

Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

February is an odd duck. The shortest of months, it has 28 days, except when it has 29, which helps to keep the calendar on track. Nothing much seems to happen—except for Washington’s Birthday. And Lincoln’s. And Black History Month. And, at FCC, our annual meeting, which falls on the second Sunday of the month, per our bylaws.

Oh, and there’s Valentine’s Day. Now, we know that this is a sentimental occasion, deftly exploited by the greeting-card and candy industries each and every February. But we may also remember that a famously violent incident occurred on this day in 1929, involving gangs vying for control of the Prohibition liquor trade in Chicago. The group of mobsters who performed the executions were tied to the notorious Al Capone, but there is no conclusive evidence of who pulled off this killing.

I suspect that there was not much thought of love shared by the gunmen on that day, nor was there any thought given to St. Valentine, which is not surprising.

Indeed, there is more than one St. Valentine, and he is the patron saint not only of those engaged to be married but also of beekeepers and those suffering from epilepsy.

That may seem random, but as we think of the good people we know, and wish to emulate, we will often find that they have a wide variety of interests. Other than specialists, very few among us are consumed by our dedication to one topic to the exclusion of all else.

There is much we don’t know about Jesus. Scripture tells us what we need to know about his identity as the son of God. That is what can help lead us down the road to salvation, or a more godly way of living.

Jesus may well have had hobbies and interests. We simply don’t know. We do know that Jesus loved his neighbor, that he taught and preached to people just like you and me, that he wasn’t really interested in power. We know that he was willing to travel, without end, to share God’s love. So, what does Jesus have to do with February?

Well, a lot. Jesus has a lot do with every month, after all. Let’s try to remember his example, his teachings, his love and his grace, even when we’re out of sorts or not sure what to do.

Yours faithfully,
Steve

2022 ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, February 13, 11:30 am, on Zoom

The Annual Meeting of the First Congregational Church of Lebanon, NH, will be held on Zoom on Sunday, February 13, 2022, at 11:30 am, after that morning's worship service, for the purpose of:

1. The election of all officers provided for under the CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS of the church.
2. To hear the reports of all officers, committees, and organizations, as required under the CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS of the church.
3. To consider and act upon any other matters relating to the general church welfare that may properly come before this meeting.

Sunday Worship at FCC

In-Person Service at 10:00 AM

Remote Viewing Available on Zoom

Please join us for worship every Sunday at 10:00, either in our Sanctuary or on Zoom. The weekly bulletin and Zoom link are emailed early Sunday morning; we also record the weekly service for posting later 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. There is still no coffee hour after worship, and we ask that interaction be kept to a minimum.

Join us as we gather for worship together!

Greeters and Liturgists Needed

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

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

THE SOUPER BOWL IS HERE!

A longer season, two more playoff teams, and the latest championship game ever—all means that we have plenty of time to shatter our SOUPer BOWL record! FCC will again tackle local hunger with a collection of soup and other non-perishable food items, to be distributed among our neighbors at HEADREST, the UPPER VALLEY HAVEN, and LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES.

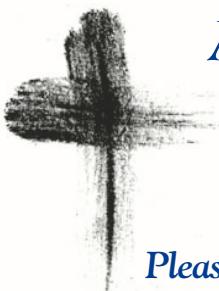
Donations will be collected in the boxes in the Parish Hall through February 20. You may also bring them directly to our beneficiaries if you'd rather (but please let us know if you do). Thanks for joining our team to fight hunger!

Spend Some Time in the Corner!

The Children's Community Corner, that is! We would 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 ongoing mentorship and guidance, not merely 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.



Ash Wednesday Ecumenical Service

**March 2 at 7:00 pm
Location TBD (and on Zoom)**

Please join us as we host this annual service to open the holy season of Lent.

To receive daily Lenten devotions by email, contact Rev. Steve Silver (silver@fccleb.org).

HOLY WEEK IS APRIL 10-17

COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

Linda Jacobs opened Council's January meeting by asking about the status of the congregational survey of mission priorities, which was originally planned for 2020 but has not happened. Brian Clancy clarified that while we did collect many suggestions of organizations, the survey itself was never conducted. This inquiry led to a discussion of the status of our **Mission and Social Action** Committee, which has not met in many months and has lacked formal leadership since the departure of Kathy Beckett. While the committee has many members, it's not clear who might feel called to lead FCC's mission effort. As it is, we have continued some familiar mission initiatives and financial contributions, but we lack a clear vision of where the program should go in the future. All recognize the pandemic's impact on volunteer participation, but perhaps we need also to revise expectations. Another suggestion is to focus on specific events and projects, rather than a standing committee.

Amid general interest in increasing financial support to local service organizations, Council agreed at least to support Listen Community Services in lieu of our monthly community dinners, which have yet to resume. We could perhaps donate the \$500 that we've annually budgeted for community dinner reimbursement, although we've given more than that amount in the past. Rev. Steve Silver offered to contact Listen's Executive Director Kyle Fisher to determine what kind

of financial support might be most effective. Corrine Erskine again suggested UV Gear as a possible beneficiary.

Valerie Nevel noted that a portion of the **Dole Trust** is available for mission purposes, although she'd like to investigate the original terms of the trust to determine any limits or guidelines for distributing those funds. Steve has researched this in the past and offered to review the trust documents with Valerie.

Consideration MSA Committee prompted a general discussion of the **nominating process** and our current position vacancies and needs. Committees have typically chosen their own chairs, or individuals have stepped forward to take on those roles, but some wondered whether Council should designate chairs. All felt that the congregation could be enlisted more effectively to identify potential leaders in missions and other program areas.

Nan Parsons reported a successful Advent season for the **Children's Community Corner**, both on Zoom and in our Nativity pageant. The Godly Play curriculum helped introduce the kids to the mystery of Christmas, including not just the Nativity itself but the Annunciation, Visitation, and other events as well. They are studying Epiphany before learning more about Christ's use of parables in coming weeks. Council members again commended and thanked Nan for her leadership of the program.

John Gilliatt had little to report for the **Board of Governors**. He will be replacing broken blinds in

the Parlor, having also replaced the bulb in the pendant light over the front door of the Sanctuary. The only upcoming large project is the Parsonage insulation upgrade.

Treasurer Terry Ellison noted that year-end figures came out favorably on both the income and expense sides of the budget, relative to what we anticipated. He and the Finance Committee are working on the 2022 budget. **Trustee** chair Valerie Nevel added that she has begun to compile the year-end reports for our investment activity, which is a rather large project.

Jon Scott reported that the **ad-hoc bylaws group** had met twice, with another subgroup planning to meet this week to work on a summary. The hope is to prepare a proposal for Council and ultimately for the entire congregation, whether at Annual Meeting or, more likely, at some future meeting called for that purpose.

Jon also updated Council on the purchase of equipment to improve our **Zoom livestream**, which will be set up for worship on January 16. The system involves a new video camera with dual microphone along with new microphones for both

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate 2/14 and 3/14, 7:00

Council 3/8, 7:00

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

COMMITTEE NOTES

pulpit and lectern, all of which will transmit directly to the broadcast. A new laptop will facilitate control in the Sanctuary (and serve basic office needs). Jon estimated the total cost at \$1000, which all agreed was quite reasonable.

Council discussed our willingness to continue **in-person worship**, in light of the alarming recent rise in COVID cases driven by the omicron variant. Rev. Silver reported that the Diaconate agreed as a group that it was acceptable to continue despite the risk, further considering the option of moving to the Parish Hall as we have in previous winters. Several Council members weighed in with questions and comments about current in-person attendance, the cost of heating the Sanctuary, the disadvantages of the Parish Hall, and other relevant factors. While members shared a respectful and reasonable concern for the ongoing prevalence of COVID risk and the need for precautions, there was also general agreement that in-person worship provides benefits of social interaction that outweigh the risk.

No one expressed strong objection to continuing in-person worship.

In his **pastor's report** Rev. Silver expressed satisfaction with services on Christmas Eve, thanking Nan Parsons in particular for arranging the newly adapted Nativity pageant. He thanked everyone for thoughtful comments regarding our in-person status, encouraging everyone to be sensitive to a variety of opinions and withhold judgment.

Following up Jon Scott's report about new audio-visual equipment, Steve thanked Jon and suggested the persistent need for a technology committee of some kind. Given the increasing complexity and necessity of this level of technology, we might benefit from a group dedicated to managing it. Terry Ellison added that the Church Administrator is perhaps best positioned to identify our needs in this area. Steve also reiterated an appeal for Zoom greeters.

Steve continues his service on the APD Lifecare Ethics Board, the Congregational Library board, the

UCF board, the NH Conference investment committee, and other external organizations.

DIACONATE

The Deacons in January remained focused on aspects of worship. Rev. Silver reviewed the purchase of new technology that should improve the sound quality of our Zoom stream greatly, including a camera and new microphones for both pulpit and lectern. Eventually, we will need to upgrade the Sanctuary PA system, but for now the Zoom broadcast quality should be sufficient.

The Deacons also considered our congregation's current preferences for in-person worship. It seems clear that some in the congregation want to maintain an in-person option despite COVID risks, and we haven't sustained any health consequences to date. The possibility for physical distancing may be more limited in the Parish Hall. Changing to all-remote services, moreover, would not significantly decrease the staff's preparation time.

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." (Mark 12:41-44)

We're so grateful to have received 31 pledges for 2022! No matter the size of your pledge, participation in faithful stewardship is vital to our mission and ministry. Thank you for prayerfully and honestly considering your commitment to FCC this year.

Offering envelopes for 2022 are in the Parish Hall. Please take your preferred box and record it on the list.

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION



WINTER'S WARMTH. Learning about the Parable of the Good Shepherd, the Children's Community Corner baked sheep-themed cookies at home. Meanwhile, Sue Pratt thought manatees "huddling in our warm spring" in Florida might be a welcome sight for the winter-weary.



LOOKING TOWARD LENT



Ash Wednesday
Ecumenical Service

March 2 at 7:00 pm
Location TBD (and on Zoom)

Please join with our neighbors in this annual service to initiate the holy season of Lent.

Lenten Lunch Bag Offering

With the beginning of Lent on March 2, the CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY CORNER asks again for your generous participation in our annual Lenten Lunch Bag Offering for two great organizations:

WISE (wiseuv.org) and
Epilogos Charities (epilogos.org)

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

The Lenten offering enables FCC's children to help other kids in tough circumstances, encouraging them to see stewardship as a way to share God's love.

You are asked to use the decorated bags to collect savings from the sacrifice of a regular treat during Lent. Suggestions include skipping a daily coffee or latte; foregoing munchies when watching TV; or having dinner at home and contributing the cost of eating out. Whatever your sacrifices, please

**plan to return your donations on
PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 10.**

HOLY WEEK IS APRIL 10-17

MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



Upcoming Concerts at FCC

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

The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, February 11 and 25, March 11 and 25, 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, 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.*

Classicopia: The Dancing Cello—Sunday, March 20, at 2:00 pm

Our friend Elizabeth Borowsky brings back her mother, famed cellist Cecylia Barczyk, to usher in spring with bright, brilliant music for piano and cello. The program includes dances and rhapsodies by Ludwig van Beethoven, Frédéric Chopin, Claude Debussy, and more. Adults \$20, FCC members \$15, children free; *for advance tickets and more, visit classicopia.org/concert/1091/.*

Upper Valley Music Center Faculty Showcase—Saturday, April 2, at 4:00 pm

All are welcome to this diverse program featuring the vocal and instrumental excellence of the faculty next door at UVMC. Adults \$15, under 18 free; *proceeds benefit UVMC tuition assistance fund. More at www.uvmusic.org.*



EXTENDING 19 DAYS INTO JANUARY. Cameo Baroque—Ernie Drown, Beth Hilgartner, Leslie Stroud, and Laurie Rabut—offered an excellent program, originally planned for December, to benefit the Upper Valley Haven’s **19 Days of the Valley** campaign, matched by the Byrne Foundation.

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@fcclb.org • www.fcclb.org
Rev. Stephen R. Silver: silver@fcclb.org • **Music:** music@fcclb.org • **Newsletter Submissions:** church@fcclb.org



First Congregational Church of Lebanon

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Music
at the
Meetinghouse

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

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Classicopia: The Dancing Cello (Borowsky/Barczyk)—Sunday, March 20, at 2:00 pm

Upper Valley Music Center Faculty Showcase—Saturday, April 2, at 4:00 pm

2022 ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, February 13, 11:30 am
(On Zoom, Following Worship)

THE SOUPER BOWL IS BACK!

*Donations gratefully accepted at the church through
Sunday, February 20. Thank you!*

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@fcclb.org • prayer@fcclb.org • music@fcclb.org • www.fcclb.org