

Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

“Less Santa, more Sanctus” is what WQXR, the New York-based classical radio station I listen to, has promised on its holiday channel.

Okay, this sounds like a good promise. But how good a promise is it? I confess that I have not listened to this channel. I’ll wait until Christmas before I begin to play wall-to-wall holiday music. Christmas music is just that—Christmas music—and I enjoy it as much as the next person. But there’s a whole catalog of Advent music out there, and like many clergy, I am frustrated that people want to rush right to the main event of December 25 and not pay much attention to all that unfolds in the weeks before the Feast of the Nativity.

That said, I’ve been asking how much of a stickler I really want to be about this. The sermon preparation workshop I try to attend on Zoom tackled this question as it prepared to discuss the lessons for Advent II. In some ways, argues Sam Wells, the vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London, we Christians have won this argument with secular society, and that should be a cause for satisfaction. Think about that.

Everybody knows Christmas. Movies abound on the subject, some glorious (*It’s a Wonderful Life*), some not (*Love, Actually*). Literary careers have been centered on writing about the Yuletide festival, and a TV network (The Hallmark Channel) earns a good portion of its proverbial keep by focusing on seasonal rom-coms.

But just how well do people know what Christmas is all about? Yes, family and presents are all part of the day. Dickens was on to something profound as he had Scrooge examine a life not well-lived. Heck, even *Die Hard*, starring Bruce Willis as New York cop John McClane, who wants to reunite with his estranged wife and get the bad guys holding Nakatomi Plaza hostage, was right with its focus on love and sacrifice. (Yes, *Die Hard* was a Christmas movie.)

But where’s the Baby Jesus in all of this? The incarnate God? We have lost sight of the one born in Bethlehem, the one who was The One. So, maybe it’s okay to be a stickler about Advent and Christmas, and what belongs to each season. But maybe not so much that we alienate people.

Continued on Page 4

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 18, 10:00—Advent Worship Services

SATURDAY, 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.

Sundays, December 25 and January 1, 10:00—Christmas and the Journey toward Epiphany

Parsonage Party and Carol Sing!

Sunday, December 11, 2:00-4:00 pm

15 Kimball Street (Corner of Kimball/Elm)

All are warmly invited to the Parsonage for our annual Christmas party! We'll gather 'round the fireplace for festive fellowship and favorite carols.

Please bring an appetizer or dessert to share.

THE CHRISTMAS FUND

The UCC's Christmas Fund offers compassionate support to retired clergy and their families with pension, healthcare, and emergency assistance.

Please consider contributing as you are able.

(Payable to FCC, memo "Christmas Fund")

All Are Welcome to Worship at FCC

Sundays at 10:00 am (Sanctuary/Zoom)

In-person worshipers are required to wear masks and observe distancing in the pews. Contact the church office to receive the Zoom link.

Greeters and Liturgists Needed!

Congregation members sing in the choir, serve as ushers and Zoom greeters, and read as liturgists. Additional options include reading prayers, sharing stewardship messages, or even leading children's moments. **All are invited to serve in these essential roles, and no prior experience is needed (though Zoom greeting requires some basic training).**

If you're interested in these opportunities to serve, please contact the church office.



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 adorn the Sanctuary with flowers, we will not be 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 15**; contributions may be made beyond that until **Monday, December 26**.

(Payable to FCC, memo "Poinsettia Fund")

If you'd like **ADVENT DEVOTIONAL REFLECTIONS** from Rev. Steve Silver by email daily during Advent, please let him know or email silver@fccleeb.org.

DECEMBER 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
27 ADVENT 1 10a Worship/CCC 11a Christmas Decorating!	28 4-8p UVMC Suzuki Program	29 4:30p FCC Choir	30 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	1 7p NA Group	2 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	3 11a-5p UVMC Holiday Music Fest
4 ADVENT 2 10a Worship/CCC (Communion) 2p Classicopia: Four-Hand Holiday	5 9a-4p LISTEN Basket Assembly (all week, M-F) 4-8p UVMC Suzuki Program	6 4:30p FCC Choir	7 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	8 7p NA Group	9 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	10 9a-12p UVMC Student Recitals 7:30p Bel Canto Chamber Singers: Winter Dreams
11 ADVENT 3 10a Worship/CCC 2-4p Parsonage Party/Caroling 4p Bel Canto Chamber Singers: Winter Dreams	12 9a-4p LISTEN Basket Assembly (all week, M-F) 4-8p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p Diaconate	13 4:30p FCC Choir 7p Church Council	14 8a-4p NH-WIC	15 10a Celebration: Larry Kirkpatrick (1947-2022)	16 7p MUSE Holiday Concert	17 12-3p Messiah Rehearsals
18 ADVENT 4 10a Worship/CCC 12-3p Messiah Rehearsals 3p Messiah Sing	19 4-8p UVMC Suzuki Program	20 4:30p FCC Choir	21	22 11a-6p NH-WIC 7p NA Group	23	24 <i>Christmas Eve</i> 5p Family Svc 8p Lessons and Carols
25 <i>Christmas Day</i> 10a Worship/CCC	26 <i>(No Suzuki Program)</i>	27 4:30p FCC Choir	28	29 7p NA Group	30	31
1 <i>New Year's Day</i> 10a Worship/CCC (Communion)	2 <i>(No Suzuki Program)</i>	3 4:30p FCC Choir	4	5 7p NA Group	6 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	7

If you have questions or corrections regarding any event, please notify us at church@fccleeb.org or 603-448-4281.

NEWS AND NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

Jon Scott opened Council in November by inviting people to share a **joy or gratitude** in their lives. Several mentioned time with family, health, and pursuits such as travel and art. Walter Scott celebrated son Emory's first steps earlier that day, and Nan Parsons thanked the families who support the children of the church. Noting a concern recently expressed in worship about welcoming visitors, Jon thanked our congregation for responding, and all agreed on the importance of welcoming visitors.

Jon next proposed a **covenanting framework** from the NH Conference, hoping that such a covenant may be adopted by Council and, ultimately, the congregation at Annual Meeting. He noted that he was not asking for any formal, binding action, rather proposing we take this as inspiration. He also clarified that it's different from the Conference's proposal after its listening sessions. Valerie Nevel expressed some disappointment with the Conference's consultation process, and several shared a view that the process hasn't achieved what we hoped it would. Walter suggested that perhaps the process was meant

to teach us "how to fish, and we're still learning." Jon noted that these views recommend adding this to our agenda for next month's meeting.

In his **pastor's report** the Rev. Steve Silver reported on a successful fall book group, with lively discussions and hope for building on this work in the future. He elaborated on the theme for our annual stewardship appeal, "Dream Big." Steve also described a request for assistance he'd received from an unhoused couple who hoped to recover their vehicle and needed a car for both shelter and work transportation. Administrator Brian Clancy expressed concern that offering this assistance (both in its amount and its purpose) would set an unsustainable precedent, adding that such requests aren't exceptional in his experience with the Open Door Ministry; many people living in their cars have sought support from us over the years. Linda Jacobs agreed it was inadvisable to set this precedent, as the recipients might tell others and create unreasonable expectations. All affirmed that we are called as a church to help people and to offer community assistance as generously as we can.

Addressing a pending need to replace both the **freezer and refrigerator** in the church kitchen, Jon Scott suggested that Corrine Erskine lead a workgroup with Barb Laro and Board of Governors chair Walter Scott. Corrine reported that she'd already researched model options and found a good choice for around \$1000. Council approved the purchase and enthusiastically thanked Corrine for her efforts.

Valerie Nevel next reported that she had made all **Trustee** distributions authorized for the year, with almost two months remaining. She noted justified increases in salary costs and a decrease in stewardship income. Valerie requested Council approval for additional transfers, although she worries about drawing more from investment funds amidst a down

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate	12/12 and 1/9, 7:00
Council	12/13 and 1/10, 7:00
MSA	1/23/23, 7:00

For information on other groups' plans to meet, contact the church office.

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

The Christmas season is not about singing carols. Nor is it about hanging evergreens about the house. Buying (or receiving) the latest tech has nothing to do with Christmas, despite merchants who want us to believe otherwise.

This season is about hope, about God's promise to be with us always, about God's willingness to go to incredible lengths to be here on Earth with humanity—with you and me. This is what Christmas is about, and indeed, this is at the heart of the Christian faith. God is Emmanuel—God is with us.

Yours faithfully, *Steve*

market. Dole mission funds would fund dues for the NH Conference and Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Assn.

For the **Board of Governors**, Walter Scott noted two projects at the Parsonage. He has contracted for the installation of a chimney cap (a relatively small expense), and he hopes to secure estimates by January for the planned insulation upgrade. Valerie asked that capital expense needs be clearly communicated to allow her to plan for the appropriate transfers.

Council next discussed FCC's **COVID protocols** and considered possibly reducing or eliminating them, as some cited other public spaces and venues that had dropped their COVID

requirements. There remains concern for the immuno-compromised and other vulnerable individuals, and Jon Scott stressed that we need to do what's right for everyone, not just what we might want individually. Dr. Deb Scott noted, among other things, that COVID is worse than flu in its demographic impact, and only 10% of eligible recipients have gotten a booster vaccine. She added, though, that very few cases are hospitalized, with our area generally characterized as low-risk.

Subsequent discussion touched on distinctions between worship and non-worship events; speaking as Administrator, Brian Clancy wondered whether there was any serious

risk of transmission between those two contexts, especially as we have air purifiers throughout the building. Valerie Nevel suggested that signage could remind guests of our congregation's preference for masking.

Another topic was the resumption of coffee hour, with many noting the ongoing loss of fellowship and the recent enjoyment of a reception following Larry Doyle's memorial service. Perhaps we could maintain our protocols in worship but relax them for coffee hour, allowing for voluntary choice and flexibility for those who preferred that. Jon Scott suggested that resumption of coffee hour be postponed until after the activity of the holiday season.

Stewardship 2023: Dream Big

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. —Isaiah 65:17

The prophet Isaiah offered these words at a time when the exiles of Judah were wondering about their future. Having seen promises go unfulfilled in the past, they despaired. They hoped to restore their imagined glory, and they wondered just what God had planned for them. Isaiah told them that God was seeking a break with the past and a fresh start for his people, one grounded in possibility.

Following the disruptions of COVID, we now have the opportunity to ask, "Who do we want to be? Where is God calling us to go?" We may disagree on the answers to these questions, but we should agree on the destination: a sustainable, healthy future for our community.

We're so grateful to have received 24 pledges so far for 2023!

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 2023 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 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

must be submitted to the Church Administrator by Monday, January 9, 2023

NEWS AND NOTES

DIACONATE

At their meeting in November the Deacons discussed creating an expense line for Diaconate purposes, as Treasurer (and Deacon) Dawn Troutman prepares the 2023 budget. In part, this would support costs of individual efforts to extend congregational care. The group considered further ways of welcoming visitors and new members with pew-pads, name tags, and self-introductions during worship, followed up with cards and the delivery of welcoming bread. New-member opportunities might include special welcoming coffee hours in the fall and spring. The Deacons also discussed the

engagement of current members through prayer shawls, an updated directory, and newsletter items.

The group also agreed on the need to update and clearly communicate Diaconate responsibilities, including materials for a new Deacon binder. Discussion included topics raised in recent congregational “listening sessions,” such as a need to improve communication, the congregation’s means for sharing concerns with staff, and ways to sustain engagement across the congregation despite individual disagreements. The Rev. Steve Silver will follow up with Jon Scott regarding the release of a summary report.

The Deacons also addressed the enhancement of the Sanctuary sound system, beyond the attention given thus far to facilitating Zoom. Repeating joys and concerns surely is helpful, and passing a mic could support that, but hope for an overall upgrade to our antiquated sound infrastructure is pending. It further was suggested that the congregation should be reminded that the service prelude is a time to transition from socializing to individual reflection, with the postlude serving as time to transition back into celebration of the gathering.

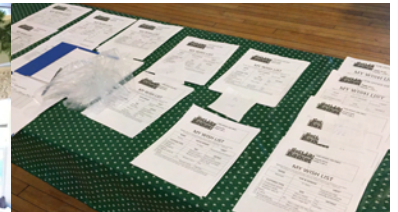
The Deacons wish the entire FCC community a blessed Christmas!

THANK YOU!



Many thanks to all who generously participated in LISTEN Community Services’ **Holiday Basket Program**. If you haven’t done so already, **please be sure to bring your gifts to church—labeled as specified in LISTEN’s guidelines—by Sunday, December 11. Thank you!**

Below: Managed by Bise Wood Saint Eugene—LISTEN Family Programs Service Coordinator and a longtime friend of FCC—and a generous team of volunteers, the Holiday Basket operation turns wish lists (checked at least twice!) into bags of gifts, filling FCC’s Parish Hall and Parlor and ready for pick-up by...maybe Santa?



OUR WIDER COMMUNITY AND MISSION

Merry Christmas to Our Guests!

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

*The Anonymous Coffeehouse
The Bel Canto Chamber Singers
Lebanon Recreation Department
NH Women, Infants, and Children Program
The "Together We Can" Recovery Group
Upper Valley Music Center*
...and the many, many, many musicians in our
Music at the Meetinghouse Series

A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF *Larry C. Kirkpatrick (1947-2022)*

**Thursday, December 15, at 6:00 pm—FCC
Reception Following in the Parish Hall**

Blue Christmas Service

**Wednesday, December 21, 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 this intimate service—a chance for quiet reflection, peace, hope, and Christ's love on **The Longest Night** of the year.

A SEASON OF THANKS. Epilogos Charities' Ed Warren and Brooke Finnell visited worship and presented a colorful tile plaque from SJV in gratitude for FCC's longtime support; Cameo Baroque offered a benefit for the Haven's 19 Days; and FCC's kids created on Zoom and connected in person.

Dear Steve and Brian,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to your congregation about our work in SJV. The FCC has been a steadfast partner on Epilogos' many projects. We are especially proud of the advances we have made in education. Thanks to your church, there are approximately a dozen students who have high school diplomas. And there is one family that has a "dignified house"—one that is secure (with a lockable front door) and has electricity.

So thank you for your longtime support. Please know that it is greatly appreciated.

epilogos
CHARITIES, INC.

Ed Warren
President



MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



**Music
at the
Meetinghouse**

From Advent into the New Year!

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

Classicopia: Four-Hand Holiday—Sunday, December 4, at 2:00 pm

Pianists Daniel Weiser and Elizabeth Borowsky renew this seasonal tradition with a selection of favorites in exciting, four-hand arrangements. *Adults \$20, FCC members \$15, children free; for more, visit classicopia.org.*

Bel Canto Chamber Singers: Winter Dreams—Saturday, Dec. 10, 7:30 / Sunday, Dec. 11, 4:00

Director Jane Woods brings Bel Canto back for its ever-popular, always-excellent holiday program, this year featuring a cantata by Norwegian composer Ola Gjeilo, as well as music of Hans Leo Hassler, Eric Whitacre, Felix Mendelssohn, and more. Superb soprano Mary Bonhag will make the latest of several sensational Upper Valley appearances. *Adults \$15, students \$10, under 13 free; for more, visit www.belcantosingers.org.*

MUSE: 'Tis the Season of Harmony—Friday, December 16, at 7:00 pm

Directed by the inimitable Glee Charlestream, the Hanover-based Mosaic Union String Ensemble (MUSE) features student musicians of diverse ages and backgrounds. They share a short, festive holiday program in their FCC-Lebanon debut! *Free-will donation. More at www.mosaicunionstringensemble.org.*

Upper Valley Music Center Messiah Sing—Sunday, December 18, at 3:30 pm

Organized by UVMC, this annual performance of G. F. 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 uvmusic.org/event/messiah-sing.*

The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, January 6 and 20, February 3 and 17, all at 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. Patrons come and go as they please; baked goods and non-alcoholic drinks available. *Free admission. For performers and more, visit anoncoffee.org/.*

The Becker Sisters: Northern Legend—Saturday, January 21, at 7:00 pm

An immensely talented duo, Kirsten and Alyssa Becker move audiences with their artistry in voice, piano, and classical guitar. Ranging from opera to jazz, Broadway to original compositions, this intimate, warm concert is perfect for the dark nights of winter. *Adults \$10, under 12 free; more at www.kirstenbeckermusic.com.*

Cantabile Women's Chorus: All Shall Be Well—Sunday, January 22, at 3:00 pm

Kathy Sherlock-Green directs this wonderful women's chorus in a warm, comforting program of Claude Debussy, Gabriel Fauré, Benjamin Britten, Felix Mendelssohn, Philip Silvey, and more. *Adults \$15, students \$10, under 13 free, advance ticket purchase preferred; more at www.cantabilewomen.org.*

Upper Valley Baroque: The Italian Concerto—Saturday, Jan. 28, 7:00 / Sunday, Jan. 29, 3:00

Led by the incomparably energetic Filippo Ciabatti, this acclaimed professional ensemble continues its second season with intimate, elegant, and lively concerti by six different Italian Baroque composers. *Admission starts at \$25; advance online purchase only. Tickets and more at www.uppervalleybaroque.org.*

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

PREPARE YE THE WAY!—ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS AT FCC

Please See Schedule of Worship Services on Page 2



Music
at the
Meetinghouse

From Advent into the New Year!

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

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First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Ernie Drown, Organist and Choir Director • Nancy Parsons, Children's Community Corner

Jon Scott, Chair of Church Council • Linda Gerlach, Chair of Deacons • Barbara Jones, Moderator

Brian Clancy, Church Administrator

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