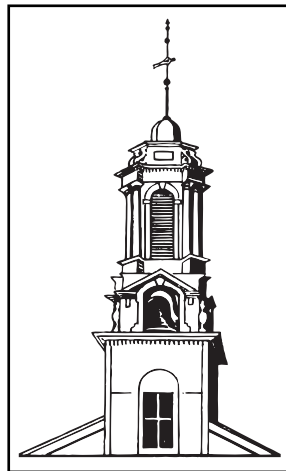


2024 ANNUAL REPORT



First Congregational Church
Lebanon, New Hampshire



Annual Meeting
Sunday, February 9, 2025

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ANNUAL MEETING 2025

Moderator: Barbara Jones

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Invocation
3. Reading of the Warrant
4. Reading of the Minutes of the 2024 Annual Meeting
5. Reports for 2024:
 - 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
9. New Business
 - A. Proposed Budget for 2025 (see pp. 15-16)
10. Closing Hymn: "Blest Be the Tie That Binds"
11. Benediction

WARRANT FOR 2025 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 9, 2025**, 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.

**If you do not have access to Zoom, please contact the church (603-448-4281/church@fcclb.org), and we will gladly accommodate you.*

Respectfully submitted,
Brian C. Clancy, Clerk
Lebanon, NH 03766
January 21, 2025

MINUTES OF 2024 ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, February 11, 2024

1. Moderator Barbara Jones **called the meeting to order** at 11:32 and confirmed that a quorum of at least 25 corporate members was in attendance. (There were 27 present in the Sanctuary; as many as 6 more attended on Zoom.)
2. Rev. Stephen R. Silver offered the **invocation**.
3. Reading of the **warrant** for the 2024 meeting: *Motion made by Linda Jacobs (seconded by Linda Gerlach) to dispense with reading the warrant; passed unanimously.*
4. Reading of the **minutes** from the 2023 meeting: *Motion made by Pete Mason (seconded by Ron Bailey) to dispense with reading the 2023 minutes; passed unanimously. Motion made by Bob Gerlach (seconded by Valerie Nevel) to accept the minutes as submitted; passed unanimously.*

5. Reports

Pastor (Rev. Steve Silver): Referring to his published message in the Annual Report, Rev. Silver invited questions from anyone in attendance. Wendell Smith asked him to summarize the “key points” of his message, and Steve emphasized our need to move forward and make decisions regarding our Bylaws review. He also reiterated a desire for us to consider pursuing a capital campaign, mentioning the upgrade of our audio-visual system as an obvious example for what such a campaign might fund. Repeating these points for the benefit of viewers on Zoom, Barb Jones added the importance of a functioning Pastor-Parish Relations Committee. (*Note: Barb often repeated comments throughout the meeting for this reason, to ensure that Zoom viewers could better follow the meeting’s discussion.*)

Church Council (Jon Scott): Referring to his summary in the Annual Report, Jon noted that it may seem as though Council spends much time discussing issues without making substantial progress. He explained, however, that our congregation is neither a dictatorship nor a democracy, and reaching a consensus from the broadest portion of our membership takes time. Our Bylaws review, for example, presents the challenge of how to structure our governance and volunteer positions to suit a smaller, different congregation, and there are several ways to accomplish that. Jon reminded everyone that Council meetings are open to all, inviting anyone to attend if they’re interested or have questions. He added support for upgrading the sound system, including an option for broadcasting downstairs, and enabling an online giving option by year’s end. Lastly, Jon encouraged everyone to consider increasing their stewardship commitment to FCC, financially and otherwise.

Bob Gerlach asked what the rationale would be for including the downstairs in the sound system; Jon replied that it is helpful to be able to share what’s happening in the Sanctuary with the children and adults downstairs in church school. Wendell Smith thanked Jon for his service as Council Chair and added an appeal for improvements to the front walkway and steps; similarly, Denise Moriearty noted the need for better lighting on the ramp side of the building. Jon acknowledged these valid concerns as priorities for Council and the Board of Governors to address this year.

Corrine Erskine asked to comment on the proposal to hire a new Christian Education coordinator, but several pointed out that such comments were better suited to the discussion of new business and the 2024 budget.

Clerk (Brian Clancy): Report published in Annual Report.

Auditor (Valerie Nevel, for Parkers Accounting): Referring to the published report, Valerie reminded everyone that we have not completed a full audit, although we plan to have Parkers Accounting do one this year. The usual informal review found no irregularities or concerns.

Treasurer (Dawn Troutman): Referring to the published 2023-24 budget report, Dawn thanked Valerie Nevel, Jon Scott, Steve Silver, and Brian Clancy, along with all committee chairs, for their help in creating and reviewing the report.

Board of Governors (*Walter Scott unable to attend*): Report published in Annual Report.

Board of Trustees (Valerie Nevel): Referring to her published report, Valerie noted that the numbers can't tell a story in themselves. Our endowment investments performed quite well in 2023, increasing in total value despite the fact that we had to withdraw from endowment principal for the first time in her memory. Referring to the published list of bequests, she expressed gratitude on behalf of the current congregation for these past generations of members who generously provided financial security for our church.

Bob Gerlach asked whether all bequests and other deferred gifts are reserved for endowment, rather than made available for current use. Valerie explained that we actually have a total of seven accounts that receive these funds, from which transfers are made for current use. We don't have a "traditional endowment" in some respects. Jon Scott added that FCC needs to formulate an explicit policy for endowment investment and management, rather than simply following prior practices. It's most important to respect the wishes of donors when those are clear, but beyond that we should have a transparent, consistent policy for investing bequests and similar funds. Jon wants to foster a clearer understanding among the congregation of our endowment's composition and investment.

Diaconate (Linda Gerlach): Referring to her published report, Linda added her great thanks to Chris Chase, as he steps off the Diaconate after three years of service. She also expressed joy that Bob Ross and Robert Crockett would be joining as new Deacons. Lastly, Linda apologized for omitting mention in her report of Dominic Watson's baptism and 10th birthday celebration in October.

Christian Education Committee (Rev. Steve Silver): Referring to the pending proposal to hire a new coordinator for Christian Education, Steve affirmed this as an important area of programming that needs investment. Rachel Silver, who has been informally leading the children's group on Sunday mornings, voiced her own support and added that she and others were interested in working on the committee in order to strengthen this area.

Valerie Nevel asked Rachel for more description of what the children typically do for their Sunday programs. Rachel explained that kids of a range of ages gather in a circle to discuss timely themes (the arrival of Lent, for example) and carry on traditions that Nan Parsons

began, such as sharing prayers and devotional time around the small fountain. Older kids may do the weekly lectionary reading or discuss a book, and ideas generally come from the children themselves. Rachel identified possibilities for growth, such as resuming use of the Godly Play curriculum, reintegrating some sort of Zoom component, and ensuring more consistency of volunteers and staff. She expressed how much she's enjoyed working with the children on a regular basis, and she's grateful for this opportunity. Several voiced their great thanks to Rachel, commending her efforts in this transitional period, and Rachel added her own thanks to Ashley Oronte for her vital contributions to the program.

Corrine Erskine stated that the relatively low attendance of children on Sunday mornings—which she estimated at about 3-4 on average—doesn't seem to justify the potential investment of \$15,000 in the new coordinator position. (Valerie clarified that the amount would be inclusive of FICA and other administrative costs.) Several observed that we don't currently have any volunteers in the congregation who can offer both the necessary experience and schedule consistency to lead the children's program. Linda Gerlach asserted that regardless of the number of children who are currently involved, funding Christian Education is an investment in our future, since it can attract new families to our congregation. Children's programming is something that families look for in a church, and if we can't offer it, they'll look elsewhere.

Memorial Gardens Committee (*Brandon Mason unable to attend*): Adding to the published report, Linda Jacobs noted that she and Ike and Nicole and Brandon Mason had cleaned up and planted the front gardens by the church sign and memorial stone (which also was cleaned this year). Wendell Smith asked what has been done to publicize and promote the memorial garden in front, and Pete Mason noted that in past years we included a notice in the bulletin or newsletter; he recommended we resume that. Jon Scott cited this as one of several areas we could promote more broadly in the congregation and community.

Mission and Social Action Committee (Valerie Nevel): Referring to the published report, Valerie noted the invitation of several non-profit organizations to speak at worship during 2023. The committee has been meeting on the fourth Monday each month. This year we hope to resume regular shopping cart collections, starting with the UV Humane Society as beneficiary. The biggest project for this year would be a symposium for local non-profits to consider both the challenges and solutions for homelessness and affordable housing.

Music Committee (Brian Clancy): Report published in Annual Report.

Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (Barbara Jones): Referring to her published report, Barb noted that this committee is moving forward, and she invited everyone to submit questions or comments to her or any other member of the committee.

Stewardship Committee (Jon Scott): Report published in Annual Report. Bob Gerlach asked what progress we'd made so far toward this year's stewardship goal of \$100,000; Jon roughly estimated that we'd reached about an eighth of that amount. He explained that the 2023 total came from a mix of small gifts and a few large gifts, adding his hope that we can draw more people into our congregation this year. Expressing confidence that we could meet the goal, Jon also promoted the prospect of online giving later this year.

Women of the Church: Report published in Annual Report. Linda Jacobs noted that the WoC's fund is used for kitchen-related purchases. (None have been made since 2021.)

Church Historian (Corrine Erskine): Report published in Annual Report document. Barb Jones said she was impressed by what we've done in the past year; Linda Jacobs commended Corrine on her work.

Motion made by Linda Jacobs (seconded by Bob Gerlach) to accept the foregoing reports of all the church's boards and committees. No further discussion; motion passed unanimously.

6. Nominating Committee Report (Barbara Jones)

Barb Jones referred to the proposed committee roster published in the Annual Report. She added that Wayne Braley had agreed to serve on the Board of Governors. Barb then asked for additional nominations from the floor, and Rachel Silver responded by volunteering to join the Christian Education Committee.

7. Election of Officers and Committees

Motion made by Bob Gerlach (seconded by Linda Gerlach) to elect the full slate of nominations to the church's leadership positions and committees, with all new terms starting in February 2024. No further discussion; motion passed unanimously.

8. Old Business

Improvements to Sound System. Revisiting the earlier mention of the need to improve the Sanctuary's sound system, Phil Hammond expressed his strong support for having portable microphones available, to facilitate prayer requests and other comments from anywhere in the Sanctuary. He framed this as not only generally useful but also compassionate to those with hearing difficulties. Linda Jacobs added that we should also provide individual hearing-assist devices, amid a general discussion of hearing challenges and solutions.

Review of Bylaws and Committee Structure. On behalf of the review subcommittee, Jon Scott invited new and creative ideas from the entire congregation for the Bylaws review.

9. New Business

Proposed Budget for 2024. Referring to the report of actual income and expenses in 2023, Treasurer Dawn Troutman clarified that while we exceeded our \$100,000 stewardship goal (and thus our overall income projection), that was largely because of a single year-end gift of \$35,000. She also pointed out that we are projecting a net shortfall of almost \$38,000 in the proposed 2024 budget, due in part to staff compensation, rising operational costs, and some anticipated capital expenses. Dawn stressed that we've been prudent and responsible about reducing spending where possible, and we're not obligated to spend the entire amount budgeted—it's simply a conservative, inclusive estimate of what we *could* spend. (In 2023, we spent almost \$44,000 less than the initial projection.) Jon Scott added that FCC's budget, as proposed at the meeting, is more a planning tool than a rigid, inflexible fiscal commitment—it's our best, prudent estimate of the funds we'll need this year. There may also be unforeseen expenses, which the Finance Committee and Council would vet in advance.

Valerie Nevel acknowledged the budget imbalance, cautioning that we cannot rely on an individual donor to cover a deficit each year. The main challenge, she explained, is not only that we have to draw from endowment but also that doing so reduces the amount that can generate income; it's not sustainable long-term. Phil Hammond, citing his long experience working with educational budgets, recognized FCC's particular circumstances but asserted that such a large deficit would never be approved in most other contexts. Bob Gerlach asked whether the 2023 surplus would roll into 2024; Valerie confirmed that we are already doing that. Bob also asked whether capital expenditures might be postponed this year, as they were in 2023; Rev. Silver pointed out that we made some capital improvements at the Parsonage. Wendell Smith suggested that we might expect some correlation between our stewardship goal and our membership. (That connection is not particularly strong, however, as annual individual contributions vary widely.) He further recommended that we be more explicit about the annually recurring contingency that we may need to cover our budget deficit by drawing more from endowment. Acknowledging that FCC's financial circumstances and operations can be confusing, Jon stated his desire this year to clarify and demystify money matters, increasing transparency and awareness among the congregation. He further stated plainly that we never spend money that we don't actually have in hand.

Motion made by Wendell Smith (seconded by Bob Gerlach) to approve FCC's proposed budget for 2024. No further discussion; motion passed unanimously, but with three abstentions.

Jon concluded the discussion by pledging consistent, open communication regarding the Christian Ed position, with Council and, when necessary, the congregation as a whole.

Lastly, Bob Ross commended Rev. Silver's facility in hearing and repeating prayer requests during worship, which Bob could appreciate from his own experience in doing that.

10. Brian Clancy led everyone in singing the **closing hymn**, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds."
11. Rev. Silver thanked everyone for their time and attention to church business, then offered the **benediction**.
12. Meeting **adjourned** at 12:52.

Respectfully submitted,
Brian C. Clancy, Clerk

PASTOR'S REPORT

³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says, "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

—1 Corinthians 12:3-7

If you were in church on January 19, 2025, what follows may seem familiar. That's okay; it bears repeating.

The church of Corinth arose in a city that had been reestablished by the Romans after it had been destroyed by them. So Corinth, though possessed of an ancient heritage, was a new boom town, filled with people looking to make a fresh start. There were the rich, the poor, Greeks, Italians, and most likely some Judeans and others from the wider Mediterranean world. But while they came from all over, they were all Corinthians. More than citizens of a Roman city, the Apostle Paul wanted them to embrace their identities as citizens of the Kingdom of God. Paul wanted the Corinthians to see themselves as one community, and he wanted them to work together. As we see in verses 4-6, Paul believed there were many gifts, but one God.

Our church is blessed with a variety of gifts for which we should all be grateful. While we may bemoan our lack of knowledge or skill in a particular area, overall we have a lot of bright, talented, faithful people, and for that we are fortunate.

One recurring problem people face in life is what should be done when something ought to be replaced but seems to work just well enough to get by. We all face this conundrum in our personal lives. When looking at one's car, the answer might be to make do. The same with an old shirt or suit. But what about bylaws?

We can complain about "hide-bound rules" or "the dead hand of the law," but First Congregational Church is a legal entity which, according to the law, needs a set of agreed-upon rules, a set of bylaws, to operate. Now, that doesn't mean that every issue or potential solution needs to be spelled out, or that every possible endeavor needs a standing committee. But legally, we do need some people from amongst our members who will be fiduciaries to oversee our assets. Membership is thus important, not only from a theological or covenantal perspective but from a legal one, too.

It pains me to admit this, but we have continued to let our bylaws review languish. Now, if the congregation is comfortable letting this current situation continue, so be it. But are we really doing ourselves any favors? The answer, I believe, is no.

So, I would like for us to tackle this issue now and not wait for it to become critical. The time is now. Why?

Council and the Diaconate have been discussing my proposed sabbatical, which is to take place later this year. One question that the congregation will need to address is pastoral coverage.

Who will lead worship? Would you be willing to preach? Who will handle communion? These questions need to be answered sooner rather than later.

Another deferred task is improving our sound and streaming systems. Simply talking about the future, or complaining about it, is not sufficient. We need to take steps to realize our vision for tomorrow *now*. We may not be ready to address all the big questions before us, but we can start with the sound system now.

What follows may seem like old verbiage, but it is as true today as it was in the past: you, the people of First Congregational Church of Lebanon, continue to show your dedication to the success of our congregation. Your efforts make a tremendous difference to our ministry, to our worship, and to both our church and wider community. One recent development is the resumption of our Community Dinner program, something that is a welcome service to residents of the Upper Valley.

As ever, 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 continues to bring us superb music on Sunday mornings, while leading our small but talented choir with flair.

Thanks, too, to volunteer Rachel Silver, who has continued to run the church school in the absence of a permanent director. Rachel has done a great job, maintaining a welcoming atmosphere for our youth. But we need to look to a lasting solution. Relying on a pastor's spouse is, quite simply, unsustainable. If we believe children are important members of our community, and we believe they are the future of the church, we need to invest in them now. So, we have work to do. But we have gifts to deploy. Trusting in God's guidance, let's move together into the future.

Yours faithfully,
Steve

CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT

Please Note: The Clerk adapted the following from the previous year's report.

Your Church Council met monthly throughout most of 2024, 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
- 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
- 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
- Supporting our mission and ministry, including the care of members in our extended church family
- 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 2024 two new covenant members joined the church, one former member rejoined by transfer, one member transferred, and one member was removed. In addition, one member died, and we learned of the death of another member in 2021. With these changes, we begin 2025 with 99 covenant members.

New Members Received (2):

Miriam Maguire, joined 2/4/24.

Robert Ross, joined 2/4/24.

Members Who Rejoined by Transfer (1):

Susan Weeks, transferred membership from Church of Christ at Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH), per phone call and e-mail, 3/22/24.

Members Who Died (2):

Judy R. Macnab, d. 12/4/21.

Gordon F. Sargent, d. 3/14/24.

Members Who Transferred or Withdrew (1):

James R. Hughes, transferred membership to First Congregational Church, Burlington, VT, per email 11/7/24.

Members Removed for Inactivity (1):

Arthur French, removed due to inactivity and lapsed contact information, 8/21/24.

Baptisms and Weddings

(None)

Memorial Services

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

Members of the Church:

Barbara L. Sargent, d. 12/25/23, memorial service 1/4/24 at FCC; committal service 1/4/24 at Glenwood Cemetery, Lebanon, NH.

Gordon F. Sargent, d. 3/14/24, memorial service 3/27/24 at FCC; committal service 3/27/24 at Glenwood Cemetery, Lebanon, NH.

Friends of the Church:

Albert C. Jones, d. 5/13/24, memorial service 5/31/24 at FCC.

Shauna J. Pearse, d. 6/23/24, memorial service 6/29/24 at FCC.

Daniel P. Broberg, d. 7/31/24, graveside burial service 8/23/24 at 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 2024. 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:

- Various small maintenance tasks
- Larger projects are initiated—contractors lined up

Unfinished Projects for 2025:

- Replacement decking and refurbished railings for the church’s front steps
- Improved audio-visual equipment for the sanctuary
- Repair of ceiling in rear of sanctuary balcony
- Improved lighting in Church School area downstairs

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 2025. Thank you also to Brian Clancy for all his help with minor projects throughout the year. Brian sees the church every day, and his willingness to investigate has proved invaluable in keeping the building in top shape and minimizing damage when things go sour (such as leaking pipes in the boiler room).

Respectfully submitted,

Walter Scott, *Chair and Secretary*

Wayne Braley

Wendell Smith

Benjamin Van Vliet

DIACONATE REPORT

In 2024 the FCC Diaconate continued to support the needs of the congregation, both spiritually and otherwise. We continue to send cards to members who are ill, shut in, or suffering a loss. We welcomed a new deacon, Bob Ross, who has made valuable contributions. With only eight deacons, we are small in number but strive to do our best.

A great deal of time is spent by the Deacon of the Month in finding both ushers and Zoom greeters. Finding ushers is not usually a problem, but there is a lack of members willing to be Zoom greeters. We are considering offering a training on Zoom to members who might be interested.

The sign-up to host coffee hour is now on a white board in the Parish Hall. However, there is still a need for more members to agree to host coffee hour. We are waiting for placement of a welcome board in the Narthex, with pictures of all the deacons so that congregation members will know who we are.

In September Community Dinners resumed. This was spearheaded by Dawn Troutman, a member of the Diaconate. Other members of the Diaconate assisted in preparing and serving the meal and helping to clean up. Dinners were also offered in October and November, and they will resume in January 2025.

After the congregation's Annual Meeting in February, when hopefully we will welcome new deacons, we hope to have a training session for all deacons, new and old.

In 2025 we will continue to support all members of the FCC congregation and to encourage a feeling of togetherness. 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*

Phil Hammond

Susan Pratt

Bob Ross

Deb Scott

Dawn Troutman

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

In the spring of 2024, the children of First Congregational Church of Lebanon engaged in age-appropriate learning around the lectionary readings. The tweens and teens led each other in reading and discussion, and the younger children brought the concepts to life through art, skits, singing, and conversation. Ashley Oronte and I always begin the children's time together with a moment for offering prayers, and then we vary the learning experience from week to week.

In June, Children's Sunday was well attended, with children making music, doing the readings, and receiving Bibles and other books for their family. In the fall, we had a lively Kickoff Sunday and began our yearlong trek following Paul's journeys and outreach to churches. Each child made a passport to track their adventure learning about Paul's work through storytelling, maps, photography, letter writing, singing (thanks, Erin Smith!), craft projects, and games.

The Christmas Eve pageant had excellent participation this year, with fifteen children in the Nativity play and others watching with their families. There was wonderful multigenerational participation, including many members of the Mason family, and some new visitors chose to don a costume upon arrival and help bring to life the story of the birth of Jesus. The children put their hearts into it, creating a terrific performance and forming special memories that will be with many of them for a lifetime.

Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Silver, *Chair*

Linda Gerlach

Nicole Mason

MEMORIAL GARDENS COMMITTEE REPORT

Please Note: The Clerk created this report for 2024 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.

Prior to 2024, the memorial stone was engraved with the names and birth/death years of the following deceased members of our congregation: Leif and Beryl Thorsrud, Richard and Helen Wallace, Henry “Hank” Watson Jr., Robert and Carolin Bassett, Gordon and Laura Place, Ellis and Elizabeth Howard, Willmott “Bin” Lewis Jr., 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.)

In April 2024 the family of Barbara and Gordon Sargent requested that their names be added to the stone in their memory, although neither had ashes interred in the garden. Considering the Sargents’ decades of devoted involvement and service to the church, the committee, pastor, and others consulted were unanimous in granting the request.

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 2024 the Mission and Social Action Committee (MSA) met monthly with a goal of helping those in need. Community dinners, which help achieve this goal, resumed at the church in September 2024, spearheaded by Dawn Troutman. Members of MSA and the wider congregation are contributing to the effort as much as possible.

With rising inflation and the end of expanded federal funding, there has been a significant increase in the number of individuals needing food assistance. As a result, MSA decided to focus the monthly non-perishable food-collection cart on LISTEN Community Services and the Upper Valley Haven. Both organizations provide meals and a food pantry for those in need. In February 2024 the annual Souper Bowl collected 323 cans, which was divided as always among LISTEN, the Haven, and Headrest. The Church Administrator was instrumental in delivering many of the donations to these non-profits.

Through the Open Door Ministry, with the support of staff, FCC has continued to give out food and gas cards to those in need. The demand continues to far exceed Open Door Ministry collections. Members of the congregation are encouraged to continue to support the Open Door Ministry with donations on communion Sundays or any other time.

On October 13 many church members participated in the CROP Walk to raise awareness and funds to combat hunger. Members of MSA provided refreshments for the walkers.

Homelessness continues to be a serious problem in the Upper Valley. According to one study, the area is still short approximately 10,000 housing units for its residents. With federal funding for housing declining, the problem is worsening. Both Steve Silver and Valerie Nevel periodically attended monthly meetings of "Housing First," a group of local employers, city employees, and community members interested in solving the homelessness problem. Members of Housing First were involved in Lebanon's accomplishment of opening a seasonal shelter during the winter of 2024. Steve also attended the December vigil remembering those who passed away due to homelessness in the previous year, a total of 19 in 2024.

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 2024. Its charge, as prescribed by our church's bylaws, is either vaguely defined or redundant of staff responsibilities. Yet our music ministry remains one of FCC's great strengths.

The congregation owes this musical vitality largely to the efforts of Organist and Choir Director Ernie Drown. Ernie is pleased to share his considerable keyboard talents, musical knowledge, and distinct sense of humor with our congregation, and he brings high musical standards to our worship service each week. He has also cultivated a strong, supportive community among just a few faithful choir members, who sing 2-3 pieces on a typical Sunday morning—either as an ensemble or as individual voices. Ernie integrates superb chamber music into worship as well, in collaboration with guest musicians.

Beyond Sunday mornings, the Music at the Meetinghouse series brings a rich variety of music to our community, drawing large audiences into our lovely, acoustically renowned Sanctuary throughout the year. The Anonymous Coffeehouse is now thriving in its fifth season, and Classicopia again offered an abundance of excellent performances throughout 2024. The Bel Canto Chamber Singers rehearse here weekly for their spring and winter concerts, and the Upper Valley Music Center presents recitals and concerts here year-round, from its Sing & Play Festival in the spring to the popular Messiah Sing during Advent. UVMC also uses our building during the week for its Suzuki program, its children's and community choruses, and a number of individual lessons.

Summer brought the third annual Oak Hill Music Festival and another week of Classicopia's delightful camp for young musicians. Ernie's Cameo Baroque ensemble presented several benefit concerts throughout the year. Numerous other concerts filled out a schedule that regularly opens our building to the public.

Music is at the heart of our congregation's worship life, and FCC is at the heart of our wider community's musical life. Many thanks for your warm, genuine support of music in all of these contexts.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Clancy, *Chair*

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

Gail Wasson

PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

Please Note: The Committee did not meet in 2024 and did not submit a formal report. The following is a general description excerpted and reprinted from the 2023 report.

The Pastor-Parish Relations Committee, according to our church's 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.

The committee members are listed below. 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

Please Note: The Clerk adapted the following from the previous year's report.

Our church continues to be blessed by a loving and generous congregation and by a loving and generous God. In 2024, 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 15 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.

Respectfully submitted,

Jon Scott, *Chair*
Barbara Jones

WOMEN OF THE CHURCH REPORT

The Women of the Church did not submit a formal report for 2024.

In July 2024, to avoid being charged a dormancy fee on its Mascoma Bank checking account, the group arranged to transfer \$1.00 automatically each month to FCC's Escrow Account (x0869) at Mascoma. No other transactions were recorded for the year.

Balance on January 1, 2024	\$ 3,835.28
Receipts	\$ 0.00
Expenditures	(\$ 6.00)
Balance on December 31, 2024	\$ 3,829.28

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Laro, *Treasurer*

CHURCH HISTORY

2024 started off very quietly. We didn't have a snowstorm until about the third week in January; then we had three snowstorms in a row! Coach Ron Bailey brought in boxes to fill with soup cans for the Souper Bowl. We hoped to beat last year's amazing numbers. We collected 323 cans. We didn't have help from the Meriden church this time, but we did very well on our own.

Two concerts this month: Upper Valley Music Center Community Chorus and Cantabile Women's Voices. And Ben Kulp and Chenyu Wang performed in February.

The first Sunday of February we welcomed two new members to the church, Robert Ross and Miriam Maguire. Welcome! Now, what committee can we sign you up for?!? Annual Meeting was held in the Sanctuary again this year, with remote participation still available on Zoom.

The book study group started on February 28. They studied the book *The Heart of it All*.

Concerts in March and April: Classicopia, UVMC's Faculty Showcase, and Revels North Spring Sing.

Holy Week began on March 24, Palm Sunday. We had a huge snowstorm the day before, but a few brave souls came out to wave palms and turn in their Lenten lunch bag offerings. The sunrise service on Easter Sunday hosted a few brave souls, but our regular service was well attended, with a great coffee hour following.

That week we also had to say goodbye to Gordon Sargent. He and his wife Barbara were the longest-tenured members of our congregation, and they both will be missed. We are all better people for having known them.

In the months of March and April we collected food for the Upper Valley Humane Society, for our furry friends who are often forgotten in hard times.

Five concerts in the month of May.

We contributed \$965 for Blanket Sunday. Church World Service uses these funds to provide light- or heavy-weight blankets to those in need around the world.

Three concerts in June, two from Classicopia and the annual Carolan Festival. Our service on the 9th featured Ernie Drown on harpsichord, Jason Smoller on oboe, and Leslie Stroud on flute. Beth Hilgartner played recorder for us on the last Sunday in June. What a treat!

For the month of June we collected non-perishable items for LISTEN Community Services.

In July the Oak Hill Music Festival took place. Bassoonist Leah Kohn and her violinist husband Niv Ashkenazi, along with other musicians, were here for a week in residence. They performed two concerts here and one in Norwich. Classicopia also gave another concert this month, and in August they offered another successful musical camp.

Rev. Gail Dimick was our guest the first Sunday in July, with Steve Silver on vacation. Pianist Sarah Hill and organist Nick Kleinschmidt filled in on three July Sundays when Ernie took his vacation. Oppressively hot weather plagued us for days, so it was a little hot in church!

In mid-August construction on the new fire station began. Church Street was closed between Colburn Park and our parking lot, so access to the lot was possible by Water and Valley Streets and up the hill on Church St. The demolition of the 70-year-old station in the first two weeks of September was a dramatic event, drawing daily onlookers and revealing a clear view of our entire church building for the first time in decades. (The project also brought some less appealing construction noise, dust, and pounding—so much pounding.) The construction and street closure are expected to last all of 2025.

August 25 was the last of three consecutive Sundays that Gail Dimick filled in for Steve, as he took the rest of his vacation. Attendance this summer had dwindled to a precious few, but Gail did a great job. Brian Clancy and Betsy Alexander performed Bach for us.

Kick-off Sunday was September 15. Steve blessed the backpacks, and his wife Rachel led the children downstairs for their first Sunday-school lesson. This year they planned to focus on the scriptures of Paul. There were refreshments on the front lawn, along with a bouncy house.

The Anonymous Coffeehouse began again this month. We also hosted Upper Valley Baroque and pianist Elizabeth Borowsky with her mother, the cellist Cecylia Barczyk.

Our community dinners on the fourth Sunday of the month resumed in September thanks in big part to Dawn Troutman. The Diaconate was responsible for this month. We had a small amount of people, but that will increase when word gets out about how delicious the food is.

The last Sunday of September we listened to Ernie playing the harpsichord and soprano Beth Hilgartner singing, along with a solo from Brian. That afternoon the famous FCC Outing Club went on a fall foliage trip to Farnum Hill, guided by Ron Bailey.

On October 6 pianist Jacqueline Schwab, known for playing on a number of Ken Burns' documentaries, held a concert entitled "Tunes for Troubled Times." Classicopia held a four-hand piano concert on October 12. On the 27th Cameo Baroque featured J. S. Bach. Four concerts in November, including a concert by former FCC organist Henry Danaher.

Residents and staff of Headrest hosted the Community Dinner in November. They did a great job, and hopefully they will offer to do some more.

We also did LISTEN's Holiday Baskets again this year. We managed to fill all the needs for the families we were given.

Cameo Baroque held another concert at the end of the month to benefit the Upper Valley Haven's 19 Days. During the Christmas season, we hosted many other concerts: Anonymous Coffeehouse, Upper Valley Voices, Classicopia, Bel Canto Chamber Singers, and the Upper Valley Music Center's annual Messiah Sing.

Because of the construction of the fire station, our water was switched to a temporary supply for a few weeks, and we were told not to drink the water. We also had to let it run to prevent freezing. Such a waste but necessary, I guess. We were provided with two water coolers for us to use. It made making coffee a joy!

Steve and Rachel hosted the annual Christmas party at their home on December 8. It was well attended and lots of fun.

An Ecumenical Blue Christmas service was held on December 20 at the Methodist Church. The same evening Steve attended a candlelight vigil and service in White River Junction for those homeless who lost their lives during the previous year.

We had two services on Christmas Eve, the family service at 5:00 and the communion and candlelight service at 8:00. About fifteen children participated in the pageant, along with some visitors who donned costumes at the last minute! And Jane Mason made a special appearance as one of the three kings. Thanks to Rachel for putting this together.

Hopefully I haven't forgotten anything too important. If so, forgive me!

Respectfully submitted,

Corrine Erskine, *Church Historian*

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

Note: All positions are three-year terms starting in February 2025, except for one-year terms as marked(*). All terms end in February of the year listed. Membership size or ranges, specified in FCC’s bylaws, are shown in parentheses. Positions marked *Vacant* are required for membership minimums; *Open* positions are available but not required. **Roster current as of 1/31/25.**

*MODERATOR	Barbara Jones
*CLERK	Brian Clancy
*TREASURER	Robert Gerlach
*ASSISTANT TREASURER	<i>Vacant</i>
*HISTORIAN	Corrine Erskine
*AUDITOR	<i>Vacant (Parkers Accounting)</i>
*CHURCH SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT (Term: July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026)	<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>	(12)	<u>BOARD OF GOVERNORS</u>	(4-9)
Robert Gerlach (2028 ¹)	2028	Walter Scott	2028
Philip Hammond (2028 ¹)	2028	<i>Open</i>	2028
Deborah Scott (2028)	2028	<i>Open</i>	2028
<i>Vacant</i>	2028	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
<i>Vacant</i>	2027	Benjamin Van Vliet	2026
Susan Pratt (2026)	2026	<i>Open</i>	2026
Stacey Steele (2026)	2026		
<i>Vacant</i>	2026	<u>BOARD OF TRUSTEES</u>	(3)
<i>Vacant</i>	2026	Jonathan Scott	2028

¹*Pending waiver of term-limit requirement.*

<u>PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE</u>	(4)
*Council Chair (J. Scott)	2026
*Diaconate Chair (L. Gerlach)	2026
*Bd of Govs Chair (W. Scott)	2026
*Mem Finance (V. Nevel)	2026

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE (4-6)

Alicia Casey	2028
Erin Smith	2028
Linda Gerlach	2027
Rachel Silver	2027
Nicole Mason	2026
Open	2026

FINANCE COMMITTEE (5)

Vacant (Member-at-Large)	2028
*Treasurer (R. Gerlach)	2026
*Mem Bd of Govs (W. Scott)	2026
*Mem Stewardship (J. Scott)	2026
*Mem Trustees (V. Nevel)	2026

MEMORIAL GARDENS COMMITTEE (3)

Linda Jacobs	2028
Isaac Jacobs	2027
Brandon Mason	2026

MISSION AND SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE (6-8)

Corrine Erskine	2028
Valerie Nevel	2028
Wendell Smith	2027
Steve Teeter	2027
Open	2027
Linda Jacobs	2026
Barbara Laro	2026
Open	2026

MUSIC COMMITTEE (4-6)

Vacant	2028
Vacant	2028
Gail Wasson	2027
Open	2027
Brian Clancy	2026
Open	2026

NOMINATING COMMITTEE (3)

Vacant	2028
Barbara Jones	2027
Valerie Nevel	2026

PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE (5)

Susan Pratt (Member-at-Large)	2027
Mem Bd of Govs (W. Scott)	2027
*Moderator (B. Jones)	2026
*Diaconate Chair (L. Gerlach)	2026
*Other Deacon (R. Gerlach)	2026

STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE (4-6)

Barbara Jones	2028
Vacant	2028
Vacant	2027
Open	2027
Jonathan Scott	2026
Open	2026

NHC-UCC DELEGATES (4)

*Vacant	2026
*Vacant	2026
*Vacant	2026
*Vacant	2026

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)*