



Grace Notes

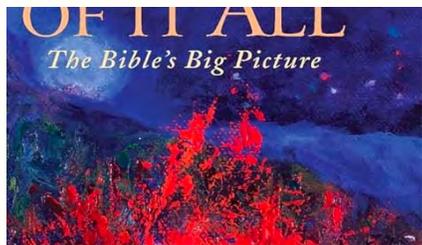
The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

I'm in New York for a United Church Funds meeting, and I just had the opportunity to take in an exhibition at the New York Public Library called "Treasures." As one would imagine, the NYPL has collected a lot of stuff over the years, much of it valuable. But the Gutenberg Bible, which was on display, was truly wonderful. So too were the cuneiform tablets from about 4,000 years ago. We humans like to record stuff, don't we?

Now, I'm focused on the fact that nothing I am now writing will be preserved for our descendants to read four millennia hence. Even if it somehow survives, the odds of anybody being able to read early-21st-century electronic media are exceedingly slim. If you doubt me, do you have any old floppy disks? Those media from twenty or thirty years ago may just as well be clay tablets written in a dead language. Inaccessibility is a problem that we have yet to truly overcome.

But then I think of that Bible. Gutenberg unwittingly played a huge role in the Reformation, and the German's invention fueled literacy in the West. But Holy Scripture was originally oral, and memorized by people, just like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. At some point, somebody decided to write down what was treasured, then it was printed, and, lo and behold, a copy found its way to New York City.

Manhattan has changed a lot over the years. The library is on the site of the old Croton Reservoir, and the structure is visible in the library. The past is accessible if we know what to look for. But we also need to know what questions to ask.

Regarding our faith, we often treasure old things. That's okay. I like tradition. But the question for us to ask is "why?" And that, of course, is the biggest question of all. Why do I exist? Why does God care about me? Why do I do what I do?

Continued on Page 6

Daily Lenten Reflections from the Rev. Steve Silver

Every day from Ash Wednesday (2/14) through Easter Sunday, receive a devotional reflection by email. Sign up by contacting silver@fcclb.org.

SUNDAY SERVICE

All Are Welcome to Worship at FCC
Sundays at 10:00 AM (In-Person/Zoom)

Coffee Hour Served!

New volunteers welcome to provide food and serve.
Please sign up on the list in the kitchen.

Zoom Greeters and Liturgists Needed!

Congregation members are essential to our worship services as ushers, Zoom greeters, and liturgists. All are invited to serve in these vital roles, and no prior experience is needed (though Zoom greeting requires some basic training).

If you're interested in these opportunities to serve, please contact the church office.



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING (OGHS) is a vital, nationwide offering for mission initiatives around the world. It funds healthcare, education, agriculture, emergency relief, and refugee assistance in over 130 countries. OGHS support is leveraged with various service partners to maximize its impact in these areas.

We gratefully accept OGHS donations until Easter, March 31. Please give as generously as you can, thanks! (Payable FCC, memo "OGHS")

IT'S Still SOUPER BOWL TIME!

It's the fourth quarter of this year's SOUPER BOWL, and we're looking for a strong game-winning drive!

Our total collection will be distributed among HEADREST, the UPPER VALLEY HAVEN, and LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES.

Donations accepted until February 18 in the collection boxes in the Parish Hall. Thanks!

LENT BEGINS FEBRUARY 14



*Ash Wednesday
Ecumenical Service*

February 14 at 7:00 pm
FCC Sanctuary

All are invited to gather for this community service to initiate the holy season of Lent.

Lenten Lunch Bag Offering

With the beginning of Lent on February 14, the CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY CORNER asks again for your generous participation in our annual Lenten Lunch Bag Offering for two great organizations:

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

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

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

You are asked to collect savings from the sacrifice of a regular treat during Lent. Some suggestions include skipping a daily coffee or latte; foregoing munchies when watching TV; or having dinner at home and contributing the cost of eating out. **Whatever your sacrifices, please plan to return your donations on**

PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 24.

HOLY WEEK IS MARCH 24-31

FEBRUARY 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28 10a Worship/CCC 3p Cantabile: Northern Exposure	29 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	30 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	31 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	1 3-6:30p UVMC/Children's Choir 7p NA Group	2 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 6:30p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat	3 9a-5p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat
4 10a Worship/CCC (Communion) 1p NCCT Rehearsal	5 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	6 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	7 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	8 3-6:30p UVMC/Children's Choir 7p NA Group	9 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	10 2-5p UVMC Recitals
11 10a Worship/CCC 11:30a Annual Meeting 2024 3p Concert: Kulp and Wang	12 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p Diaconate	13 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir 7p Council	14 ASH WEDNESDAY <i>Valentine's Day</i> 8a-3:30p WIC 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	15 3-6:30p UVMC/Children's Choir 7p NA Group	16 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 6p Piano Recital (Students of S. Slater)	17
18 10a Worship/CCC	19 <i>Presidents' Day</i> No UVMC (<i>Leb School Vacation Week</i>)	20 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	21 No UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	22 11a-6p WIC No UVMC 7p NA Group	23 No UVMC 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	24
25 10a Worship/CCC	26 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p MSA	27 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir 6p Contemplative Dance 7p Bylaws Review	28 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	29 3-6:30p UVMC/Children's Choir 7p NA Group	1 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 6:30p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat	2 9a-5p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat
3 10a Worship/CCC (Communion) 1-6p UVMC Wkshop/Concert	4 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	5 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	6 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	7 3-6:30p UVMC/Children's Choir 7p NA Group	8 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	9 10a-12p UVMC Chorus 4p UVMC Faculty Showcase

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

NEWS AND NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

Rev. Steve Silver opened Council's January meeting with his **pastor's report**, which included plans for a **book study** in March on *The Heart of It All* by Sam Wells; more details will be forthcoming. Steve noted a busy Christmas season, which for him included extensive time with the Sargent family due to Barbara's passing on Christmas Day. As he reminded everyone, Gordon will continue to need prayer and support in the days and weeks ahead. He added that Steve Teeter, too, needs support and encouragement (as does Barb) as he continues his rehab at a facility in Claremont.

Steve then introduced a discussion of whether to stay in the **Sanctuary for worship** or move to the Parish Hall, as we have done in some past winters. He reported the Diaconate had not reached a clear consensus in favor of one location over the other, but he clearly recommended we stay in the Sanctuary, as shifting to the Parish Hall complicates coffee hour and poses logistical challenges for Zoom streaming. He further noted that savings in heating oil are not as

significant as many have assumed, as confirmed by Church Admin Brian Clancy, citing usage data from Dead River Company. Brian clarified that while we certainly use more heating oil by worshiping in the Sanctuary, our 2021 insulation improvements have made that usage much more efficient. The space also gets a fair amount of use even when we're not worshiping there, and Sanctuary oil consumption actually represents a smaller proportion of our total usage than previously assumed.

Several observed that the recent rise in covid and other seasonal illnesses made the larger Sanctuary space a safer choice. Walter Scott asked about our capacity for air circulation, which is ensured by several air-purification units in the space. Linda Oronte shared perspective as a healthcare professional that covid and other diseases pose a current threat, and others expressed personal concern. Council unanimously supported the decision to continue worshiping in the Sanctuary, rather than move to the Parish Hall.

Linda Gerlach reported that, aside from discussing worship location, the

Diaconate had agreed to produce a simple, card-sized welcome brochure for the pews, based on the seasonal brochure just produced for Advent. It would contain only general information and photos, avoiding wordy descriptions and specific program details. The group also discussed resuming use of the Deacons' box in the Narthex, the original purpose of which no one present could confirm, although it may have been meant to collect prayer requests. Lastly, the Deacons continue to ask for photos of congregation members for a new digitally-based directory.

Rev. Silver then offered a brief report on the search for a new **Christian Education coordinator**, a position that is still evolving. After making only marginal progress on this during Advent, Steve has given this more attention in the new year and hopes to bring something to the Personnel Committee soon. Corrine Erskine expressed concern that the budgeted amount of \$15,000 seems an overly large sum to spend on a handful of children whose participation in the program is inconsistent. While he acknowledged that concern, Steve

2024 Annual Meeting—Sunday, February 11 In the Sanctuary Following Worship (Zoom Available)

The Annual Meeting of First Congregational Church of Lebanon, NH, will take place in the Sanctuary (w/remote participation available on Zoom) after worship on Sunday, February 11, 2024, for the purpose of:

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

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate	2/12 and 3/11, 7:00
Council	2/13 and 3/12, 7:00
MSA	2/26 and 3/25, 7:00
Bylaws Review	2/27, 7:00

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

and others pointed out that we need to invest in the program to grow it and credibly promote educational programming as a strength of our congregation. Such promotion is essential to our future growth, as providing programming for families will ideally attract more families. No current parents are able to take on leadership with formal lesson plans on a consistent, ongoing basis, which all agreed are vital to the children's program. The children themselves should also be invited to offer their input and ideas. Valerie Nevel asked if we might share resources with other churches, but Steve affirmed that we should try to build our own program before resorting to a joint arrangement with other churches, which can be complicated and unsatisfying. Jon Scott recommended that discussion about the prospective position continue individually with Steve after the meeting.

Jon then asked whether there were particular items that needed to be prepared for **Annual Meeting**. He mentioned, for example, that we should report to the congregation on the resumption and progress of our **bylaws review**, even though we don't yet have a revised set of bylaws to present. He noted that the review subcommittee has reconvened to update operation priorities, volunteer capacities, and governance needs for our congregation. There is general agreement that our current bylaws, created many years ago for a different congregation, no longer suit us.

Council then reviewed the **proposed budget for 2024**, in order to reach some preliminary approval prior to Annual Meeting. Jon suggested that

Volunteer Opportunities Available

Have you found an ideal service opportunity for yourself at FCC? Are you interested in a particular program or committee? Do you have creative ideas for aspects of congregational life or governance?

We want to know!

As we begin a new term for FCC's volunteer committees, Church Council and the Nominating Committee ask you to consider how you might best contribute your skills, interests, and energy to the church's operations, ministries, and mission.

If you're interested in learning more about a committee or available opportunities for service and ministry, please contact the church office or Barb Jones (603-863-9664 or basketmaker@icloud.com).

PREPARED TO SERVE

Saturday, February 24, 8:00 am–4:00 pm
Pembroke Academy, Pembroke, NH

Prepared to Serve is an annual training event for members of the NH Conference (UCC), offering workshops on topics ranging from lay leadership and church finances to service, mission, and Christian education. All are invited to participate in this enriching day of classes, exhibits, and worship with conference friends.

FCC will pay for any interested congregation members to attend!
Registration deadline is February 12. (Includes resources and meals.)
More details at nhcucc.regfox.com/prepared-to-serve-2024.



Stewardship 2024: Don't Bury Your Treasure

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

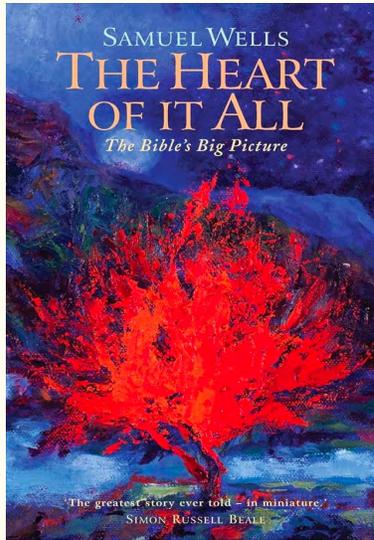
The **parable of the talents** tells of three workers entrusted with their employer's vast wealth in his absence. Two of them invest their shares, earning a high return. The third, worried about incurring a loss, buries his money instead. For that, the boss scolds and punishes him anyway. We've been given much by God and should use it wisely, to advance the Kingdom of God. So, don't bury that treasure—use it for God!

No matter what you pledge, faithful stewardship is vital to FCC's mission and ministry in 2024. Thanks for your support.

Offering envelopes for 2024 are available in the Parish Hall.

*Lenten Bible Study***THE HEART OF IT ALL****The Bible's Big Picture**

Wednesdays at 7:00 pm on Zoom
February 21 through March 27



**What does the Bible mean to us?
What does the Bible say to us?**

Join us for a six-week discussion of *The Heart of It All: The Bible's Big Picture* (2019). This short book was written by the Rev. Dr. Samuel Wells, a scholar, Anglican priest, and since 2012 vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in central London. "As a collection of 66 books spanning thousands of years," explains the publisher, "the Bible can be daunting in size and scope. In *The Heart of It All*, Rev. Wells simplifies the Bible's complexity and presents the entire sweep of its narrative in eighteen key themes." We'll discuss this provocative, engaging book on Zoom over six Wednesdays, but you needn't attend every week to participate.

Please let us know if you wish to join or have any questions. Our book group begins February 21 and continues every week through Lent.

Copies of the book will be provided at no charge, but you must RSVP so we can order you a copy. If you'd like to participate, please contact the church office or Rev. Steve Silver directly.

we likely needed to schedule time beyond the current meeting for a more complete conversation, partly because the Personnel Committee still needs to discuss compensation updates with the pastor and staff. He did note, though, that the draft budget is already at an advanced stage. Treasurer Dawn Troutman added that this was the second draft of the budget presented to Council, suggesting that members have had sufficient time to raise questions.

With a projected income goal of \$262,000 (including \$100,000 in stewardship), we ended at almost \$280,000. The stewardship total, however, was boosted at the very end of the year by an individual gift of \$35,000, and we also relied on increased endowment distributions throughout the year. That is, the surplus income does not necessarily indicate a positive or sustainable trend. It was noted that we'd brought in just over \$72,000 in stewardship contributions prior to the year-end gift. On the expense side, we spent about \$250,000 toward an expected total of \$295,000, because of prudent under-spending generally.

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

Evolutionary biology might offer some answers, but the truth is deeper. "Why does God love us?" has a simple answer: Because.

Remember these words from the First Letter of John (1 John 4:8): "God is love." And from that come all sorts of implications about how we treat one another, how we think about one another, how we live with one another. If God is love, whom may I hate? Another simple question with a straightforward answer: Nobody.

There are people I may not like, but should I hate them? If I'm serious about my faith, then the answer is no. I should not hate. This is something to think about in Lent—I hope you will join me in this reflection.

Yours faithfully, *Steve*

NEWS AND NOTES

Dawn explained that for 2024 we've once again set the stewardship goal at \$100,000, an important statement to congregation members that our costs are high and whatever they are able to give is needed. Expenses project at \$308,000, against a total income of \$269,000, for a planned shortfall of almost \$40,000. Dawn noted that the expense increase is due primarily to modest increases in compensation, the planned addition of the education coordinator, a few pending capital-expense items (e.g., front steps renovation), and generally rising operational costs.

Walter Scott, speaking for his own younger generation, pointed out that the lack of an online giving option means that he and contemporaries are giving less than they might give otherwise. Having raised this issue previously, Walter again insisted that we need to enable online giving to have any hope of future growth. (It was once again made clear, however, that no one would ever be *required* to give online; this is simply an option that we don't yet offer but should.)

Reviewing year-end **endowment** statements, Valerie Nevel reported that despite increased our spending, the total value of our investments

actually rose 11% in 2023. She immediately reminded everyone, though, that we had lost significant value in the prior year (2022), such that the 2023 gains only restored some of those previous losses. It also remains true that we are now drawing more from endowment resources than we ever have. Valerie cautioned that while we may be fine in the near term, we will eventually see more negative longer-term consequences.

Jon Scott suggested that Council at some future date take a closer, deeper look at our endowment funds, observing that while we may have a *practice* for investing our endowment funds, we do not have a formal *policy* for it. Rev. Silver stressed the need to have such a policy for endowment management, rather than leaving it up to case-by-case preferences. Valerie noted the policy would complement broader efforts to institutionalize knowledge at FCC.

Jon asked how Council wished to proceed on the budget, and members voted unanimously to approve the proposed budget for presentation at the Annual Meeting, where the entire congregation will vote on it. All expressed thanks to Dawn and others for their hard work on this.

DIACONATE

The Deacons in January heard Rev. Steve Silver's proposal for a six-week adult-education series on Sam Wells' *The Heart of It All*. The group also considered the location of winter worship, and the recommendation was to remain in the Sanctuary to facilitate remote participation.

The Deacons resumed a discussion of the Diaconate box in the narthex, considering that it be used for either pastoral care requests or Children's Community Corner participants. Suggestions will be solicited from the congregation. If it's used, Deacons will need to check the box weekly.

The Diaconate also reviewed a few examples of welcome brochures, such as the most recent one used at FCC. Consensus was to keep any design simple and general, with current announcements and activity notices appearing instead on the website and worship bulletin. Phil Hammond and Sue Pratt will work with Church Administrator Brian Clancy to draft a brochure. The group also discussed the timely production of an updated directory, with new information and photos encouraged from everyone.

Welcome
New Members!

Bob Ross
and
Miriam Maguire

February 4
2024



MOMENTS FOR CHILDREN YOUNG AND OLD. One Sunday featured two pairs of toddler brothers; the previous week offered older kids a lesson about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



Music
at the
Meetinghouse

Winter Into Spring

All in the Sanctuary. Masks welcome but optional.

The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, Feb. 9 and 23, Mar. 8 and 22, April 5, 19, and 26, all 7:30 pm

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

Benjamin Kulp, Cello, and Chenyu Wang, Piano—Sunday, February 11, at 3:00 pm

Upper Valley Music Center’s longtime cellist Ben Kulp and new faculty member Chenyu Wang offer an eclectic, thoughtful program ranging from Samuel Barber, Arvo Pärt, and Olivier Messiaen to Ed Sheeran and Charlie Chaplin. *Adults \$20, under-18 free; more at uvmusic.org/event/ben-kulp-cello-and-chenyu-wang-piano.*

Upper Valley Music Center Faculty Showcase—Saturday, March 9, at 4:00 pm

This popular annual program features the vocal and instrumental excellence of the faculty next door at UVMC, ranging from classical repertoire to traditional and folk genres and original compositions. *Free will donation; all proceeds benefit UVMC tuition assistance fund. More at uvmusic.org/event/faculty-showcase-concert.*

Revels North Spring Singers—Saturday, April 13 (time TBD)

Classicopia: Jewish Jazz (Clarinet and Piano)—Sunday, April 21, at 2:00 pm

Bel Canto Chamber Singers Spring Concert—Saturday, May 4, at 7:00 / Sunday, May 5, at 4:00

Harmony Night A Cappella Concert—Saturday, May 11, at 7:00 pm

UVMC Sing & Play Festival—Saturday, May 18 (various times/events throughout the day)

Classicopia: A Celebration of Women Composers—Sunday, May 19, at 2:00 pm

Brooks Hubbard: A Benefit for Good Neighbor Health Clinic—Sunday, May 19, at 7:00 pm



BARBARA L. SARGENT, 1932-2023. On January 4 family and friends gathered to celebrate the life of FCC’s longest-tenured member (since 1945), who passed away on Christmas Day. The congregation continues to hold Gordon in prayer.

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

Weekly Worship and Church School: Sundays, 10:00 am • Office Hours: Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9-12
10 South Park Street, P.O. Box 230, Lebanon, NH 03766 • 603-448-4281 • church@fccleb.org • www.fccleb.org
Rev. Stephen R. Silver: silver@fccleb.org • Music: music@fccleb.org • Newsletter Submissions: church@fccleb.org



First Congregational Church of Lebanon

10 South Park Street
PO Box 230
Lebanon, NH 03766

DATED MATERIAL
PLEASE DELIVER PROMPTLY

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

2024 ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, February 11, 11:30 am
Sanctuary (Zoom Available)

ASH WEDNESDAY IS FEBRUARY 14

Ecumenical Ash Wednesday Service, 7:00 pm
FCC Sanctuary



Music
at the
Meetinghouse

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First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

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

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

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