days fixed. For many, perhaps most, ministers Advent is the busiest—and most stressful—time of year. I'd be lying if I didn't admit to sometimes being amongst this cohort. The services need to take place, the meetings need to be attended, stuff has to be done, and, well, you get the picture.

Yet...

This is still one of the most beautiful times of the year. As I write this, a gentle blanket of snow has covered the Upper Valley, giving everything an appropriate seasonal aura, and we now seem to be in a new season. It is also incredibly special in large part because of what's to come. We seem to be on the cusp of something, something big. Perhaps you sense this too. We Christians believe that the big event in the offing is the imminent arrival of the Christ-child, which we will celebrate later this month.

It doesn't matter that he's already here, that his birth took place two millennia ago and 4,000 miles away. It doesn't matter that he left us the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, after he was crucified and resurrected. Simply put, God's time does not work like ours. Jesus has come, will come, and, we profess, is coming, very, very soon.

So while we will rejoice in song and pageant about Jesus' long-ago nativity, we will experience his birth as if for the first time. And as with any newborn's arrival, the possibilities will seem endless and the potential limitless. In this baby, our hopes and dreams will be fulfilled in so many marvelous ways, even if we don't recognize what has happened.

We know what Jesus did for us—and what he is doing now. His birth was part of history. But our history is a story that is still being written,

Continued on Page 7

CELEBRATE THE SEASON

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT FCC

Please join us as we celebrate Advent and prepare to welcome the Christ Child!

Sundays, December 1 through 22, 10:00 am—Worship and Children’s Community Corner

Sunday, December 1, 11:30 am—Christmas Decorating Party (*Below*)

Saturday, December 7—Lebanon Holiday Celebration; Markets at WLCC and LUMC (*Page 3*)

Sunday, December 8, 3:00-5:00 pm—Christmas Party and Carol Sing at the Parsonage (*Below*)

Thursday, December 12, 6:30 pm—Blue Christmas Service at WLCC (*Page 3*)

Sat., Dec. 14, 7:30 / Sun., Dec. 15, 4:00—Bel Canto Chamber Singers: Make We Joy (*Page 9*)

Sunday, December 15, 11:30 am—FCC Community Caroling (*Below*)

Friday, December 20, 7:00 pm—Blue Christmas Service at LUMC (*Page 3*)

Saturday, December 21, 3:30 pm—UVMC Messiah Sing (*Page 9*)

Sunday, December 22, 1:00 pm—Classicopia: Four-hand Holiday (*Page 9*)

Sunday, December 22, 5:00 pm—Christmas Community Dinner (*Page 2*)

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24—CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

5:00 pm—Family Service and Pageant

A joyful service of Christmas song and story for families and the young at heart. All children are invited to participate in a pageant and living crèche (*prep at 4:15*).



8:00 pm—Service of Lessons and Carols

The story of our Savior’s birth in lessons from Scripture and traditional carols.



11:00 pm—Candlelight Communion Service

A service of light and song, rejoicing in Christ’s birth with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Christmas Decorating Party!

Following Worship on Sunday, December 1

As we welcome Advent, plan to stay after worship to hang wreaths, string lights, trim our tree, and have fun getting the church ready for this festive season.

No need to RSVP, but please bring some refreshments or treats to share!

Community Caroling

Following Worship on Sunday, December 15

Join us for this annual Christmas ministry, as we share favorite carols with enthusiastic and grateful residents of the Towers, Genesis, Harvest Hill, and elsewhere around town. No need to offer a perfect singing voice—just bring your good cheer!

Christmas Party and Carol Sing at the Parsonage!

Sunday, December 8, 3:00-5:00 pm—15 Kimball Street (Corner of Kimball/Elm Streets)

All are warmly invited to the Parsonage for our annual congregational Christmas party! We’ll gather ’round the fireplace for festive fellowship and favorite carols. *Please bring an appetizer or dessert to share.*

CELEBRATE THE SEASON

Holiday Events in Our Community Saturday, December 7

Lebanon Downtown Holiday Celebration

(Various locations throughout town, all day)

Lebanon Recreation and local businesses offer an impressive array of festivities around the Green, and the Upper Valley Music Center will present student recitals in FCC's Sanctuary all afternoon. Full schedule and more at lebanonnh.gov/1097/Lebanons-Downtown-Holiday-Celebration and uvmusic.org/event/holiday-open-house.

WLCC Holiday Bazaar, 9:00-1:00

LUMC Holiday Market, 9:00-2:00

Our friends at West Lebanon Congregational and Lebanon United Methodist offer decorations, gifts, jewelry, books, textiles, baked goods, candy, and assorted other items. Bring your friends!

Blue Christmas Services

Thursday, December 12, 6:30 pm

West Lebanon Congregational Church

Friday, December 20, 7:00 pm

Lebanon United Methodist Church

For those carrying burdens or dealing with loss, this can be quite a challenging time of year. All are welcome to share in these intimate services—a chance for quiet reflection, peace, hope, and Christ's love on **The Longest Night** of the year.

Do Your Part to Fill the Cart!

All are invited to join in fighting local poverty and food insecurity by leaving contributions in our shopping cart in the Parish Hall. FCC designates a different cart beneficiary each month.

During December, we'll collect non-perishable food and personal-care items on behalf of

LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES

Thanks for your generosity in fighting poverty and hunger in our community.



Poinsettias FOR ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

If you wish to offer poinsettias for the Sanctuary in honor or memory of someone, you may either donate your own or order them through the church office. FCC will purchase 6-inch poinsettias (@ \$7) this year.

If you would like to be included in the church's poinsettia order, please contact the office no later than Thursday, December 12.

If you plan to donate your own flowers, please bring them to church by Sunday, December 15.

All dedications must be received by Monday, December 16. Dedications will be listed in bulletins on Sunday, December 22, and on Christmas Eve.

CHRISTMAS COMMUNITY DINNER

Sunday, December 22, 5:00 pm

Leader: NAN PARSONS

Many thanks to Nan and her family for once again serving our Christmas Community Dinner! Please lend a hand in providing a festive meal to our friends and neighbors, especially if this is your first time.

Look for sign-ups soon in the Parish Hall.

New Year, New Leaders!

We are always hoping to expand the reliable group of dedicated leaders who generously commit time and resources to our Community Dinners.

Please consider organizing a meal in 2020, especially on January 26 or February 23!

Menu resources are available, and the church can reimburse costs. If you're interested in leading or have questions, contact the church office.

Queued for Coffee Hour

December—Board of Governors

January—Stewardship Committee

February—Christian Education Committee

DECEMBER 2019

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 ADVENT 1 10a Worship/CCC (Communion) 11:15a Christmas Decorating!	2 5:30p Cub Scouts (AoL/Girls) 7p Valley Improv	3 7p BSA Troop 279	4 5:30p Cub Scout Pack Committee 6p UVPRN 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	5 7p Choir	6 11:45a LHS Life Skills Class 7:30p Anonymous Coffeehouse	7 (9a-1p WLCC Holiday Bazaar) (9a-2p LUMC Holiday Market) 1p Leb Holiday Celebration (UVMC in FCC Sanctuary)
8 ADVENT 2 10a Worship/CCC (Open House for Coffee Hour) 11:15a MSA 3-5p Parsonage Christmas Party	9 7p Diaconate 5:30p Cub Scouts (AoL/Girls)	10 7p BSA Troop 279	11 8a-4p NH-WIC 5:30p Cub Scouts (Webelos/Tigers) 6p UVPRN 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	12 7p Choir 7p Valley Improv	13 11:45a LHS Life Skills Class 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	14 7:30p Bel Canto: Make We Joy
15 ADVENT 3 10a Worship/CCC 11:30a Community Caroling 4p Bel Canto: Make We Joy	16	17 7p Church Council 7p BSA Troop 279/Committee	18 5:30p Cub Scouts (Webelos/Tigers) 6p UVPRN	19 12:30p Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Assn (CoCM) 6-10p Messiah rehearsals 7p Choir	20 10a-1p Messiah rehearsals 11:45a LHS Life Skills Class	21 1p Messiah rehearsals 3:30p UVMC Messiah Sing!
22 ADVENT 4 10a Worship/CCC 11:15a Bd of Govs 1p Classicopia: Four-hand Holiday 5p Community Dinner	23	24 CHRISTMAS EVE 5p Family Service and Pageant 8p Lessons and Carols 11p Candlelight Communion	25 CHRISTMAS DAY 6p UVPRN	26 10a-6p NH-WIC No Choir	27	28
29 10a Worship/CCC	30	31 NEW YEAR'S EVE	1 NEW YEAR'S DAY 6p UVPRN	2 7p Choir	3	4
5 10a Worship/CCC (Communion)	6 5:30p Cub Scouts (AoL/Girls) Annual Report Content Due	7 7p Diaconate 7p BSA Troop 279	8 5:30p Cub Scout Pack Committee 6p UVPRN 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	9 7p Choir 7p Valley Improv	10 11:45a LHS Life Skills Class 7p Paul Cohen, Cello	11 1p Paul Cohen Cello Class

If your event is missing or incorrect, please notify us at church@fccleb.org or 603-448-4281.

COMMITTEE NOTES

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

The Board of Governors will discuss **fire safety procedure** in conjunction with our November fire drill. The group prefers to keep the process simple, deciding not to designate a “sweeper” to clear areas because of possible liability and the need to train and equip such a person. For drill purposes Steve Silver, as pastor, will be the one to inform everyone that it’s safe to return to the building. Further recommendations will be made in response to the drill.

The Board also discussed ongoing **insulation projects** in the kitchen exhaust system, Sanctuary ceiling, and dirt cellar. Wayne Braley will be hired to do much of this work, in collaboration with others on the Board. Wayne will also install the new railings on the chancel steps.

We continue to assess the condition of the **front portico**, including the new finish on the decking and rust staining on some of the facade and columns. The Board will ensure that entrances are safe through the winter with mats, ice-melt, and other usual measures; we will again provide for snow and ice removal around the property.

Among other projects, the carpets downstairs, in the office stairwell, and in the Parlor have been cleaned professionally. It has been hard to correlate our paint registry with colors throughout the building. A review of storage space confirmed that the Scouts should have enough space in their balcony room for all their needs. And the Board will be considering several minor issues of landscaping for the spring.

December Meetings

<i>Mission/Social Action</i>	12/8, 11:15
<i>Diaconate</i>	12/9, 7:00
<i>Church Council</i>	12/17, 7:00
<i>Board of Governors</i>	12/22, 11:15

January 2020 Meetings

<i>Mission/Social Action</i>	1/5, 11:15
<i>Diaconate</i>	TBD
<i>Church Council</i>	1/21, 7:00
<i>Board of Governors</i>	1/26, 11:15

CHURCH COUNCIL

Nan Parsons reported to Council in November on current activities in the **Children’s Community Corner**. The children have had a yoga meditation session and are planning field trips to Riverbank Church and different theatrical productions. Nan commended and thanked Ashley Oronte for her excellent work and support during these months of transition in the program. She invited everyone to an open house in the CCC space for coffee hour on December 8.

In his **pastor’s report** the Rev. Steve Silver noted that we hope to produce a new welcome brochure during Advent. There was brief discussion about its contents and what needed to be updated from the previous version. Some asked whether we’d consider producing a new church directory at some point as well; the current edition was published in 2016, and the next version could be a streamlined, in-house production. Steve has also begun to explore how we might reconfigure our **committee and governance structure**, in recent

conversations with colleagues at churches that have engaged in a similar restructuring. Steve stressed this would be a long, deliberative process, but we’ve considered this issue for several years already.

Steve thanked the congregation for a successful **fire drill** November 17, which revealed only some minor aspects of our safety plan that could be refined (technical connections with the fire department and the need to call 911 as part of the drill).

With our **ecumenical Thanksgiving service** coming on November 25 at Greater Hartford United Church, Steve encouraged participation by FCC members in ecumenical events more generally.

Approaching **Stewardship Sunday**, it is hoped that the congregation will fully participate in pledging for 2020, regardless of amount. Jon Scott invites committee chairs to lead the way in making pledges. As Council approved last month, campaign planning is progressing toward a launch at Annual Meeting.

Valerie Nevel reported that the **Finance Committee** won’t meet until after the Thanksgiving holiday, but she noted that the year’s market success has been very good for our endowment portfolio. Steve recently attended a board meeting of the UCF, which manages a portion of our investments.

John Gilliatt reported for the **Board of Governors** that the altar railing installation will now happen after the New Year, due to some schedule issues. The Parsonage energy audit was completed in October, and the Board is considering what actions

COMMITTEE NOTES

might be taken in response. John is also interested in hearing feedback about the fire drill.

Council briefly discussed **coffee hour duties** and our longstanding monthly rotation of those duties. Corrine Erskine has drafted some guidelines in hopes of encouraging more people to take on this weekly role, but it was generally agreed that we should be careful not to impose too high a standard or expectation for what's provided. *(Please contact the church office for a copy of Corrine's guidelines, or if you'd like to volunteer for a Sunday!)*

Lastly, Steve Silver noted that the **Mission and Social Action** account, used for community assistance for rent, utilities, and other needs, was running low on funds. Council approved a distribution from the Dole Trust. A discussion followed about our mission partnerships with organizations such as WISE and Second Growth, which have sometimes involved financial support. No reauthorization of those partnerships is required, but it was suggested that we contact our current partners to determine how FCC can best help them now.

DIACONATE

At their November meeting the Deacons discussed funds for food and gas cards, approving another bulk purchase of each for the Open Door Ministry. They also reflected on the work that Nan Parsons and others have done with the Children's Community Corner, particularly the increased involvement of kids in worship. As with adult liturgists, they should be encouraged to speak clearly and use the microphone. Deacons were encouraged to visit downstairs during worship. They

Doing Good, Sharing Gifts: Stewardship and Our Faith

“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

As **Hebrews 13:16** reminds us, when we participate in Stewardship with our time, skills, and resources, we are not just being philanthropic or community-minded—we are making a sacrifice. When the Israelites presented their offerings at the temple, they were engaged in worship, as we are when we make our pledges each fall. Let our sacred, holy work please the Lord as we strive to better the world.

We are grateful to have received 24 pledges so far for the coming year! Regardless of the size of your pledge, your participation is vital to our plans for 2020. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to FCC's mission and ministry, and thanks for your faithful stewardship!

Offering envelopes for 2020 are available in the Parish Hall. Once you've submitted a pledge form, please take whichever box you wish and record it on the list.

**CONTENT FOR THE 2019 ANNUAL REPORT
must be submitted to the Church Administrator by
Monday, January 6, 2020**

Which Offering Is Which?

Our stewardship effort asks us to consider a variety of offering collections throughout the year. Each offering serves a distinct purpose:

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

Communion offering—Collected on the first Sunday of each month, directly funding our Open Door Ministry for community assistance (gas/grocery cards) or, occasionally, designated for some other mission need. Any contribution in a communion envelope goes to this fund.

Special UCC offerings (e.g., One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, and Christmas Fund)—Each collected once annually, as part of a national campaign for a particular mission or service cause.

***No matter which envelopes we use,
THANKS TO ALL for so generously and
consistently supporting these diverse
purposes, at FCC and far beyond!***

COMMITTEE NOTES

also affirmed our choice in recent years to keep rear entrances of the building unlocked.

Steve Silver in his **pastor's report** appreciated the large contingent from FCC at UVIP's Micah Award event. He noted that four people were engaged in the *Simply Christian* book study. He and the Deacons have reviewed and revised material for new welcome brochures, to be produced for Advent; the Deacons were encouraged to think about other possible ways in which pew cards could reach worshipers.

The Diaconate continues to review our **membership rolls** in advance of the next Annual Meeting, along with consideration of possible new Deacons. We are also examining our volunteer roles and committee structure with regard to the size and capabilities of our congregation.

The Deacons also discussed how we refer to the various **sections of the Bible**, keeping in mind important differences in Jewish and Christian traditions. The "Hebrew Bible" and "Old Testament," for example, are not interchangeable terms or equivalent collections of scripture. The group decided simply to list scripture lessons in the worship bulletin without designating their Biblical sections.

Reviewing community connections, it was reported that the City of Lebanon will fund a part-time VNA coordinator for the Community Nursing program, which currently carries a caseload of 65 clients. It was also suggested that we try to offer our Community Dinner more directly to families with children.

FCC's Shopping Cart for Hunger

Many thanks to all who have so generously filled our shopping cart each month, in support of Listen, the Haven, and the UV Humane Society. Thanks also to Kathy Beckett and others on the MSA Committee and Diaconate for delivering all the donations!

Thanks for helping to fight local poverty and hunger!



From Church Council and the Nominating Committee

Volunteer Opportunities Available

Have you found an ideal service opportunity for yourself at FCC? Are you interested in a particular program or committee? Do you have creative ideas for aspects of congregational life or governance?

We want to know!

As we approach a new year and a new term for FCC's volunteer committees, Church Council and the Nominating Committee ask you to consider how you might best contribute your skills, interests, and energy to the church's operations, ministries, and mission.

If you're interested in learning more about a committee or available opportunities for service and ministry, please contact the church office or **Amy Driscoll** (603-448-0976 or amykdriscoll@gmail.com).

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

not by impersonal historical forces but the Author of Everything, the Almighty, Loving God, who has chosen us to be his beloved people.

So let's live into this moment, let's be caught up in the wonder of the season. Let's take a few moments to reflect but also to be joyful. And let's set aside the ephemera that clamor for our attention in the present and focus on the amazing thing that the Lord has done for us, in and through an infant who was and will be born in Bethlehem.

Yours faithfully,

Steve

Advent Devotional Reflections

If you'd like to get Rev. Steve Silver's daily devotional messages by email during Advent, please let him know or email silver@fccleb.org.

OUR LOCAL AND GLOBAL MISSION

Thank You!

Many thanks to all who are contributing clothing items and grocery/gift cards for the families we are sponsoring through Listen's Christmas Gift Basket drive. And thanks to BARB TEETER for doing such a fine job coordinating this program each year! All gifts must be brought to church no later than Sunday, December 8.

Thanks also to those who filled shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child—23 boxes in all! We're grateful to PHIL AND GLORIA HAMMOND for managing this important project again.



Merry Christmas!

First Congregational Church extends its warmest wishes for a blessed Christmas season and a peaceful, prosperous new year to those who use our building for regular events:

The Anonymous Coffeehouse
The Bel Canto Chamber Singers
Boy Scout Troop 279 / Cub Scout Pack 279
The Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association
Lebanon Opera House
Lebanon Recreation Department
NH Women, Infants, and Children Program
United Valley Interfaith Project
Upper Valley Music Center
UV Professional Resource Network
Valley Improv

...and the many performers in our *Music at the Meetinghouse Series*



NOVEMBER HIGHLIGHTS. The Children's Community Corner has begun providing leadership in worship on Communion Sundays. And two excellent concerts brought new music to enthusiastic (and large!) audiences—Infinitus, working with UVMC Suzuki students, and the NH Master Chorale, premiering a powerful work by Kim André Arnesen with a 16-piece string ensemble.

MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



Music
at the
Meetinghouse

DECEMBER CONCERTS

at First Congregational Church

Bel Canto Chamber Singers: Make We Joy—Saturday, Dec. 14, 7:30 / Sunday, Dec. 15, 4:00

Directed by Jane Woods, Bel Canto celebrates the joy of the Christmas season with festive music for choir, brass, and piano. The program includes a brass quintet on Kevin Siegfried's *Vidimus Stellam* and Michael Praetorius' *In Dulci Jubilo*, along with a selection of carol and gospel arrangements. Come support FCC's "resident chorus" in December! *Adults \$15, students \$10, under 13 free; more at www.belcantosingers.org.*

UVMC Messiah Sing!—Saturday, December 21, 3:30 pm

Organized by UVMC faculty and conducted by Jane Woods, this annual performance of Handel's beloved oratorio features student soloists and chamber orchestra. All are welcome to join the chorus (scores available!) or just listen. *Fee \$15 for choral/orchestral participants; suggested \$10 donation for audience. More at www.uvmusic.org.*

Classicopia: Four-hand Holiday—Sunday, December 22, 1:00 pm

Pianists and good friends Daniel Weiser and Philip Liston-Kraft share a fun program of holiday music and four-hand arrangements of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. *Adults \$20, FCC members \$15, children free; for tickets and more, visit classicopia.org/concert/four-hand-holiday/.*

AND COMING IN THE NEW YEAR...

Cantabile Women's Chorus: Words of Wisdom—Sunday, January 19, 3:00 pm

Founded in 2001 and directed by Kathy Sherlock-Green, this superb women's ensemble returns to FCC for its winter concert. The program offers familiar works by Mozart and Bach along with choral settings of Emily Dickinson, John Keats, Louisa May Alcott, Anne Frank, and William Shakespeare. *Adults \$15, seniors \$10, students \$5, under 12 free; for more, visit www.cantabilewomen.org/.*

LOH ON LOCATION: Johnny Gandelsman, Violin—Friday, February 7, 7:00 pm

Our partnership with Lebanon Opera House began in 2017 with a stunning performance by this sensational violinist, renowned for his virtuosity with the Silk Road Ensemble, Brooklyn Rider, and artists ranging from Béla Fleck to Renée Fleming. He returns in February to play Bach's complete cello suites on violin. *Admission \$18-33; for tickets and more, visit lebanonoperahouse.org/events/johnny-gandelsman-violin-2/.*

William Ögmundson, Piano—Saturday, February 8, 7:00 pm

Will Ögmundson returns with a dazzling program surveying 100 years of American music, from Stephen Foster and John Philip Sousa to George Gershwin. *Details TBD; for more, visit www.williamogmundson.com/.*

Lebanon's newest hit... The ANONYMOUS COFFEEHOUSE—Fridays, Dec. 6, Jan. 17 and 31, all 7:30 pm

FCC is delighted to host this increasingly popular venue for live, local music! An informal "listening room" for established and emerging musicians, each show features several acoustic acts, and patrons may come and go as they wish. Baked goods and non-alcoholic drinks available. And it's all free of charge, so please come and enjoy! *For more information, please visit anoncoffee.org or email anoncoffeehouse@gmail.com.*

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

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT FCC

Please join us as we celebrate Advent and prepare to welcome the Christ Child!

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8:00 pm—Service of Lessons and Carols

The story of our Savior's birth in lessons from Scripture and traditional carols.

11:00 pm—Candlelight Communion Service

A service of light and song, rejoicing in Christ's birth with the celebration of the Lord's Supper.