

Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

In any other year, we'd be celebrating Kick-off Sunday in mid-September. Our Children's Community Corner would be gathering once again, we'd have a bouncy house on the front lawn, and we would get together for a fun lunch and enjoy one another's company.

But we're in this year. So, no kids in the church school, no bouncing around outside, no luncheon, no cake. Happy 2020!

Okay, this might seem glib, but it's worth dwelling on what we've lost, and perhaps also gained, during this year of pandemic.

The coronavirus first made itself known late last December, and soon thereafter we began to realize it was going to be a big deal. We followed news stories of its spread in China, then Europe, and we uneasily awaited its arrival on our shores. Everything soon changed, and in mid-March, things—including our church building—shut down. That was six months ago!

I won't recount what's happened since then. It's just too much, really. But I will note that compared with the rest of the country, we here in the Upper Valley have gotten off pretty easy. Still, we worry, we wonder. What will happen this fall? Will we see a Second Wave? How will flu season unfold? Will the economy stabilize or go into free fall? And let's not even mention the election.

It's at times like these that we can feel helpless. Yes, we can wear masks and practice social distancing. But that can feel inadequate at times. We want to be in control, don't we?

Well, one thing that we can do is to rely upon God, read the Bible, attend worship (if only virtually). We can continue to be the church, even if the building is closed. During these unsettled times, we can find reassurance in the company of the faithful, in the community into which God has invited us.

We find a reminder of God's saving presence in the great hymn *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*. The first stanza proclaims, "Our God, our help in ages past/Our hope for years to come/Our shelter from the stormy blast/And our eternal home." When the great Isaac Watts wrote

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SUNDAY SERVICE

Outdoor Services on FCC Lawn

KICK-OFF SUNDAY, September 20, 10:00
Sunday, October 11, 10:00 (*Tentative Date*)

All are welcome to join us for more outdoor worship services on the church's front lawn!

Once again, our main concern is everyone's health and safety, and we ask for patience and understanding of what it means to worship in person now—with changes in liturgical practice, restrictions on singing and communal prayer, and reduced social interaction.

Those attending will have to RSVP in advance and follow requirements including health and symptom screening, physical distancing, and mask use. We will not have coffee hour.

Please contact the church office or Rev. Steve Silver (silver@fccleb.org) to RSVP or ask any questions.

Sunday Worship Online

Zoom Services—Sundays at 10:00 am

Please join us via Zoom conference every Sunday morning at our usual worship time! Following our familiar order of worship, we share prayers and readings, sing hymns, and listen to Steve's weekly sermon. There's even "coffee hour" afterward! **The Zoom invitation is emailed every Sunday morning; if you're not receiving it but would like to, please contact the church office.**

YouTube Recordings—Watch Anytime!

If Zoom isn't your thing, or if you can't make the Sunday morning time, you're invited to watch on YouTube whenever you like. We record and post the weekly service every Friday afternoon.

The YouTube link is posted at www.fccleb.org and sent with the Sunday morning email.

For either format, each week's bulletin—with an order of worship, prayers, scripture texts, hymns, and announcements—is posted on our website and sent out with the Sunday morning email. We also post the text of Rev. Steve Silver's sermon.

SEPTEMBER 20

KICK-OFF SUNDAY!

Our annual celebration of a new program year for the **Children's Community Corner** will be a bit different this year, but it will be outside! Please join us!

STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH: INVEST IN THE VISION

Special UCC Offering in September

The Strengthen the Church program supports the growth of ministry and local congregations across the country. Renewing older faith communities, building new ones, and funding grants for emerging leaders in our church, the program is vital to the health of our denomination. The offering is inspired this year by a vision of the Holy Spirit at work on Pentecost.

Please contribute as you are able, either by mail to the church or at www.ucc.org/stc.

Neighbors in Need

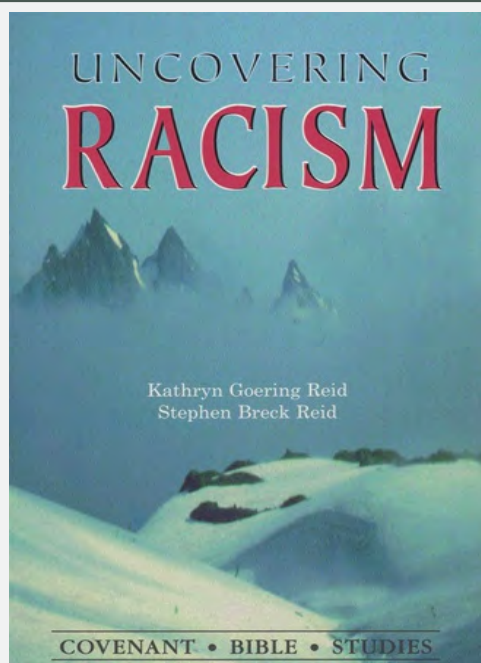
Special UCC Mission Offering in October

Neighbors in Need supports ministries of justice and compassion across the US. Two-thirds of the collection is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries for a range of local and national initiatives, advocacy efforts, direct service projects, and the fight against systemic injustice. The rest goes to the Council for American Indian Ministries, sustaining a proud tradition of aiding Native American populations.

This year, NIN is focused on serving our immigrant neighbors and their communities.

Please contribute as you are able, either by mail to the church or at www.ucc.org/nin.

Please note that Church Council has extended the suspension of indoor worship and other on-site events at FCC through Sunday, October 18, as we follow an abundance of caution regarding COVID-19. Monitoring the return of college students and other situations, we'll reassess concerns in mid-October.



Uncovering Racism: A Racial Justice Reading Group on Zoom

We believe that as Christians, we are called to work for racial justice. To help us do this work better, we will read and discuss the book *Uncovering Racism*, by Kathryn Goering Reid and Stephen Breck Reid. Written from a faith perspective, this short but powerful book helps us see how racism persists as an issue we must all confront. **All are invited to participate.**

Starts Wednesday, September 16, at 7:00. We're planning on a six-week class, with additional sessions possible as needed.

Books provided free of charge, but advance reservations are required. To RSVP or ask questions, contact Rev. Steve Silver at silver@fccleb.org or 603-448-4281.

Black Lives Matter Vigils in the Upper Valley

All are encouraged to participate in one or more of these weekly **Black Lives Matter** vigils for racial justice. FCC's Church Council and the Mission and Social Action Committee have affirmed this as a relatively easy but visible and important way for all members of our congregation to offer our Christian witness to the many tragedies of systemic racism and join in demanding significant cultural change. Bring your own signs promoting racial justice, awareness, and action—and spread the word among your friends and social networks.

HANOVER—Mondays, 5:00-5:30
Hanover/Dartmouth Green

LEBANON—Tuesdays, 5:00-5:30
Colburn Park, opposite Opera House

MERIDEN—Wednesdays, 5:00-6:00
Corner of Route 120 and Main Street

CANAAN—Thursdays, 5:00-5:30
Downtown sidewalks (NOT on the Green)

PLAINFIELD—Fridays, 5:00-6:00
Near the Town Library

The Lebanon CROP Walk Goes Virtual for 2020!

Weekend of October 3-4

Begun in 1969 as a single walk in Bismarck, ND, the **CROP Hunger Walk** has long been a national project run by Church World Service. Happening all year but mostly in the fall, CROP Walks across the US raise about \$9 million annually to combat hunger, food insecurity, and poverty worldwide.

Due to the pandemic, this year's walk will happen virtually—we will still walk, but we'll stay in small family or friend groups in our own neighborhoods.

We won't have our usual hot lunch at FCC, but participants will gather for a celebration on Zoom.

ALL GIVING WILL BE DONE ONLINE.

YOU can help in either or both of these ways...

Walk!—Walk on your own or get a small group together. If you'd like to join a group, contact the church.

Donate!—Sponsor a walker, or give online at crophungerwalk.org/.



www.crophungerwalk.org

Questions? Contact the church office or visit www.crophungerwalk.org/.

Our Open Door Ministry

Supporting Our Community, One Gift Card at a Time

Throughout the year, our neighbors come to the church office seeking assistance. Whether it's a tank of gas for the car, some food for dinner, or a payment toward rent or an electric bill, our congregation is able to help, thanks to the **OPEN DOOR MINISTRY**. Available to anyone in Lebanon and surrounding towns, this ministry is one of the most vital services we extend to our community—all the more vital amid the economic and mental-health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We don't ask questions about need or use; the "Open" Door is just that. We do ask people to wait at least four months between requests, only because the overall need is so great. FCC has been able to respond to that need for years, but we *never* have enough to assist all those who need it—and **demand has increased considerably over the past seven years, during which time we've helped over 430 people.**



Those who seek help from us haven't been irresponsible or lazy, and the large majority (about 75%) request assistance just once or twice. With just occasional exceptions, they don't become dependent or try to take advantage of the program. Some are chronically homeless; some have just been evicted for reasons beyond their control. Sometimes they've just moved to the area and need a hand getting started; sometimes they've lost a job or just started a new one. Some are driving to and from the hospital more often because they're caring for a family member; some have been referred to us by a counselor at WISE. **All are our neighbors.**



The Open Door is kept open by contributions to the monthly Communion Offering, with which we purchase \$25 gift cards for gas and food from **JAKE'S** and **PRICE CHOPPER**, respectively. This is supplemented by the Mission and Social Action Fund (from the Dole Trust), which provides modest assistance for rent and utilities. **In any of these cases, our ability to support those in need depends on you, our congregation. Because you give each month, we can help a lot of people. Your neighbors thank you!**

For more details, please contact your Deacon or the church office.

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

these words in 1719, a time of some turmoil in England, he looked to the psalter, and Psalm 90 in particular, for inspiration.

These words hold true now, just as they did in England 300 years ago, or in ancient Israel thousands of years ago. God is a comfort, a refuge, a shelter for us, now and always. The temptation to just give up can be strong sometimes, but our faith teaches us that it is at those times that seem most dire that God's Spirit is with us.

Things will be different this fall. But in the ways that matter most, they will be the same. The church and the church's God will be with all of us, each and every day, in all circumstances. Thanks be to the Lord!

Yours faithfully, *Steve*

COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

This summer Council has regularly considered **the prospect of FCC's reopening**, accounting for a variety of variables and requirements for in-person worship, and the regional outlook for COVID-19 spread. All agree that a September reopening would be inadvisable, amid concerns about the fall return of students and other local developments. The possibility of even one member of our congregation becoming ill from an in-person event is too risky and painful to imagine. Ventilation in our Sanctuary is not so great, and in the few cases where churches have opened up, worshipers have tended to be younger on average than ours.

In the meantime, we successfully held an **outdoor service** August 9, regulated by a series of precautions and requirements. While it wasn't as social and familiar as our typical worship experience, all agreed that it was worth doing to offer this interaction. We plan two additional outdoor services before the arrival of colder weather.

Nan Parsons has kept in touch with kids of the **Children's Community Corner**. Looking ahead to possible reopening plans, she added that it's unlikely we will be able to hold the CCC downstairs as before. Nan would like to discuss the relevant concerns with parents and other volunteers in order to come up with some alternative plans.

We have received a couple **church-use inquiries** about live-streaming concerts in our Sanctuary, without an audience. Council members are generally comfortable with such an

arrangement in a limited number of cases. It was agreed that this or any other event should be scheduled far enough away from anything else (such as weekly worship recordings) so as to minimize any risk of viral spread. Council also discussed the need for having the church cleaned thoroughly in conjunction with any use, perhaps by professionals rather than church volunteers.

Our **music position search**, guided by a committee of congregational representatives, has just completed a series of candidate interviews. Despite the uncertainty of our plans to reopen, all agreed that we should move forward with this promising group of applicants. The committee hopes to have good news soon!

For the **Trustees**, Valerie Nevel has reported that this year's distribution from the Waldo Trust, which was slightly larger than in previous years, has been received and deposited.

In his **pastor's report** Steve Silver has discussed reopening and plans for outdoor services, along with our ongoing provision of remote worship every week in printed, recorded, and live online formats, which have served the congregation well. He reports lively responses for both Christian Education groups offered online this summer. The four-week class during August on Plymouth's Pilgrims drew about ten participants, while the racial-justice reading group currently has about twice that many. The latter will study *Uncovering Racism*, published by the Brethren/Disciples of Christ, and Steve hopes for an honest exchange grounded in faith. He and a small

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom teleconferences:

Diaconate 9/14 and 10/12, 7:00

Council 9/15 and 10/20, 7:00

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

group are determining how this discussion will be structured.

Steve is optimistic about the music search, hoping to sustain his good fortune in having worked with very talented and collaborative church musicians in the past. He reiterates his thanks to both Brian Clancy and interim organist Susan Sorensen for helping with worship each week.

Steve has initiated a conversation with both the Diaconate and the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee about his annual vacation time, which he has not yet taken as he normally would have in previous years. He hopes to arrange a sort of rollover or cash-value agreement to compensate for the vacation time he hasn't used. It's an unusual situation for us, but not uncommon in the professional world.

Lastly, Steve again thanks Council and the congregation for their spirit, dedication, and thoughtful efforts during this unprecedented time. He is aware that some congregations have not fared as well, or been as supportive of their clergy and each other, and Steve has been especially grateful to be going through these challenges with us.

COMMITTEE NOTES

DIACONATE

This summer the Diaconate has continued to reach out to **members of our congregation**. Jim Oronte, has been coping with his health situation as best as he can, and he and Linda appreciate messages of support. Longtime FCC member Edith Wheeler, who had moved a couple years ago to Williamstown, VT, has returned to the Upper Valley to live in an assisted-living community in Hanover. Deacons have been in contact in with many others on their member lists, and Sue Pratt created three new prayer shawls to be given out whenever needed. The group has considered the impacts of virus-related social isolation on residential senior-care communities, and we hope to find ways to help going forward.

In his **pastor's report**, Steve Silver discussed our two current adult-education offerings—one in August

on Plymouth's Pilgrims and another on the book *Uncovering Racism*, to begin in September—both of which have been well received. He invites everyone to sustain support for racial justice, in part by attending local Black Lives Matter vigils each week. Steve also noted that the Mission and Social Action survey remains in development.

Steve collaborated with Deacons on the plans for our first outdoor worship service on August 9, securing volunteers to help with health screening, ushering, and ensuring that all worshipers follow safety precautions. We hope to offer two more outdoor services before the weather turns too cold this fall. Online and remote worship options continue to be available through at least mid-October, and those have served us well. Steve has included congregational hymn requests, and some have asked about involving more singers and musicians.

From the Music Committee

We are happy to report that we have now finished interviewing five excellent candidates for the **organist/choir director position**. While nothing is official yet as of publication, we plan to hire someone soon—so stay tuned for some exciting news!

Many, many thanks to our SEARCH COMMITTEE:

Chris Chase, Brian Clancy, Meghan Davis, Jo Shelnutt, Steve Silver, Laurel Stavis, and Gail Wasson

And even more thanks to our INTERIM ORGANIST:

Susan Sorensen

Susan has faithfully, graciously offered her organ expertise and good humor every week since January 12. Since March, she's been vital to our production of remote services. *Thanks, Susan!!*



NHC-UCC ANNUAL MEETING 2020

Repair - Restore - Renew

Saturday, October 17, 9:00–2:30 (Connecting Sessions Oct. 1-21)

Online Registration Now Open

All are invited—lay and ordained church leaders, congregation members, friends, and visitors—to participate remotely in the 219th Annual Meeting of the NH Conference of the UCC. This year's theme is grounded in the exhortations of Isaiah 58:9-12, which concludes, "You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in." The keynote speaker will be the **Rev. Michael W. Caine**, who has served the UCC and congregations in New York and Philadelphia for three decades. He will help us consider how our churches can identify opportunities to respond actively to what is happening in the world around us.

In addition to the business meeting and other plenary events on October 17, connecting sessions starting October 1 will address racial justice, community ministry, the Rights of Nature Resolution, and other topics.

FCC will pay for up to four delegates to attend (\$25/person); registration closes Wednesday, October 7. For complete details and schedule, visit the meeting page on the Conference website (www.nhcucc.org/conference-ministries/2020-annual-meeting).

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

Connecting Our Congregation

GET HELP, GIVE HELP! If you need assistance with picking up groceries, running errands, getting to appointments, or other tasks in these isolated times, volunteers from our congregation can lend a hand.

FELLOWSHIP THROUGH FOOD! Would you enjoy a meal provided by a friend from church? Do you enjoy cooking, and could you provide a meal to someone in need? Either way, please let us know.

If you are in need, or you'd like to volunteer your help, we invite you to contact the church office or Rev. Steve Silver directly.



A delicious dinner of fresh tomatoes and tomato-bacon pie that Dawn Troutman and the Hammonds shared with David's House in August.



OUTDOOR WORSHIP IN AUGUST. A comfortable congregation of almost thirty enjoyed our first in-person worship service since mid-March, all safely distanced on the front lawn. More to come!

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

**SEPTEMBER 20
KICK-OFF SUNDAY!**

Our annual celebration of a new year for the **Children's Community Corner** will be a bit different this year, but it will be outside! (*See right.*)
Please plan to join us!

Uncovering Racism: A Racial Justice Reading Group
Weekly on Zoom—Starting Wednesday, September 16, 7:00
Free; RSVP to participate at silver@fccleb.org or 603-448-4281.

Outdoor Services
FCC Front Lawn

Sunday, Sept. 20, 10:00 am
(KICK-OFF SUNDAY!)

Sunday, Oct. 11, 10:00 am

***** RSVP Required *****

Health and symptom screening,
physical distancing, and mask
use required for all attendees.

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Susan Sorensen, Interim Organist and Choir Director • Nancy Parsons, Church School Superintendent
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