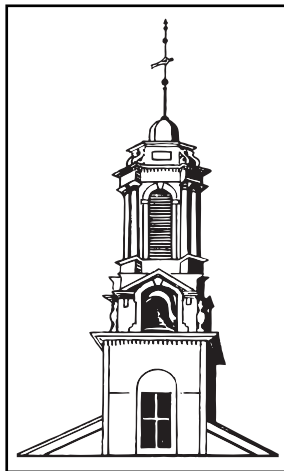


2023 ANNUAL REPORT



First Congregational Church
Lebanon, New Hampshire



Annual Meeting
Sunday, February 11, 2024

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ANNUAL MEETING 2024

Moderator: Barbara Jones

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Invocation
3. Reading of the Warrant
4. Reading of the Minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting
5. Reports for 2023:
 - PASTOR: Rev. Stephen R. Silver
 - CHURCH COUNCIL: Jon Scott
 - OFFICERS:
 - Clerk - Brian Clancy
 - Auditor - Valerie Nevel (for Parkers Accounting)
 - Treasurer - Dawn Troutman
 - BOARDS:
 - Board of Governors - Walter Scott
 - Board of Trustees - Valerie Nevel
 - Diaconate - Linda Gerlach
 - COMMITTEES: Committee Chairs
 - WOMEN OF THE CHURCH
 - CHURCH HISTORIAN: Corrine Erskine
6. Nominating Committee Report
7. Election of Officers and Committees
8. Old Business
 - A. Review of Committee Structure and Bylaws
9. New Business
 - A. Proposed Budget for 2024 (see pp. 14-15)
10. Closing Hymn: "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"
11. Benediction

WARRANT FOR 2024 ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of First Congregational Church of Lebanon, NH, will be held in the Sanctuary (and remotely on Zoom) on **Sunday, February 11, 2024**, at 11:30 am, after that morning's worship service, for the following purposes:

1. To hear the reports of all officers, committees, and organizations, as required under the CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS of the church.
2. The election of all officers provided for 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.

Respectfully submitted,
Brian C. Clancy, *Clerk*
Lebanon, NH 03766
January 26, 2024

MINUTES OF 2023 ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, February 12, 2023

1. Moderator Barbara Jones **called the meeting to order** on Zoom at 11:33 and confirmed that a quorum of at least 25 corporate members was in attendance. (The Zoom meeting showed as many as 25 participants, representing roughly 35-40 people.)
2. The **invocation** was offered by the Rev. Stephen R. Silver.
3. Reading of the **warrant** for the 2023 meeting: *Motion made* by Linda Gerlach, seconded by Linda Jacobs, to dispense with reading the warrant. *Motion passed unanimously.*
4. Reading of the **minutes** from the 2022 meeting: *Motion made* by Pete Mason, seconded by Chris Chase, to dispense with reading the 2022 minutes and accept them as submitted. *Motion passed unanimously.*

5. Reports

Pastor (Rev. Steve Silver): Expanding on his published message in the Annual Report, Rev. Silver emphasized his call for the Bylaws review subcommittee to reconvene; this is important and necessary work. He expressed a similar urgency about the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee, which has not met in over a year. Steve invited comments and feedback from members of the congregation, welcoming everyone to contact him at any time. "It's your church, and I need to hear from you." He also asked everyone to consider what our church community will or should look like in the post-pandemic period. How are we meeting people's needs, using Zoom, and addressing changing patterns of participation? He appealed again for more Zoom greeters in particular.

Church Council (*Jon Scott unable to attend*): Report presented in Annual Report document.

Clerk (Brian Clancy): Report presented in Annual Report document.

Auditor (Valerie Nevel, for Parkers Accounting): Referring to the published report, Valerie reminded everyone that we have not completed a full, formal audit, which can cost \$5,000 or so. Lisa Bybee of Parkers Accounting completes a cursory review of our investment statements and accounts each year.

Treasurer (Dawn Troutman): Referring to the published 2022-23 budget report, Dawn thanked the members of the Finance Committee (Valerie Nevel, Jon Scott, Wendell Smith), as well as Steve Silver and Brian Clancy.

Board of Governors (Walter Scott): Referring to his published report, Walter reminded everyone that he hasn't been chair for the full year, so he is still getting acclimated to the role. He invited questions and comments from anyone who has concerns, or ideas or needs relative to building and property maintenance.

Board of Trustees (Valerie Nevel): Referring to her published report, Valerie excused herself (due to illness) from reading the names of bequests as in past years. She pointed out that our

endowment values are down 18%, while we took just over 5% draw; the 2023 budget is not balanced, so we may well need to take more than 5% this year to cover our expenses.

Diaconate (Linda Gerlach): Referring to her published report, Linda added only another invitation to consider filling one of the four remaining vacancies on the Diaconate. She noted that serving as a Deacon is not an onerous responsibility.

Christian Education Committee (Nan Parsons): Referring to her published report, Nan added her thanks to the entire FCC community for supporting and giving their time to the children, especially parents who get their kids to church and support the program. Several expressed gratitude to Nan for her work, and Barb Jones appreciated a particular line from Nan's report: "Inspiration propels a person from apathy to possibility."

Memorial Gardens Committee (*Brandon Mason unable to attend*): Report presented in Annual Report document.

Mission and Social Action Committee (Valerie Nevel): Valerie had nothing to add to the published report. Linda Jacobs added that the committee has discussed extending an appeal to the congregation on behalf of WISE, for baked goods for the families in their safe homes. Anyone interested should communicate with WISE directly.

Music Committee (Brian Clancy): Report presented in Annual Report document. Rev. Silver expressed his thanks to Ernie Drown, Brian Clancy, and the other members of the choir for their tremendous job on Sundays. "Our choir is punching above its weight."

Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (Barbara Jones): Referring to her published report, Barb acknowledged that this committee needs to meet and get to work, encouraging improved communication between pastor and congregation. The committee has good members and just needs to meet. Barb welcomed questions, comments, and information, and Wendell Smith asked if he was still a member of the committee; it was confirmed that he is not.

Stewardship Committee (*Jon Scott unable to attend*): Report presented in Annual Report document.

Women of the Church: Report presented in Annual Report document.

Church Historian (Corrine Erskine): Report presented in Annual Report document. Linda Jacobs commended Corrine on her history.

Motion made by Linda Jacobs, seconded by Amy Driscoll, to accept the foregoing reports of all the church's boards and committees. *Motion passed unanimously.*

6. Nominating Committee Report (Barbara Jones)

Barb Jones referred to the proposed committee roster, noting the high number of vacancies. She observed the need to revise the church's Bylaws to better suit the current size of our congregation. She thanked those who had agreed to continue in their roles.

Barb further noted that Susan Pratt had expressed a desire to continue serving as a deacon, although our Bylaws limit deacons to two consecutive three-year terms. Barb suggested that a waiver of this restriction might be possible. The Clerk reported that Church Council had

recommended such a waiver for this case only (not a permanent bylaw change). *Motion made* by Linda Gerlach, seconded by Bob Gerlach, to waive the Diaconate term limit in this case. *Motion passed unanimously*. Sue Pratt expressed her appreciation for the waiver, adding her sincere recommendation to anyone considering serving as a deacon.

Barb then asked for nominations from the floor, but none were forthcoming. Linda Jacobs also volunteered to join the Memorial Gardens Committee for the term ending 2025. Rev. Silver added a final appeal for volunteers to help Barb with the Nominating process itself, which is an important job.

7. Election of Officers and Committees

Motion made by Wendell Smith, seconded by Chris Chase, to accept the full slate of 2023 nominations as presented and updated at the meeting. *Motion passed unanimously*.

8. Old Business

Review of Bylaws and Committee Structure. Barb Jones repeated Rev. Silver's earlier plea for progress on the Bylaws review.

9. New Business

Proposed Budget for 2023. Treasurer Dawn Troutman noted the challenges of increased operating expenses in 2022, similar to what we're all experiencing in our personal finances. Stewardship income was also down, although we are maintaining a goal of \$100,000 for the coming year. Dawn reviewed other income figures, including the increased income from use of premises; Church Administrator Brian Clancy clarified that our rental rates have remained the same, crediting the many groups that use our building responsibly. Barb Jones asked whether the rate was variable or voluntary; Brian explained that while we do have fixed rental and heating fees, most users pay a negotiated rate based on purpose, audience, budget, and other variables. We try to make the space accessible and affordable for all.

Dawn continued her summary of the proposed budget, noting the placeholder figure of \$10,000 for increases in staff compensation and benefits. Fellowship and events have been reduced, while expected amounts for the Open Door Ministry and special offerings have been increased, reflecting their rising importance. A new line item of \$1500 will support costs of the Diaconate's congregational care and outreach. An increase in financial services anticipates higher audit costs. Operating costs for utilities are all higher.

In total, the budget plans for a deficit of over \$30,000, despite efforts to streamline and make cuts. We are not, however, committed to spending all that we've budgeted, and we hope be able to increase membership and stewardship. Walter noted that the parsonage insulation project will reduce operational costs by making the house more efficient; Brian confirmed with him that the insulation contractor has scheduled that work. Valerie Nevel reminded everyone that we'll have to cover the deficit by spending from endowment, after a down-market year. She is concerned that fixed costs in the budget mean that this situation will continue in future years unless we are able increase membership. She noted that we've never passed a budget that carried such a large deficit.

Dawn expressed her willingness to take further questions or comments at any time, and all thanked her for her work. **Motion made** by Linda Jacobs, seconded by Amy Driscoll, to accept the church's proposed budget for 2023. **Motion passed unanimously** but with one abstention, an expression of concern but not an outright vote against.

10. Brian Clancy led everyone in singing the **closing hymn**, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds."

11. Rev. Silver thanked for everyone spending their time on church business, for listening to each other and conducting themselves in Christian charity. We may not have agreed on every item, but we had a civil discussion. He then offered the **benediction**.

12. **Motion made** by Rachel Silver, seconded by Amy Driscoll, to close the meeting. **Motion passed unanimously**. Meeting **adjourned** at 12:23.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian C. Clancy, *Clerk*

PASTOR'S REPORT

⁹Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.

¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

—Romans 12:9-13

The Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Romans with the intent of offering them counsel. He did not plan on writing an enduring part of Christian theology. But that's what he did. He spelled out what we Christians should do, what we might call good *praxis*, or practice, for the Church. And in doing so, he also offered some thoughts on what it means to be a follower of Jesus. These words still hold true.

Largely, I believe that we as a community are following Paul's advice. We love, we hate evil, we hold fast to what is good, we love one another with mutual affection, and we honor one another.

But what about zeal? If I were to grade myself, and our church as a whole, I'd say "incomplete."

One might ask, just what do I mean by zeal? Well, there are areas where we can become too comfortable, where we can be satisfied with the status quo. But what happens when being comfortable becomes complacency? And what about when the status quo no longer serves us?

We have let our bylaws review languish. Fortunately, we have now revived the effort to come up with a structure that meets the needs of our congregation as it is today—but that will also allow us to adjust as we grow and move into the future. A recent meeting was filled with rich ideas, and some disagreement. That's okay. We may disagree so long as we do so with Christian love.

Last year I wrote, "We also need to continue to work on our livestream capacities. Much has been achieved in this area, and I am grateful to those who have contributed to our progress. But, to use a tired cliché, we have not yet reached the promised land. If we are to make the most of this new hybrid reality, we must make sure that those who are joining us online experience worship or other activities without any difficulty." This remains true. We have talked about upgrading or replacing our sound system, too. This could be part of the long-talked-about campaign. Ah, yes. Some have said this is not a good time. Why not? The economy? Meaningful campaigns succeed regardless of who is in office or what the top-line economic numbers are. Simply talking about the future is not enough. We need to take steps now to realize our vision for tomorrow.

You, the congregation and friends of First Congregational Church of Lebanon, continue to show your commitment to our church. Your efforts make a tremendous difference to our ministry, to our worship, and to both our church and wider community.

Our church staff continues to go above and beyond the call of duty. Brian Clancy, our Church Administrator, has been an invaluable presence in the church office; Barb Teeter, our Sexton,

continues to care for our building with affection and diligence. And Ernie Drown has been great to work with, bringing us wonderful music on Sunday mornings, and leading our small but mighty choir with aplomb.

A special thank-you to volunteer Rachel Silver, who stepped in last fall to run the Children's Community Corner after Nan Parsons felt a need to step back. Rachel has done a great job, especially with our older youth. But we need to look to a permanent solution. Relying on a volunteer or a pastor's spouse is, quite simply, inappropriate. If we believe that children are important members of our community, and we believe that they are the future of the church, we need to invest in them now.

So, we have work to do. Let's get to it.

Yours faithfully,

Steve

CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT

Your Church Council met monthly throughout most of 2023, generally on the second Tuesday of each month. Our main purposes in most meetings included:

- Hearing and discussing reports from church committees and boards
- Monitoring the church's financial condition, approving all significant expenditures, and reviewing/approving recommendations on budgets and staff compensation
- Staying up to date on concerns of the congregation
- Monitoring the health risks associated with covid in our community and planning worship/social/meeting arrangements accordingly
- Considering strategies for better meeting the needs of current and future congregants, including Christian education for youth and adults

Priorities for the coming year, many of which complement each other, include:

- Updating FCC's audio/visual system for in-person and remote worship
- Completing work done earlier to "right-size" and simplify church structures and systems, and update our bylaws accordingly
- Continuing work to make Sunday worship more welcoming and accessible
- Addressing important building maintenance needs (e.g., renovation of front entry steps)
- Setting up online pledging and donation systems
- Hiring a church school director
- Strengthening and clarifying our employment-related policies and procedures
- Establishing a regular schedule for meetings of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee as a support and communications group for the pastor and for the congregation
- Supporting our mission and ministry, including the care of members in our extended church family
- Reviewing facilities use/rental policies and practices, including amounts charged, to insure adequate financial return and other benefits, including community goodwill and support that is generated from these activities
- Exploring potential for re-starting Community Dinners, with an eye toward relieving pressure on our long-term volunteers, and involving more volunteers from the community
- Listening for and responding to concerns of the congregation

Council members have contributed many hours of service in support of this church and its members. The Pastor and Church Administrator have faithfully attended most meetings and worked with lay volunteers to keep things running and in good shape between and beyond meetings. We are grateful for the hard work, collaborative spirit, and dedication to service which continue to fuel our small-but-mighty leadership team.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Scott, *Chair*

Linda Jacobs, *Vice-Chair*

Corrine Erskine and Linda Oronte, *At-Large
Committee Chairs*

CLERK'S REPORT

Membership Changes

During 2023 two new covenant members joined the church, three members died, and five members withdrew. With these changes, we begin 2024 with 100 covenant members.

New Members Received (2):

Robert Crockett, joined 11/12/23.

James R. Hughes, joined 11/12/23.

Members Who Died (3):

Lloyd C. Bennett, d. 2/14/23.

Gloria P. Hammond, d. 4/2/23.

Barbara L. Sargent, d. 12/25/23.

Members Who Withdrew (5):

Linda MacVicar, withdrew per communication with Diaconate, 9/1/23.

Leslie Merrill (*nee* Thomson), withdrew per email to church office, 11/20/23.

Elizabeth and Jim Duvall, withdrew per email to church office, 11/27/23.

K. C. Erskine, withdrew per email communication with Corrine Erskine, 12/29/23.

Baptisms

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver performed the following **baptisms**:

Jacobe Lisotto, 9/17/2023, at FCC.

Dominic Watson, 10/15/2023, at FCC.

Memorial Services

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver presided at the following **memorial and graveside services**:

Members of the Church:

Lloyd C. Bennett, d. 2/14/23, memorial service 2/18/23 at FCC; graveside service 5/6/23 at Pine Grove Cemetery, Grafton, NH.

Gloria P. Hammond, d. 4/2/23, graveside memorial service 6/29/23 at New Rye Cemetery, Epsom, NH.

Friends of the Church:

Eleanor Sullivan, d. 3/5/23, memorial service 3/11/23 at Ricker Funeral Home, Lebanon, NH.

Chester "Chet" Wood, d. 2/20/18, graveside memorial service 9/19/23 at Valley Cemetery, Lebanon, NH.

Randolph Catlin, Jr., d. 11/9/23, memorial service 12/26/23 at Bigelow Chapel, Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, MA.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian C. Clancy, Clerk

AUDITOR'S REPORT
TREASURER and FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT

[*** These reports are not available in this edition. For questions or additional information, please contact First Congregational Church directly at 603-448-4281 or church@fccleb.org. ***]

BOARD OF GOVERNORS REPORT

“The Board of Governors shall have general charge and care of the church’s physical property,” according to our church’s *Constitution and By-Laws*. The Board has traditionally met on the fourth Sunday of the month, although meetings have only happened on an as-needed basis during 2023. All meeting agendas and minutes are available in written or digital form.

Following is a summary list of our work this year:

Maintenance and Repairs Completed:

- Insulation of parsonage
- Removal of dead tree at parsonage, along with lawn releveling
- Replacement of exterior spotlights on front lawn
- Various small maintenance tasks

Unfinished Projects for 2024:

- Repair/replacement/refinishing of the church’s front steps
- Improved lighting in church basement
- Development of a 5-10-year plan of maintenance for church and parsonage

The chair wishes to thank the church for its continued support. Please forgive the lack of a regular meeting schedule; there will be more opportunities to contact the Board of Governors in 2024. Thank you also to Wendell Smith for all his help. We hope to have a larger membership in the Board of Governors this year, which will help the Board to be better prepared to address the needs of the church.

Respectfully submitted,

Walter Scott, *Chair and Secretary*

Wendell Smith

Benjamin Van Vliet

DIACONATE REPORT

In 2023 the Diaconate of First Congregational Church of Lebanon continued to serve the needs of the congregation, both spiritually and otherwise. The Deacons send cards, make phone calls, arrange receptions, and coordinate the prayer shawl ministry. The Diaconate continues to have only eight members, and with a dual format of both in-person and Zoom worship, much time was spent finding ushers and Zoom greeters.

In January the Diaconate decided to resume coffee hour on a limited basis. By early summer we had resumed weekly coffee hours, providing a time for fellowship after worship. There is a need for more volunteers to sign up for coffee hour.

We began a discussion of updating the directory, including pictures. Still a work in progress, this hopefully will reach fruition early in 2024. Under the leadership of Deb Scott, the Diaconate also had FCC T-shirts designed and printed. They are available for order online.

Dawn Troutman began a program of handing out bags, containing a piece of fruit and a personal note from FCC members, to accompany the Open Door Ministry's gas and food cards. Recipients have enjoyed this personal touch.

The Diaconate has also been involved in the discussion of the children's education ministry. We have decided to become more involved in the serving of communion. We began to discuss a new welcome brochure for FCC, to be placed in both the pews and the Narthex. We plan to again begin using the Deacons' Box, located next to the front door in the narthex. (More information on this will follow.)

The Diaconate continued to participate in the reception of new members. Perhaps the highlight of the year for the Diaconate was the baptism of Jacobe Lisotto and a reception, organized by the Deacons, that followed. We were sad to see Jacobe move away, but are pleased he is doing well in his new living situation.

I would like to thank all the members of the Diaconate for their dedicated service to FCC. Also I would like to thank Rev. Steve Silver and Brian Clancy for their guidance and assistance.

In 2024 the Diaconate will continue to provide care for all members of the FCC community. We will continue to brainstorm ways to attract new members. We humbly ask for God's guidance in and blessing on our work.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Gerlach, *Chair*
Stacey Steele, *Vice-Chair*
Bob Gerlach, *Secretary*
Chris Chase
Phil Hammond
Susan Pratt
Deb Scott
Dawn Troutman

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

The year 2023 was one of transition for FCC's Christian Ed (CE) program. By CE, we refer to our youth ministry, which has been a way of describing Sunday (or Church) School. This effort was ably led by volunteers for many years, most recently by Marcia Corkins and then by Nan Parsons. Nan led what the church's youth renamed the Children's Community Corner, through and beyond the covid pandemic, and she adopted the Godly Play curriculum. She built relationships with our families, skillfully made use of both Zoom and in-person activities, and engaged the children week after week. Her efforts culminated in a lively Children's Sunday last June.

Sadly, due to developments in her personal life, Nan felt she was no longer able to make the investment the program needed and stepped back in August. Her departure reminded us of our past good fortune, but also of our current weakness: we as a church cannot assume we will always be blessed with skilled volunteers to do what needs to be done.

We were fortunate, though, that church members, most notably Rachel Smith Silver, stepped in to run our Sunday-morning program, as we looked at its strengths and weaknesses. Each Sunday Rachel gathers all the children for prayers and conversation; then she convenes our older youth—our teens and tweens—to discuss the lectionary reading and its key concepts and to explore the special role that Christianity, the Bible, and church communities can have throughout our lives. The younger children engage with key aspects of being a Christian through art and play—creating skits, drawing pictures, reading and telling stories, and learning from each other.

This leaves us with the question of what to do to continue to grow and deepen our children's program and its impact in their lives. The current plan is to hire someone with experience who can oversee our youth ministry, with volunteer assistance. We want someone who can develop a relationship with our kids and their families and engage them in creative ways—building momentum, creating compelling age-appropriate pathways to learn about Christianity and the Bible, and laying a solid Christian foundation that they can build on throughout their lives. This leader can provide consistency, strategic focus, and dedicated time that will offer our children and our volunteers a coherent, meaningful experience throughout the year.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Stephen R. Silver

MEMORIAL GARDENS COMMITTEE REPORT

Please Note: The Clerk created this report for 2023 by updating those of previous years.

The Memorial Gardens Committee is responsible for overseeing the maintenance and planting of our memorial gardens in front of the church, as well as preparation and documentation for interments. The garden by the church sign is in honor of Betty and Ellis Howard, given by their family. The Memorial Garden in front of the stone is where cremated ashes of deceased church members and their families may be buried.

The memorial stone is now engraved with the names and birth/death years of the following deceased members of our church: Leif and Beryl Thorsrud, Richard and Helen Wallace, Henry "Hank" Watson, Jr., Carolin and Robert Bassett, Laura and Gordon Place, Elizabeth and Ellis Howard, Willmott "Bin" Lewis, Marilyn Guild Mason, and Margaret "Ginger" Smith. (The names of spouses may be engraved on the stone at the same time, whether or not both are deceased.)

Anyone who would like to receive more information about the Memorial Gardens, or to contribute to them, should please contact one of the committee members. To reserve a space in the garden for interment, please contact a committee member or the Church Administrator.

Respectfully submitted,
Brandon Mason, *Chair*
Ike Jacobs
Linda Jacobs

MISSION AND SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT

During 2023 the Mission and Social Action Committee met monthly, with a goal of reaching out to the community. While there was a desire to have community dinners at the church during the year, the committee decided it would not be feasible due to the limited number of church volunteers with the ability to run the dinners. As a result, the committee decided to continue focusing support on LISTEN Community Services, the Upper Valley Haven, and the UV Humane Society, with food collections from church members.

Through the Open Door Ministry, with the support of staff, FCC has continued to give out food and gas cards to those in need. Primarily due to cutbacks in federal programs and growing inflation in food and gas prices, the demand for this assistance far exceeds the Open Door Ministry's collections and budget. MSA Committee members worked on gathering funds so that the budget could be increased.

The committee also decided to invite representatives of non-profits with which the church has a close relationship to speak in worship, with the goal of providing donation and volunteer opportunities for congregation members. Epilogos spoke about its program in El Salvador, helping to build home for those who need them. WISE spoke about its programs and shelter for domestic abuse survivors. LISTEN discussed its food pantry, community dinners, and thrift store, all designed to assist those in need. The hope is that church members will help these worthwhile organizations.

In February of 2023, the annual Souper Bowl collected a record 556 cans, which was divided as always among LISTEN Community Services, the Upper Valley Haven, and Headrest.

Homelessness continues to be a serious problem in the Upper Valley, which, according to a recent study, is falling 10,000 units short of housing its residents. As federal funds expire, this problem is expected to worsen. FCC's Minister, the Rev. Steve Silver, is involved in Lebanon's efforts to open a winter housing shelter on Mechanic Street.

In 2024, the Mission and Social Action Committee hopes to host a symposium on the issue of homelessness. The hope is that church members will become more knowledgeable about community needs and learn about ways they can personally help, whether through donations or volunteer opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Nevel, *Chair*

Lola Baldwin

Corrine Erskine

Linda Jacobs

Barbara Laro

Denise Moriearty

Jon Scott

Steve Teeter

MUSIC COMMITTEE REPORT

The Music Committee did not meet in 2023. The music ministry overall, however, continues to be one of FCC's great strengths.

The congregation owes this success largely to the efforts of Organist and Choir Director Ernie Drown. Over another full year of in-person worship and choir participation, Ernie has shared his considerable keyboard talents, musical knowledge, and distinct sense of humor with our congregation every Sunday. Our small but mighty choir offers two pieces each week, and Ernie often integrates superb chamber music into our worship services, in collaboration with excellent guest musicians.

The Music at the Meetinghouse series has regularly drawn large audiences to our acoustically renowned Sanctuary, with at least one concert (often more) most weekends. The Anonymous Coffeehouse is now thriving in its fourth season, and Classicopia again offered an abundance of excellent performances throughout 2023. The Bel Canto Chamber Singers rehearsed here weekly in preparation for spring and winter concerts, and the Upper Valley Music Center presented recitals and concerts here all year, from its Faculty Showcase and Sing & Play Festival in the spring to the beloved Messiah Sing during Advent. UVMC also has continued to use our entire building each week for its Suzuki program, its children's and community choruses, and a number of individual lessons. The impressive second iteration of our resident Oak Hill Music Festival and a wonderful week of Classicopia's youth music camp enlivened the summer months. Ernie's Cameo Baroque ensemble presented several benefit concerts, supporting Willing Hands, the Upper Valley Haven, and Vermont flood relief. Numerous other concerts—including programs by the women's chorus Cantabile, a chamber concert presented by the NH Music Festival, two packed performances by Upper Valley Baroque, and a spectacularly popular Christmas concert organized by the Borowsky family—filled out a schedule that regularly opened our building to the wider community.

Music remains central to the worship life of our congregation, and our full concert schedule affirms FCC's distinguished reputation as a hub of regional musical life. Many thanks to our congregation for its warm and enthusiastic support of music in all of these contexts.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Clancy, *Chair*

Ernie Drown, *Organist/Choir Director (ex-officio)*

Meghan Donahue

Steve Teeter

Gail Wasson

PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

The Pastor-Parish Committee, according to our current *Bylaws*, “act[s] as a confidential and privileged body providing a two-way communication link between the minister and the congregation.” It undertakes to support the pastor, yet within the context of providing feedback from one to the other and vice-versa.

In 2023 the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee met August 28 in the Parlor and September 25 on Zoom. Our focus was principally on process, procedures, and greater clarity of the roles and responsibilities of Pastor-Parish and Personnel.

Much of our meeting was a general discussion of the direction we feel the church might pursue and the areas where we hope to grow and develop. The committee will need to narrow that focus to the concerns more closely associated with the type of work such a committee does. We will also need to see if there are areas we are overlooking and can build and improve or, if working well, to foster. Goal setting is important, as is bylaw clarification.

The committee members are listed below. We plan our next meeting not long after the 2024 Annual Meeting, and we welcome any thoughts that members of the congregation wish to bring forward.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Jones, *Moderator and Chair*

Bob Gerlach

Linda Gerlach

Susan Pratt

Walter Scott

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT

Our church continues to be blessed by a loving and generous congregation and by a loving and generous God. In 2023, our mission and ministry received substantial support, in many forms. We received many faithful pledges and weekly offerings.

Members and visitors embraced our Open Door Ministry, responding generously in monthly communion offerings and other opportunities to give. We again participated in the CROP Walk (as walkers, fundraisers, donors, and volunteers) and in each of the UCC's national giving campaigns. We received gifts of stock and IRA donations (QCDs).

Each Sunday our offering plates have included anonymous gifts of cash and coin. We received grant support from an ongoing fund at the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation that was established by congregation members as part of their estate plans. We continue to benefit from generous gifts and bequests from others who are no longer with us today but used their wills to provide for the church's future. (Please refer to the Treasurer's report on page 14 for total collections in regular stewardship, special offerings, and other donations.)

And we once again tallied hundreds of hours of volunteer service in support of each other, in support of those in need in our wider community, in support of prayer and worship, and in support of church operations and leadership.

As the financial pages of this Annual Report illustrate, we continue to benefit from our church endowment funds, withdrawals from which have needed to be higher in recent years than in the past. The Finance team and Trustees monitor this dimension of our finances carefully, recognizing that prudent, sustainable management of funds provided by generations of members is a serious responsibility—but also recognizing that the purpose of all the resources with which we are entrusted is to do God's work in our church, in the wider community, and in the world.

In the coming months we hope to be able to offer online giving and pledging for anyone who might find these helpful ways to manage their financial support for church operations, special offerings, and mission projects. Anyone who would like to discuss how to maximize the impact and benefit of their gifts (and explore ways of adding to their financial support)—whether today or in the future, as part of your will—is invited to be in touch with your Stewardship Committee chair. In the meantime, please know that we remain ever grateful for your generous and faithful participation in our church community.

NOTE: FCC uses a pledge process through which any individual or family is invited to share their financial and volunteer commitments. Pledges are gratefully welcomed at any point in the year (forms available from the church office). They help inform our budgeting and financial management and allow your volunteer lay leadership team and church staff to be efficient, and effective stewards of the resources you provide.

Respectfully submitted,

Jon Scott, *Chair*

Barbara Jones

WOMEN OF THE CHURCH REPORT

The Women of the Church did not submit a formal report for 2023. No transactions were recorded for the year in their dedicated bank account.

Balance on January 1, 2023	\$ 3,835.28
Receipts	\$ 0.00
Expenditures	(\$ 0.00)
Balance on December 31, 2023	\$ 3,835.28

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Laro, *Treasurer*

CHURCH HISTORY

We had finally lifted the mask mandate for worship at Christmas 2022, and in January 2023 we started worshipping in the Parish Hall until Easter. We slowly brought back coffee hour. However, we are still offering a Zoom option for worship. That is here to stay.

There were three concerts in January: the Becker Sisters, Cantabile Women's Chorus, and Upper Valley Baroque. We also collected for the Souper Bowl again, trying to beat our goal of 500 cans. We passed that and ended up in February with 556 cans! I have to say I was surprised, since attendance at church has been so low. Yay for us!

Nan Parsons, with the help of some kids from the Children's Community Corner, gave us a small presentation about what they have been doing. They made some posters depicting what they think would make a better world, then took them outside to show people driving by. Unfortunately it was very cold out, so they weren't out there for very long!

We lost a longtime member of the church on February 14, when Lloyd Bennett died after a long illness. We had a memorial service at the church, along with a celebratory reception afterward. He did a lot for the church, and he will be missed.

Ash Wednesday services were held on February 22 at the Methodist Church. The children gave us their Lenten bags for their offering collection for WISE and Epilogos. In March the Rev. Steve Silver led a reading group on Zoom, studying the Book of Daniel.

On Palm Sunday (April 2) we moved back into the Sanctuary for worship. We celebrated Holy Week in the usual way, with a Maundy Thursday service, a Good Friday service, and a sunrise service in the park on Easter. Our 10:00 service that morning was almost back to normal. Lots of adults and children!

Our church seems to be averaging three to four concerts each month, which helps our mission of being an important part of the community. And for our last worship service in April Ben Van Vliet and Alicia Casey played their violins for us. Ben and Alicia played again several times during the year. They make beautiful music together!

Our first Sunday in May featured our NH Conference Minister, the Rev. Gordon Rankin, as guest preacher. We held a coffee hour afterward for anyone who had questions or just wanted to chat with him. A Bel Canto concert followed that afternoon at the church.

On May 21 we invited Eva Loomis, Executive Director of Upper Valley Habitat for Humanity, to visit worship and give us an overview of the organization and how we can help. The first week of June, in surprisingly cold weather, we welcomed Peggy O'Neil, Executive Director of WISE. The children presented her with a check from the Lenten Lunch Bag collection, and we also provided two bags of towels and conditioner for the organization's new shelter. June also brought five more concerts.

The beginning of July brought us sweltering weather and rain almost every day. Rev. Silver took two Sundays off, then four more in August; Rev. Gail Dimick filled in most weeks, with the Rev. Bob Ross leading worship one Sunday. Organist Ernie Drown also took vacation in July, and so organist Nicholas Kleinschmidt and pianist Sarah Hill substituted.

On the first Sunday in September, Steve announced from the pulpit that Nan Parsons had stepped down as the Christian Education coordinator. We were all sad to see her leave that position but understand her need to do so. Now comes the hard job of finding a replacement.

September 10 was Kick-Off Sunday. Erin Smith, Alicia Casey, and Rachel Silver all agreed to help out. Steve blessed the backpacks and the children before they went downstairs. After the service, pizza and cookies were consumed by all!

On September 17 we celebrated the baptism of Jacobe Lisotto, who had made plans to move to Hooksett. We had a goodbye reception after the service. The next month on October 15 we had another baptism, for Dominic Watson. Dominic also turned 10 on the same day, so after the worship service his family threw him a birthday party! He needs to have a birthday every week—we had over 50 people in church!

Oboist Jason Smoller and flutist Leslie Stroud played in worship a couple times during the fall. Leslie and Ernie Drown are both members of Cameo Baroque, which played two benefit concerts in the fall, the second being their annual effort for the Upper Valley Haven's 19 Days campaign. Classicopia also gave concerts in September and October, and the Anonymous Coffeehouse continued to go strong every other Friday night.

Ron Bailey led another hike of the FCC Outing Club on October 15, this time along the historical route of Town Highway 38 in Hanover, first laid out in 1795! (Ron had also led a hike to Smith Pond in Enfield in June.)

In the fall we filled our shopping cart with food donations for LISTEN Community Services, and on November 5 we invited LISTEN director Rob Roy McGregor to speak in worship. The following Sunday we welcomed James Hughes and Robert Crockett as new covenant members. On November 26, Ben Van Vliet and Alicia Casey played once more, and daughter Elizabeth played a solo of *Silent Night*. The family spent most of December visiting family in Australia.

We decorated for Advent on the first Sunday in December. Lighting Advent candles this year were Erin and Andy Smith; Xavian, Emory, Deserai, and Walter Scott; Nan Parsons and Kailyn Rappaport; and TJ, Billy, and Rob Crockett. The Parsonage carol sing and Christmas party was held December 17. Quite a few people attended, and the table was covered with food.

December brought lots of concerts, including Classicopia, Bel Canto, the UVMC Messiah Sing, and a Christmas Spectacular on the 23rd, organized by the Borowsky family and friends. The last program drew a capacity crowd, and earlier that afternoon, ice sculptor Tony Perham created an angel playing a harp on the front lawn, adding to the holiday festivities.

We ended the year with fairly mild weather and no snow. We mourned the passing of Barbara Sargent, such a kind soul and FCC's longest-tenured member (since 1945), who left us on Christmas Day. Our prayers continue to be with Gordon and his family.

This ends the history for 2023. Hopefully I didn't forget anything or anyone. My wish is that 2024 is a little kinder to everyone.

Respectfully submitted,

Corrine Erskine, *Church Historian*

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

Note: All positions are three-year terms, except for one-year terms as marked with an asterisk (), all ending in February of the year listed. Membership size or ranges, as specified in FCC's bylaws, are shown in parentheses. Positions marked *Vacant* must be filled to meet membership minimums; those marked *Open* are available but not required.*

*MODERATOR	Barbara Jones
*CLERK	Brian Clancy
*TREASURER	Dawn Troutman
*ASSISTANT TREASURER	<i>Vacant</i>
*HISTORIAN	Corrine Erskine
*AUDITOR	<i>Vacant (Parkers Accounting)</i>
*CHURCH SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT (Term: July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025)	<i>Vacant</i>

CHURCH COUNCIL

*CHAIR	Jonathan Scott (<i>may serve until Feb 2026</i>)
*VICE-CHAIR	Linda Jacobs (<i>may serve until Feb 2026</i>)
*MEMBERS-AT-LARGE	Corrine Erskine and Linda Oronte

<u>DIACONATE (<i>end of eligibility</i>)</u>	<u>(12)</u>	<u>BOARD OF GOVERNORS</u>	<u>(4-9)</u>
Robert Crockett (2030)	2027	Wayne Braley	2027
Linda Gerlach (2027)	2027	<i>Open</i>	2027
Robert Ross (2030)	2027	<i>Open</i>	2027
Dawn Troutman (2027)	2027	Wendell Smith	2026
Susan Pratt (2026)	2026	Benjamin Van Vliet	2026
Stacey Steele (2026)	2026	<i>Open</i>	2026
<i>Vacant</i>	2026	Walter Scott	2025
<i>Vacant</i>	2026	<i>Open</i>	2025
Robert Gerlach (2025)	2025	<i>Open</i>	2025
Philip Hammond (2025)	2025		
Deborah Scott (2028)	2025	<u>BOARD OF TRUSTEES</u>	<u>(3)</u>
<i>Vacant</i>	2025	Valerie Nevel	2027
<u>PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE</u>	<u>(4)</u>	Robert Gerlach	2026
*Council Chair (J. Scott)	2025	Jonathan Scott	2025
*Diaconate Chair (L. Gerlach)	2025		
*Bd of Govs Chair (W. Scott)	2025		
*Mem Finance (V. Nevel)	2025		

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE (4-6)

Linda Gerlach	2027
<i>Vacant</i>	2027
Nicole Mason	2026
<i>Vacant</i>	2026
<i>Open</i>	2025
<i>Open</i>	2025

FINANCE COMMITTEE (5)

<i>Vacant</i> (Member-at-Large)	2026
*Treasurer (D. Troutman)	2025
*Mem Bd of Govs (TBD)	2025
*Mem Stewardship (J. Scott)	2025
*Mem Trustees (V. Nevel)	2025

MEMORIAL GARDENS COMMITTEE (3)

Isaac Jacobs	2027
Brandon Mason	2026
Linda Jacobs	2025

MISSION AND SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE (6-8)

Lola Baldwin	2027
Wendell Smith	2027
Steve Teeter	2027
Linda Jacobs	2026
Barbara Laro	2026
Denise Moriearty	2026
Corrine Erskine	2025
Valerie Nevel	2025

MUSIC COMMITTEE (4-6)

Gail Wasson	2027
<i>Vacant</i>	2027
Brian Clancy	2026
<i>Vacant</i>	2026
<i>Open</i>	2025
<i>Open</i>	2025

NOMINATING COMMITTEE (3)

Barbara Jones	2027
Valerie Nevel	2026
<i>Vacant</i>	2025

PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE (5)

*Moderator (B. Jones)	2025
*Diaconate Chair (L. Gerlach)	2025
*Other Deacon (R. Gerlach)	2025
Susan Pratt (Member-at-Large)	2025
Mem Bd of Govs (W. Scott)	2025

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE (4-6)

<i>Vacant</i>	2027
<i>Vacant</i>	2027
Jonathan Scott	2026
<i>Open</i>	2026
Barbara Jones	2025
<i>Open</i>	2025

NHC-UCC DELEGATES (4)

* <i>Vacant</i>	2025
* <i>Vacant</i>	2025
* <i>Vacant</i>	2025
* <i>Vacant</i>	2025

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Jones, *Chair*
Valerie Nevel

Blest Be the Tie That Binds

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

We share each other's woes,
Each other's burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

When we are called to part
It gives us inward pain,
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.

– *John Fawcett (1739/40-1817)*