



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

What's Inside

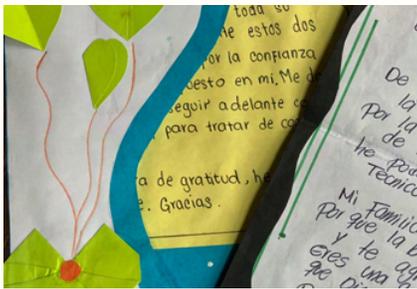
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The Pastoral Perspective

George Herbert (1593-1633) was a prolific English poet who served as an Anglican priest during the reign of James I. Herbert is one whose writings I will turn to whenever I'm seeking some inspiration, and, I'm happy to admit, I turn to him now as I grapple with the question, "What should I write about this Advent?"

Hoping to find something appropriate for this liturgical season, I came across this short poem, "JESU," included in *The Temple*, his volume of collected poems published posthumously in 1633:

J E S U is in my heart, his sacred name
Is deeply carved there: but th'other week
A great affliction broke the little frame,
Ev'n all to pieces: which I went to seek:
And first I found the corner, where was J,
After, where E, S, and next where U was graved.
When I had got these parcels, instantly
I sat me down to spell them, and perceived
That to my broken heart he was *I ease you,*
And to my whole is J E S U.

Now just what are we looking for in Advent but the Christ-child, the one we profess is God's love and faithfulness made incarnate? When we are troubled, it is to God that we look. We may be heartbroken, we may be lost, but we are not alone. For at those moments, we ought to recall the words of Isaiah 40, in which the prophet tells us that God has said, "Comfort, O Comfort my people."

The text of Isaiah 40 dates to the Babylonian Exile. Imagine being torn from your home, deported to another country, and wondering whether anything would ever get better. The author of Isaiah believed things would improve. The author believed in God, and God's promises—something we, too, would do well to do.

Sure, the world's messed up right now. Wars are raging, hate seems to be on the march, and you can probably add to this list of woes. But the truth is, things now are way better than they were during the exile, for us and

Continued on Page 5

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 are emailed prior to each service, with recordings later posted on YouTube.



Sundays through December 24, 10:00—Advent Worship Services

SUNDAY, 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 Rachel Silver (rachelsilver@live.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 31 and January 7, 10:00—The Journey from Christmas to Epiphany

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")

Parsonage Potluck and Carol Sing!

Sunday, December 17, 12:00-2:00 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 a favorite dish or holiday treat to share.*

All Are Welcome to Worship at FCC

Sundays at 10:00 AM (In-Person/Zoom)

Coffee Hour Served!

We're happy to share this popular opportunity for fellowship as often as we have volunteers to supply and serve it. **New volunteers always welcome—please sign up on the list in the kitchen.**

Zoom 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 adorn the Sanctuary with flowers, we no longer buy 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 **Friday, December 15**; contributions may be made beyond that until **Wednesday, December 27**.
(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@fccleb.org.

DECEMBER 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26 10a Worship/CCC 4p Cameo Baroque: 19 Days Benefit	27 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p MSA Comm	28 No Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	29 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	30 3-6:30p UVMC/Children's Choir 7p NA Group	1 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	2 8a-4p UVMC (Downtown Leb Holiday Fest)
3 ADVENT 1 10a Worship/CCC (Communion) 11a Christmas Decorating! 2p Classicopia: Four-Hand Holiday	4 9a-4p (all week) LISTEN Holiday Baskets Project 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	5 9a-4p LISTEN HB 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	6 9a-4p LISTEN HB 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	7 9a-4p LISTEN HB 3-6:30p UVMC/Children's Choir 7p NA Group	8 9a-4p LISTEN HB 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	9 7p Bel Canto: Wintertide
10 ADVENT 2 10a Worship/CCC 4p Bel Canto: Wintertide	11 9a-4p (all week) LISTEN Holiday Baskets Project 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p Diaconate	12 9a-4p LISTEN HB 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir 6:45p UVMC 7p Council	13 8a-3:30p WIC 9a-4p LISTEN HB 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Messiah Sing: Choral Refresher	14 9a-4p LISTEN HB 3-6:30p UVMC/Children's Choir 7p NA Group	15 9a-4p LISTEN HB 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	16
17 ADVENT 3 10a Worship/CCC 12-2p Parsonage Potluck/Caroling 3p UVMC Messiah Sing!	18 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	19 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir 6p Contemplative Dance	20 No UVMC 7p Blue Christmas Svc (at LUMC)	21 No UVMC 7p NA Group	22 No UVMC	23 7p Christmas Spectacular!
24 ADVENT 4 CHRISTMAS EVE 10a Worship/CCC 5p Family Svc 8p Lessons and Carols	25 CHRISTMAS DAY No UVMC	26 No Cameo Baroque No FCC Choir	27 No UVMC	28 11a-6p WIC No UVMC 7p NA Group	29 No UVMC	30
31 10a Worship/CCC	1 New Year's Day No UVMC	2 No Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	3 3-6:30p UVMC	4 3-6:30p UVMC/Children's Choir 7p NA Group	5 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program	6

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

NEWS AND NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

Jon Scott opened Council's meeting in November with an appeal to focus on work that needs to happen prior to the end of the calendar year or Annual Meeting in February, such as budget and financial matters.

In his **pastor's report** the Rev. Steve Silver reflected on the previous night's Diaconate meeting. He noted the uncertain status of the ecumenical Thanksgiving service, due to the unavailability of other clergy and a lack of enthusiasm for the service among our own congregation. He invited comments from Council on the matter, and several expressed the reluctant but clear view that there doesn't seem to be enough interest to justify Steve's effort to prepare for the service. Linda Gerlach reported a consensus among Deacons that it's not worth offering the service, given the lack of interest and the busy holiday week. Recognizing similar agreement among Council members, Jon recommended clear communication that this is not a permanent decision, applying only to this year. Steve expressed thanks for Council's advice and noted that he would convey the decision to the congregation.

Steve also noted that he'd attended his final meeting of the APD LifeCare board, on which he has served a six-year term. He has enjoyed working with the group and appreciates what APD does in the community.

Steve continued with a word about **Stewardship Sunday**, encouraging everyone to think prayerfully about their 2024 pledge to FCC. He took

care to emphasize the importance of participation, of simply making a commitment, over any particular dollar amount. He shared his deep appreciation of everyone's generosity. Corrine Erskine asked if individual congregants would bring pledges up to the altar, as was done in the past, and Steve confirmed that he would invite people to do that.

Lastly, Steve noted that he would be attending a meeting of the **Granite State Organizing Project**, a successor to the now-defunct United Valley Interfaith Project. The meeting will focus on how faith communities are engaged in affordable-housing issues and solutions. He invited others to attend in person or by Zoom.

Linda Gerlach reported further on the **Diaconate's** discussion of the ecumenical service and hopes for the Children's Community Corner. Drawing from Dawn Troutman's visit to the West Lebanon church, the group also considered inviting more congregational participation in service opportunities such as altar flowers and coffee hour provisions. Regarding the latter, it has seemed difficult to expand volunteers beyond a small group; it was suggested that the sign-up list be placed more visibly on the food table.

Linda Oronte, noting a resurgence of COVID and her experience as a nurse, questioned whether we should continue **coffee hour** through the winter months. Several appreciated the concern, agreeing that holiday travel has typically brought increased illness. Corrine suggested that Steve try to gauge the congregation's cur-

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate	12/11 and 1/8, 7:00
Council	12/12 and 1/9, 7:00
MSA	1/22, 7:00

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

rent comfort level with coffee hour, and Walter Scott asked that we verify our capacity for air filtration in the Parish Hall. Linda Gerlach noted that everyone is free to make their own choices for whether or not to attend coffee hour, and that those who do are responsible enough to know the possible risks. Jon Scott recognized the need to balance our wishes for social interaction with our obligation to care for the health of our congregation. Steve thanked everyone for their insights, assuring that we would monitor and adjust the situation as needed.

Walter acknowledged that he still needs to submit budget requests for 2024 on behalf of the **Board of Governors**. He further reported on some minor landscaping and repairs at the Parsonage.

Dawn Troutman referred to her **Treasurer's** report, showing income continuing to run behind expenses. Within that income, stewardship collections have fallen well short of the year's \$100,000 goal, although we do still expect some substantial contributions before year's end. We expect expenses to rise next year, with (among other things) the possible hiring of new staff for the Children's

NEWS AND NOTES

Community Corner. Dawn thanked several people for their help in 2024 budget planning, which is far ahead of where it's been in past years.

Considering the parallel work of the **Personnel Committee** on staff compensation, Jon affirmed that those figures would be finalized as close as possible to January 1, which would allow ample time for Council to review the budget prior to Annual Meeting. Valerie Nevel elaborated that the Personnel Committee seeks to be more active than in the past, with the goal of institutionalizing and formalizing more of the church's operations and job descriptions, perhaps with support from a human-resources consultant. The committee hopes to establish greater clarity and continuity regarding staff responsibilities and compensation.

For the **Trustees**, Valerie added a note about plans for a meeting on Zoom with United Church Funds representatives to review our UCF investments, inviting any interested member to join. She also noted that

the **Mission and Social Action Committee** would meet for the last time in 2023 on November 27.

Jon concluded the meeting with his sincere encouragement to participate in Advent and Christmas services. Addressing the CCC's interim status, Steve confirmed that we would still plan to have a children's pageant as usual during the 5:00 service, with a later service at 8:00. Both services will be available on Zoom, along with the morning service that day, as Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday this year. There followed general conversation about the many ways our church can attract new people, welcome them, and retain them.

DIACONATE

At the Deacons' November meeting, the Rev. Steve Silver celebrated new covenant members Jim Hughes and Robert Crockett. He also mentioned the challenge of organizing this year's ecumenical Thanksgiving service, due to limitations on other clergy.

It was suggested that perhaps an at-home meditation could serve as an alternative.

The Deacons also discussed coffee-hour provisions and how to facilitate **volunteer sign-up**. They considered offering a broader sign-up board to engage other roles, such as flower arrangements. Dawn Troutman offered to provide an example from another church.

Steve then explained the need for a **children's ministry** that could cover a full age range from small toddlers up to teenagers. Engaging the older youth would require consistency in staff involved, and so it would be advisable to hire a paid coordinator. The Deacons discussed the relative advantages of scheduling children's activities before, during, or after the main worship service, possibly in conjunction with adult learning opportunities. It was noted that parents may differ widely in their preferences for exposing their kids to more disturbing or challenging topics and discussions.

The **Pastoral Perspective**, *continued from Page 1*

for the world. Still, we can complain and God will be present for us, and God will help us put the pieces of our broken lives back together.

None of this may be easy, but it is possible. Some of our contemporaries are doubtful, suggesting that we don't need God, that God does not exist, that we can solve all of our problems on our own. Really? Our track record, throughout our history, is that we are good at making problems, not so good at fixing them. Oh yes, we need to keep working on them. But we do not need to act alone.

God-with-us, Emmanuel, we call out during Advent. In just a few weeks, we will celebrate Christ's birth, and we will draw comfort that God is present, now and always.

Yours faithfully,

Steve

*Welcome
New Members!*

Rob Crockett
and
Jim Hughes

November 12,
2023



Blue Christmas Service
Wednesday, December 20, 7:00 pm
Lebanon United Methodist Church

An intimate service for those carrying burdens or dealing with loss at a challenging time, offering peace, hope, and Christ's love on **THE LONGEST NIGHT** of the year.

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, Arts, & Parks Dept*
- NH Women, Infants, and Children Program*
- The "Together We Can" Recovery Group*
- The Upper Valley Music Center*

...and the many, many, MANY musicians in our *Music at the Meetinghouse Series*

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. **The purpose of such interaction is mentorship, not just supervision.** Please think about offering your time—thanks!

Interested? Please contact the church office or the Rev. Steve Silver at revsrs@live.com.

Please note that content for the 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

must be submitted to the Church Administrator by

Friday, January 12, 2024

Stewardship 2024: Don't Bury Your Treasure

For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance. —Matthew 25:29

The **parable of the talents**, as you may recall, tells of three workers entrusted with their employer's wealth in his absence. Two of them invest the man's wealth, earning a high return. The third, worried about punishment from his boss should he incur a loss, buries the money instead, returning it upon the master's return. The boss is very angry to learn of the worker's choice and punishes him.

We've been given much by God, and how we use it matters. We should use not just our money but our time and our skills wisely, to advance the Kingdom of God. So, don't bury that treasure—use it for God!

We're so grateful to have received 24 pledges so far for 2024!

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

Offering envelopes for 2024 are available in the Parish Hall. Please take whichever box you wish and record it on the list.

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION



WELCOMING THE SEASON. In November we enjoyed special music from Laurel Stavis and the Casey/VanVliet family, as well as a visit by LISTEN Executive Director Rob Roy McGregor. Erin and Andy Smith opened Advent with reading and candle-lighting, and that afternoon Classicopia made everyone merry with a rollicking four-hand program.

OUR LOCAL AND GLOBAL MISSION

THANK YOU!

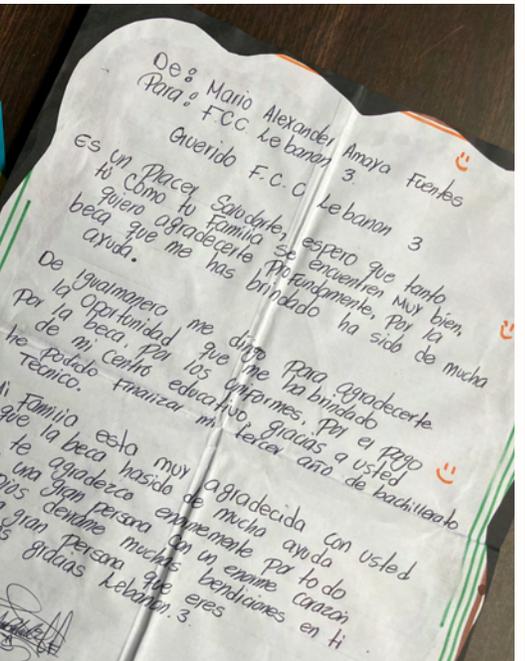
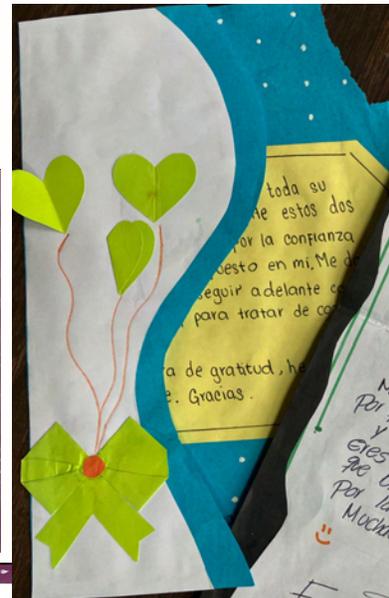


To all who generously donated gifts to LISTEN's **Holiday Basket Program** this year, *many thanks!*

Right: Bise Wood Saint Eugene (LISTEN Family Programs Service Coordinator) with FCC's Trish Heather-ton—one of the numerous volunteers helping check, sort, and organize gifts downstairs at church.



Greetings from EL SALVADOR!



Estimada Fundación Epilagos:

Les escribo con profundo agradecimiento por haberme otorgado la beca. Esta distinción significa mucho para mí y estoy sinceramente honrado.

El apoyo financiero ayuda a la carga económica de mis estudios y me permite enfocarme plenamente en mi formación académica. Valorizo el compromiso de Epilagos con la excelencia académica y su enfoque para ayudar a jóvenes para hacer una diferencia en la sociedad.

Prometo que este reconocimiento no será en vano y trabajaré incansablemente para aprovechar al máximo esta oportunidad que me han brindado.

Mi familia, está muy agradecido por la gran ayuda que nos está brindando.

Este apoyo no solo beneficiará educación, sino que también es motor de motivación constante. Seguir esforzándome y superándome.

Estoy emocionado por las oportunidades que se presentaron gracias a esta ayuda que me dieron, y estoy decidido a hacer todo lo posible para llevar esta distinción.

Gracias nuevamente por su generosidad y confianza en mí.

Atentamente:
Rafael Alejandro Orfano Mejía

Last month we received these delightfully artistic letters of thanks from our three **EPILOGOS** scholarship students in San José Villanueva—(L to R) Rafael, Sergio, and Mario. Our **Lenten Lunch Bag** offering may not seem like a lot of money when we collect it, but it clearly goes a long way toward enriching the education and lives of these studious boys. “Many thanks for the confidence you have placed in me,” writes Sergio, a genuine sentiment all of them share. In Mario’s closing words, **“Muchas gracias, Lebanon!”**

MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



**Music
at the
Meetinghouse**

From Advent into the New Year!

All in the Sanctuary. Masks welcome but optional.

***The Anonymous Coffeehouse: Season Four!*—Fridays, Dec. 1 and 15, Jan. 12 and 26, all 7:30 pm**

Our comfy community venue for live folk music returns for its fourth season! An informal “listening room” for emerging musicians, each show features several acoustic acts. Come and go as you please; baked goods and hot drinks available. *Free admission, donations welcome. For performers and more, visit anoncoffee.org/.*

***Classicopia: Four-Hand Holiday*—Sunday, December 3, at 2:00 pm**

Daniel Weiser and Philip Liston-Kraft renew this festive tradition of favorite classics in fun, four-hand-piano arrangements, from “Jingle Bells” and “White Christmas” to the Blue Danube Waltz and the Nutcracker. *Adults \$20, FCC members \$15, children free; for more, visit classicopia.org/concert/four-hand-holiday4/.*

***Bel Canto Chamber Singers: Wintertide*—Saturday, Dec. 9, 7:00 pm / Sunday, Dec. 10, 4:00 pm**

Director Jane Woods leads Bel Canto in a seasonal program of choral music accompanied by strings, flute, and piano. The concert features portions of Marc-Antoine Charpentier’s *Messe de Minuit*, as well as music of Ola Gjeilo, John Rutter, and a selection of traditional spirituals and French carol arrangements. *Adults \$15, students \$10, under 13 free; for more, visit www.belcantosingers.org.*

***Upper Valley Music Center Messiah Sing*—Sunday, December 17, at 3:00 pm**

Organized by UVMC and directed by Mark Nelson, this annual performance of G. F. Handel’s beloved oratorio features student soloists and chamber orchestra. All are welcome to join the chorus (scores are available!) or just listen. *Suggested \$20 donation; more details at uvmusic.org/event/messiah-sing-2.*

***A Christmas Concert Spectacular!*—Saturday, December 23, at 7:00 pm**

The magical Borowsky family (AKA “The American Virtuosi”) and an array of musical friends offer an enchanting variety of Christmas favorites in diverse arrangements for voice, violin, cello, piano, and even harmonica. **And don’t miss Tony Perham’s ice-sculpture demonstration that afternoon on the front lawn!** *A free-will donation will benefit the Upper Valley Haven; more details at 88keys.my.canva.site/christmas23.*

***Cantabile Women’s Voices: Northern Exposure*—Sunday, January 28, at 3:00 pm**

Kathy Sherlock-Green brings back this outstanding women’s chorus with an exploration of music from across northern Europe and Canada. The program includes Eriks Esenvalds, Kim André Arnesen, Jean Sibelius, Canadians Eleanor Daley and Donald Patriquin, and an original piece by Kim Baryluk based on Native Canadian Mi’kmaq chant. *Adults \$15, seniors \$10, students (13+) \$5, under 13 free. Advance ticket purchase preferred; more details at cantabilewomen.org/january-2024-concert.*

***UVMC Presents Ben Kulp, Cello, and Chenyu Wang, Piano*—Sunday, February 11, at 3:00 pm**

Upper Valley Music Center’s longtime cellist Ben Kulp joins new faculty member Chenyu Wang for a concert of short works for cello and piano. *More details at uvmusic.org/event/ben-kulp-cello-and-chenyu-wang-piano.*

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 welcome but optional.

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First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Ernie Drown, Organist and Choir Director • Brian Clancy, Church Administrator

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

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