



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

Christmas, in addition to commemorating the birth of our Lord, is understood as a moment of new beginnings, of possibilities, of peace, of warmth. But it also has its darker elements.

Consider the Nativity story. Who among us doesn't feel for the holy couple as they look for a place to stay? Who among us would want to endure a childbirth in a manger, surrounded by animals? Who among us would want to place our newborn child in an animal trough? Who among us would want to go through the hassles of a long journey mandated by the government to fulfill a bureaucratic need? Who among us, indeed?

Yet it is in darkness that the light of Christmas is made that much more powerful, providing a stark contrast between the ways of the world and the ways of God. This holiday tells us that things will be different, that God acts differently, that we should respond in kind.

So, yes, sing carols, share a feast, exchange presents, but remember the importance of extending hospitality, of providing shelter, of helping strangers. That's what one of the most reviled figures of Western culture, the innkeeper, did that long-ago night.

Frankly, we know nothing about this figure. For starters, we don't know his sex or gender identity. We presume he was a man, and from there, our imaginations have free rein to run wild. He must have been a bad man, perhaps overweight or perilously thin, with a five-o'clock shadow, a cigarette dangling from his mouth, and maybe a stained t-shirt (or the first-century equivalent). He was not a suave, well-dressed hotelier named Pierre, but rather a slob. This is a guy who epitomizes our stereotypes of a huckster, of someone who takes advantage of people, especially the weak and vulnerable.

But consider this: when he had no room at the inn, he still found a place for Mary and Joseph to stay, for them to rest and get ready to have their baby. I don't know that the innkeeper was any hero, but he was not a cartoon villain. Think of him as a regular Joe, trying to pay his bills and keep his business running. Amidst all these responsibilities, the innkeeper found a way to care for the young woman and her husband. He did not

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SUNDAY SERVICE

PREPARE YE THE WAY!—ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT FCC

Join us in welcoming the Christ Child this month, either in our Sanctuary or on Zoom.

Worship bulletins and Zoom links will be emailed prior to each service; recordings will later be posted on YouTube. **All worshipers are required to wear masks at all times and observe distancing in the pews;** singing and unison prayer are permitted, with masks. We are not offering coffee hour on Sundays.



Sundays through December 19, 10:00—Advent Worship Services

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24—CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

Family Service and Pageant, 5:00 pm: A joyful service of Christmas song and story for all who are young at heart. Children are invited to play a role in acting out the events of the Nativity story. *If you or your children would like to participate, please contact Nan Parsons (nlp3721@yahoo.com).*



Service of Lessons and Carols, 8:00 pm: The story of our Savior's birth in lessons from Scripture and traditional carols. The Rev. Steve Silver will offer a reflection, and the FCC Choir will sing.

Candlelight Communion, 11:00 pm: A service of light and song, celebrating Christ's birth with the Lord's Supper. *(Please note that this service is only tentatively scheduled; all services subject to change.)*

Sundays, December 26 and January 2, 10:00—The Journey toward Epiphany

Blue Christmas Services

Tuesday, December 14, 7:00 pm
West Lebanon Congregational Church

Tuesday, December 21, 7:00 pm
Lebanon United Methodist Church

Both services in-person; contact FCC for Zoom links.

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 time for quiet reflection, peace, hope, and Christ's love offered on **The Longest Night** of the year.

Greeters and Liturgists Needed

All are invited to serve as greeters/ushers, liturgists, or some other worship role—reading the prayers of invocation or dedication, sharing a stewardship message, or even leading a children's moment.

We also need a "ZOOM GREETER" each week!

None of these roles requires special experience or training! If you're interested in serving in these ways, please contact the church office.

THE CHRISTMAS FUND

The UCC's Christmas Fund, also known as the Emergency Fund or the Fund for the Veterans of the Cross, offers compassionate, grateful support for retired clergy and their families with pension, healthcare, and emergency grant assistance.

Please consider contributing as you are able.



The Poinsettia Fund
TO BENEFIT THE
OPEN DOOR MINISTRY

For years our congregation has offered poinsettias in honor or memory of family and friends. While we'll have a few live poinsettias again this year, we are not buying individual plants for each dedication.

We invite you instead to honor your loved ones with a modest contribution to our Open Door Ministry for community assistance.

Please submit dedications to the church office by **Thursday, December 16**; contributions may then be made until **Monday, December 27** (*payable to FCC, memo "Open Door Poinsettia Fund"*).

COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

The **Diaconate** has been discussing the Advent season and Christmas Eve services. It's not yet clear which services will be offered, in particular the late candlelight service. There is also hesitation about how to do the early children's service in a safe way, so that may be on Zoom only. Linda Oronte offered further perspective on local COVID conditions, noting the severity of the current wave of cases and urging extreme caution. All supported the decision to limit children's services to Zoom.

For **Music at the Meetinghouse**

Brian Clancy promoted the silent auction benefit for local Afghan refugees, to be held in conjunction with the Anonymous Coffeehouse. The Bel Canto Chamber Singers have opted to move their December concerts to Norwich, and UVMC's Messiah Sing will be reduced in size and participation.

Treasurer Terry Ellison reported that income and expenses were both slightly under budget expectations for this point in the year. He sees no concerns at this time. **Trustees** chair Valerie Nevel mentioned the option of a quarterly investment presentation from United Church Funds to the Council and other interested church members. She also noted that UCF could discuss strategies for socially responsible investing, which many members of the congregation support.

Terry and Valerie introduced their proposal for clarifying the role of the **Personnel Committee**, with additional language for the Bylaws. Although this committee is clearly

defined in the current Bylaws, it has rarely met in recent years. As we've addressed staff compensation and benefits, many feel the need for a functioning Personnel Committee to oversee those issues going forward. Valerie explained the suggested edits, noting that they are consistent with current language in the Bylaws.

Jon Scott recommended that the proposal be considered within the broader Bylaws review process already underway, as some committees and policies referenced in the changes may themselves be changed or even eliminated. All agreed, however, that a strengthened, revived Personnel Committee is necessary now, as the Finance Committee approaches the 2022 budget process. Integrating the changes and new language with other Bylaws revisions would delay that. Council approved the intent of the proposal—that the Personnel Committee should oversee benefits and compensation for all staff—without adopting specific language.

Council further considered the Personnel Committee's potential membership, relative to Terry and Valerie's proposal. There was some discussion of which interests and areas should be represented, and discussion of Council's role in appointing members (as distinct from the congregation's electing them). Considering that volunteer participation is reduced across our congregation, many felt it would be expedient for Council to appoint the committee each year, recognizing that its tasks are time-specific and finite (unlike a standing committee meeting regularly). Wary of slowing down the process, Council agreed

to table the procedural details of choosing the committee, deferring for this year's budget cycle to the group already working on benefits and compensation (subject to final approval of the full 2022 budget).

Jon Scott noted that FCC's annual **Stewardship** appeal was soon to be mailed. Asked about the status of our implementation of online giving, Jon replied that it was contingent on IRS certification of 501(c)(3) status, which is in process. It is hoped that online giving will be possible in 2022.

John Gilliatt reported that the **Board of Governors** submitted a proposed revision of its Bylaws description. Preparations for winter weather are underway, and the group hopes to secure estimates for insulation work at the Parsonage, likely in the spring.

In his **pastor's report** the Rev. Steve Silver thanked everyone for their collective efforts on governance revisions, noting the challenges of historical expectations and patterns. He invited everyone to attend the Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association semi-annual meeting on Zoom and the ecumenical Thanksgiving service in FCC's Sanctuary (and on Zoom). The FCC book group has started, but Steve encouraged anyone else to join if interested.

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate 12/13 and 1/10, 7:00

Council 12/20 and 1/11, 7:00

For information about other groups' plans to meet remotely online, please contact the church office.

COMMITTEE NOTES

Steve will be concluding his service as treasurer of the Congregational Library this year, although he will continue to be involved with that and other institutions, both locally and nationally. He also noted that our neighbors at UVMC had finally resolved the issues that hampered its renovations. He stressed that the difficulties had come from Liberty Utilities, not UVMC itself— in fact, our relationship with them has grown stronger through this process.

Steve expressed gratitude that the RV shelter had arrived successfully November 1, generating positive feedback and a *Valley News* article. Observing that expectations were still evolving, Brian Clancy invited Council members to consider ways

of welcoming the two residents while respecting their space and privacy. Three days after Council’s meeting, however, the City of Lebanon notified us that the shelter, a temporary but “non-accessory” dwelling, violated the city’s Zoning Ordinance—forcing its relocation on November 22, three weeks earlier than planned.

DIACONATE

The Deacons offered the Rev. Steve Silver feedback on a few topics in November, including the possibility of resuming coffee hour or fellowship time following worship services. Some masked socializing is already happening spontaneously, and the Deacons discussed whether to for-

malize such a time with or without food. Some concern was expressed about forcing congregants to make uncomfortable decisions about their willingness to socialize, and about how to ensure compliance with our distancing and masking expectations. For now, the Deacons recommended not resuming formal fellowship time or coffee hour after worship.

The group also discussed interest in resuming our on-site Christmas Eve services in some format, about which Steve will also confer with staff and Nan Parsons. The consensus was to offer an early family-oriented service and a late-evening remote service. It is possible that simpler aspects of the children’s pageant may be included in the family service.

Stewardship 2022: Giving From the Heart

[Jesus] watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

As this story in **Mark 12:38-44** recounts, Jesus offers a warning about following the wrong motives in both faith and philanthropy. While the scribes and wealthy act in ostentatious self-promotion, the poor widow is comparatively more generous, giving what meager amount she can simply because it is the right thing to do. As we approach our own stewardship, we’re invited to follow her example—to give from the heart.

We’re so grateful to have received 27 pledges so far for 2022!

No matter the size of your pledge, faithful stewardship is vital to our mission and ministry. Thank you for prayerfully and honestly considering your commitment to FCC in the coming year!

Offering envelopes for 2022 are available in the Parish Hall. Please take whichever box you wish and record it on the list.

Spend Time in the Corner!

The **Children’s Community Corner**, that is! We’d like more of the adults in our congregation to engage with FCC’s fantastic kids, whether on Sundays or another day of the week. **Our purpose for such interaction is mentorship, not just supervision.** Please think about offering your time—thanks!

If you’re interested in spending time with our young people, please contact Nan Parsons at nlp3721@yahoo.com or 603-863-8354.

Please note that content for the 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

must be submitted to the Church Administrator by

Monday, January 10, 2022

OUR MISSION NEAR AND FAR

THANK YOU!



Many thanks to all who generously supported FCC's donation to Listen Community Services for their **Holiday Basket Program**. The economic challenges of the pandemic have increased demand for this program, even as health precautions preclude fulfilling gift requests directly, as we usually do with our Giving Tree of clothing and gift cards.

When Listen appealed to the wider community for help, we at FCC responded—our congregation contributed a total of \$1255, which has enabled Listen to serve more families on their waiting list. Thanks to all of you for giving in the true spirit of Christmas!



NOVEMBER PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS. Our neighbors at UVMC were grateful to finish prolonged, complex renovations, which required the clearance of brush and some small trees—opening up space and revealing traces of the neighborhood's past. A silent auction benefit for local Afghan refugees brought in about \$5000, with the help of another entertaining Anonymous Coffeehouse, as bidders and audience members shared a warmly social atmosphere and a lovely spread of delicious baked goods. Two weeks later, Barb Jones expertly led the Advent liturgy.

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION



KIDS GETTING CRAFTY AT HOME. Even within the limitations of Zoom, the **Children's Community Corner** has had a busy fall, thanks largely to Nan Parsons' tireless efforts to keep kids connected to FCC. Bible study and storytelling engaged them in seasonal narratives, and assorted craft projects produced a variety of delightful ornaments for Advent.



Community Christmas Dinner

LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES
Saturday, December 25

All are welcome to help serve or just share in this holiday feast provided by Listen Community Services!

To pick up a meal, come by the Listen center in WRJ (42 Maple St) between 10:00-12:30.

To get a meal delivered, call 603-667-8668.

To volunteer to deliver meals or bake cookies, sign up at listen.volunteerhub.com/lp/christmas/.

Do Your Part to Fill the Cart

Lebanon continues to struggle with rising poverty and food insecurity, made worse by the economic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. To help address this need, we've resumed collecting items in our shopping cart in the Parish Hall.

We continue to collect non-perishable food and personal-care items for

THE UPPER VALLEY HAVEN

Thanks for fighting poverty and hunger in our community!

MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



Music
at the
Meetinghouse

Upcoming Concerts at FCC

All in the Sanctuary. Masks, distanced seating, and vaccination required.

Cameo Baroque Benefit for 19 Days of the Valley—Sunday, December 12, at 3:00 pm

As their annual effort in the Upper Valley Haven's "19 Days of the Valley" campaign, Ernie Drown, Beth Hilgartner, Leslie Stroud, and Laurie Rabut return with an excellent program, featuring G. F. Handel, Henry Purcell, G. P. Telemann, William Boyce, and others. Enjoy wonderful music, beautifully played—all to benefit the Haven. *Free-will donation (\$20 suggested); for more, please visit cameoarts.org or uppervalleyhaven.org.*

UVMC Messiah Sing (Abridged)—Sunday, December 19, at 2:00 pm

Our annual performance of G. F. Handel's beloved oratorio is back in a covid-safe format, thanks to our friends at UVMC. Students will sing selected arias, followed by an outdoor open sing of the Hallelujah Chorus. *Admission \$15; more information at uvmusic.org/event/handels-messiah-aria-recital-hallelujah-sing.*

The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, January 14 and 28, February 11 and 25, all 7:30 pm

Come enjoy our popular community venue for live local music! Conceived as an informal "listening room" for emerging musicians, each show features several acoustic acts, and patrons may come and go. Baked goods and non-alcoholic drinks are available, and it's all free of charge. *For more, please visit anoncoffee.org.*

The concerts below, originally booked for FCC, have been relocated to Norwich Congregational Church:

Bel Canto Chamber Singers—Saturday, December 11, at 7:30 / Sunday, December 12, at 4:00

Cantabile Women's Chorus—Saturday, January 22, at 3:00 pm

We warmly encourage you to attend them anyway! *More at belcantosingers.org and cantabilewomen.org.*

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

send them away, he gave them a place to stay, one that may well have been in his own home. Yes, you read that correctly—in the first century, homes in the Middle East often included space for livestock.

But again, we simply don't know what the manger looked like. We envision a place fit for a king to be born, something out of a fairy tale. God, though, had different ideas, and if we spend some time reflecting on the whole Nativity, we find ourselves confronted with the odd way in which God acts. And we gain some much-needed perspective.

Sometimes, we focus on doing it all. When we are unable to meet this impossible standard, we may give up. Sometimes, though, doing enough is what makes all the difference, and that is what God requires of us.

With joy and gratitude, I wish you a blessed Advent, and a merry, happy Christmas.

Yours faithfully,

Steve

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



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at the
Meetinghouse**

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PREPARE YE THE WAY!—ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT FCC

Please See Schedule of Worship Services on Page 2

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Ernie Drown, Organist and Choir Director • Nancy Parsons, Children's Community Corner
Barbara Teeter, Chair of Deacons • Linda Jacobs, Chair of Church Council • Barbara Jones, Moderator
Brian Clancy, Church Administrator

Church Office Hours: Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9:00-12:00 (or by appointment as needed)

603-448-4281 • church@fccleb.org • prayer@fccleb.org • music@fccleb.org • www.fccleb.org