

Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

Liturgically, February is a dead zone.

No holidays, no seasons, no nothing.

Just a bunch of waiting for Lent to come. In March.

So, what are we to do? Well, we can twiddle our thumbs, or we can distract ourselves. Or we can carry on trying to follow the path of Jesus.

Well, that sounds reasonable, though not very decisive. I mean, what's with the word *trying*? That sounds kind of wishy-washy, hesitant. Or it is a word of humility?

I recall a person (I think it was Dr. Tim Johnson) saying he was a "practicing Christian." Why the qualification? He didn't think he had mastered his vocation—he was still trying to get it right. He was, in short, "practicing."

I find this approach refreshing, and it's one to which I can subscribe. I am not perfect (no surprise). But Jesus still loves me.

Why am I not perfect? Ah, that's a tough question.

None of us is perfect. None of us has ever been perfect. Why not? Because that's the way we were made. You might tell me that's the way we evolved; you may tell me that's the way God made us. You may claim it's a combination of the two. But whatever your belief, it's yours. I have mine.

So, I will take up this notion of being a practicing Christian. That's not an excuse to fail, but a recognition that I need to keep trying. I can always do better. *We* can always do better.

Yours faithfully,

Steve

SUNDAY SERVICE

Community Dinners Are Back!

Sunday, February 23, at 5:00 pm

Leader: TEAM CORRINE ERSKINE

Many thanks to Corrine for leading this month's dinner, with generous help from Barb Laro and Linda Jacobs! Volunteer signups will be available soon.

All are warmly invited to come, eat, and share fellowship, regardless of need or affiliation.

Consider Hosting a Dinner in 2025

We're excited to continue our revival of Community Dinners in the new year—but we **need leaders!** If you're interested in leading a dinner in 2025, menu resources are available, and FCC can reimburse your costs—please contact the church office.

Anyone can lend a hand with dinner planning, setup, serving, and cleanup—friends, coworkers, neighbors, ANYONE!

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 16 in the collection boxes in the Parish Hall. Thanks!

LENT BEGINS MARCH 5



Ash Wednesday
Ecumenical Service

March 5 at 7:00 pm

Location TBD

All are invited to gather with our community to initiate this holy season.

HOLY WEEK IS APRIL 13-20

2025 ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, February 9, 11:30 am

(In the Sanctuary; Zoom Available)

The Annual Meeting of First Congregational Church of Lebanon will take place in the Sanctuary (w/remote participation available on Zoom) after worship on Sunday, February 9, 2025, 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.

Potluck Lunch Theater: The Chosen

Sunday, March 2, at 11:30 am—Parish Hall

All are invited after church on March 2 to enjoy a delicious meal while we watch the first episode of this acclaimed series. A groundbreaking historical drama based on the life of Jesus as seen through the eyes of those who knew him, *The Chosen* is set against the backdrop of Roman oppression in first-century Palestine. *The episode lasts approximately one hour.*

Join us for a time of food, fellowship, and film!

All Are Welcome to Worship at FCC

Sundays at 10:00 AM (In-Person/Zoom)

Zoom Greeters and Liturgists Needed!

All are invited to serve in these essential roles, and no prior experience is needed (although Zoom greeting requires some basic training).

Would You Like to Serve Coffee Hour?

Coffee hour is a beloved time for fellowship after worship. Please consider hosting a Sunday or two!

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

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 2 5

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26 10a Worship/CCC 5p Community Dinner	27 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p MSA	28 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir 7p Cantabile Rehearsal	29 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	30 3-5:15p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	31 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	1 12:30p UVMC: Tommy Mesa Masterclass 7p Totally Worth It Live Show
2 10a Worship/CCC (Communion) 3p Cantabile: Night and Day	3 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	4 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir	5 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	6 3-5:15p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	7 6-9p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat	8 9a-5p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat
9 10a Worship/CCC 11:30a 2025 Annual Meeting	10 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p Diaconate	11 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir 7p Council	12 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	13 3-5:15p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	14 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	15 7:30p LOH on Location: Dom Flemons
16 10a Worship/CCC 1p Rehearsal: Rua, Drown, et al.	17 <i>Presidents' Day</i> <i>Lebanon School Vacation Week</i> No UVMC 6:30p Commtty Conversation	18 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir	19 No UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	20 11a-6p WIC No UVMC 7p NA Group	21 1p Rua, Drown, et al.	22
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2 10a Worship/CCC (Communion) 11:30a Potluck Lunch Theater	3 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	4 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir	5 ASH WEDNESDAY 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	6 3-5:15p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	7 6-9p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat	8 9a-5p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat

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

Jon Scott began Council's January meeting with a reading from his grandmother's devotional book. In the spirit of looking toward the new year, he read Psalm 121 and Isaiah 60:1-3. Jon then asked for committee reports, noting that the meeting's focus would be financial reports and a discussion of Rev. Steve Silver's 2025 sabbatical.

In his **pastor's report**, Steve noted a satisfying turnout for Christmas Eve services, with a large family presence at the early service and a good crowd for the 8:00 service of communion, which seemed to be appreciated. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to take a second **sabbatical** this year (his call agreement specifies one of up to four months every seven years. Steve has begun to consider ideas such as a program of study with theologian and scholar NT Wright, an extended visit to California's missions, and an intensive exploration of the Book of Romans. As for timing, he observed that the summer months pose the least disruption to the liturgical calendar.

Valerie Nevel noted various budget implications of providing funds for sabbatical expenses and interim pastoral coverage during Steve's absence, on top of his regular salary. Steve anticipates minimal travel costs and other expenses, some of which can be covered by currently budgeted lines for his professional expenses and continuing education. He will further refine his plans and create a budget proposal in coming weeks, for discussion with the Diaconate and

Personnel Committee. Although the pastoral call agreement already confers the sabbatical benefit, Council endorsed and approved Steve's plan to take one this year.

Turning to **Board of Governors** issues, Steve reported that Walter Scott had obtained a satisfactory estimate from a local firm to replace the Parsonage garage door. Steve further asked that we assess and repair a small corner section of the Sanctuary's balcony ceiling, which for many months has visibly shown significant deterioration.

While the **Mission and Social Action** Committee has not met since the fall, Steve reported that the December vigil commemorating those homeless who passed away in 2024 was a well attended, meaningful event. He also spoke favorably of meeting LISTEN's new executive director, Kristi Lenart-Rikert, describing her as an articulate community leader. Valerie, who serves on Listen's board, added her own enthusiasm and hope that the organization would grow stronger.

Dawn Troutman advocated for our **Community Dinners**, encouraging us to build on the momentum of the fall and inviting an open approach to new leaders in the coming year. Her realty office will lead the January dinner, and discussion considered other possibilities. Several suggested that regular users of our building, such as the Anonymous Coffeehouse and UVMC, might be invited to lead a dinner. Some concern was raised that such invitations should avoid any implication that use of the church was contingent on serving a

dinner. The dinners will be offered as an opportunity for service, not an obligation, and there is mutual value simply in extending the invitation. User organizations would certainly be free to decline, if unwilling or unable to lead a dinner.

Valerie noted that she's reviewing **Trustee** figures and compiling reports for our 2024 Annual Report. Barb Jones acknowledged her own need to fill the **Nominating** Committee's annual slate of volunteer roles, a task which Valerie pledged to assist.

Jon asked for any update on our ongoing search for leadership of the **Christian Education** program, and Steve reported that we should expect Rachel Silver's interim leadership to continue through this school year and likely beyond. He has discussed this challenge with several clergy colleagues, who regularly advise that reliance on congregational volunteers for this leadership is common, often even unavoidable. Several agreed that as long as our current arrangement continues, Rachel deserves to receive some compensation, although she hasn't to this point. The Personnel Committee plans to address that.

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

2025 Annual Mtg	2/9, 11:30
Diaconate	2/10 and 3/10, 7:00
Council	2/11 and 3/11, 7:00
MSA	2/24 and 3/24, 7:00

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

Speaking for **Personnel**, Valerie described the difficulty of reconciling a desire to increase staff compensation with the limitations of our budget, decreasing stewardship collections, and prudent investment management. The committee has essentially agreed on a roughly 3% raise across the board for 2025, trying at least to keep up with inflation. Consultation with the NH Conference office confirms that FCC has actually done well in maintaining pastoral compensation, keeping pace with inflation and some other indices better than most churches in the state.

DIACONATE

Bob Gerlach opened the January Diaconate meeting with a reading of poems on jubilation and solitude, both by Sara Teasdale. The group checked in on several congregational care cases, and all were reminded of the need for hosts for coffee hour and the monthly Community Dinner. There was also discussion of some potential candidates for new deacons in advance of Annual Meeting.

Rev. Steve Silver will be taking a sabbatical of up to four months later this year, and the Deacons considered plans for worship leadership in his absence. It's possible that lay members could lead some services, with guest clergy serving communion. The group also agreed on the need for a sustainable plan to run Church School serving both younger and older children, a plan that needs to engage parents as well.

**An Open Community Conversation
Responding to the Issues of Our Time**

Monday, February 17, at 6:30 pm—FCC Sanctuary

A group of local citizens invites the public to a wide-ranging conversation about how to respond to pressing current issues and support values of peace, justice, and inclusion. Diverse participants will address concerns such as immigrants' rights, healthcare and ethical science, racial and sexual equality and justice, reproductive rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, civil service integrity, climate and environment, and related areas. Rather than focus on a particular group or individual, **the meeting will serve primarily to connect and organize, with an eye toward future action.**

RSVP and questions to don@laurentidearts.com. Organizers include Don Collins, Lars Johansson, and Michael Thomas.

Stewardship 2025: Doing What Is Right and Just

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. —Proverbs 21:3

Scripture teaches us that God is more pleased by what we *do*, rather than by what we give up. Gifts of money are important, but if we seek to please God, we must do more. Perhaps we consider what righteousness and justice mean, both for our church and for us individually.

We're grateful to have received 24 pledges so far! No matter the amount of your pledge, faithful stewardship is vital to our mission and ministry. Thank you all for your commitment to FCC in 2025.

Box sets of offering envelopes for 2025 are in the Parish Hall.

PREPARED TO SERVE

Saturday, February 22, 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 Christian education, service, and mission. All are invited to participate in this enriching day of classes, exhibits, and worship with conference friends from across the state.

FCC will pay for any interested congregation members to attend!
Registration deadline is February 10. (Includes resources and meals.)

More details at www.nhcucc.org/events/pts-2025.



Our Open Door Ministry

Supporting Our Community, One Gift Card at a Time

Throughout the year our neighbors come to the church office seeking assistance. Whether it's a tank of gas, food for dinner, or payment toward rent or utility bills, our congregation offers help through the **OPEN DOOR MINISTRY**. Available to anyone in Lebanon and nearby towns, this ministry is one of the most vital services we extend to our community, especially amidst so many post-pandemic challenges.

We don't ask for proof of need; the "Open" Door is just that. We do ask recipients to wait at least four months between requests, only to ensure fairer distribution. FCC has responded to these needs for years, but we *never* have enough to assist everyone—**demand has increased considerably, and we now have helped over 700 people.**

Those who come to us aren't irresponsible or lazy, and most (about 70%) request help just once or twice, rather than becoming dependent on the program. Some are chronically unhoused; some have just been evicted or moved to the area. Some have just lost a job or started a new one. Some are driving more to care for an ill family member; some are referred to us by a counselor at LISTEN or WISE. **All are our neighbors.**



The Open Door is kept open by your contributions, including monthly communion offerings, supplemented by the Mission and Social Action Fund (from the Dole Trust). We distribute \$25 gift cards for gas and food (purchased from Jake's Market and Price Chopper, respectively), and we write checks in modest amounts for rent and utilities. **In every case, our ability to help those in need depends on you, our congregation. And because of you, we can serve a lot of people—your neighbors thank you!**



Community Dinner Leaders Welcome!

We're excited to continue our revival of Community Dinners in 2025—but **we need leaders!** If you are interested in leading a dinner, menu resources are available, FCC can reimburse costs, and you'll *always* have help. **Questions? Contact the church office!**

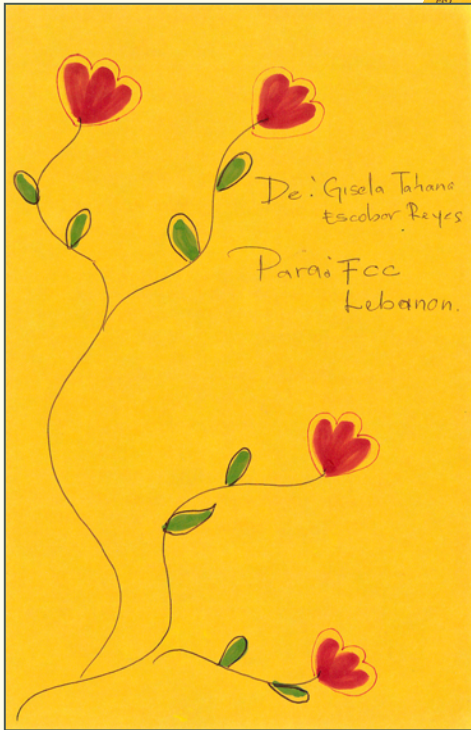
Anyone can lend a hand with dinner planning, setup, serving, and cleanup—friends, coworkers, neighbors, ANYONE!



BRINGING DINNER TO THE COMMUNITY. When January's dinner wound up with plenty of leftovers, the Callahan boys came up with a plan. Knowing that the warming shelter on Mechanic Street had opened for the winter, they suggested packing up soup and bread for a special delivery the next day.

OUR LOCAL AND GLOBAL MISSION

Greetings from EL SALVADOR!



Un cordial saludo... Espero que se encuentren bien. Mi nombre es Gisela Tatiana Escobar Reyes.

Quiero agradecer por toda su ayuda para mi y mi familia ha sido de parte de las que hemos estudiado voy bien. Este apoyo alivia la carga financiera que nos brindaba, sino que me brinda mas oportunidades de generosidad puedo persiguiendo mis metas gracias por su apoyo me es un feliz día de amor y salud.

E | | **P**

Un cordial saludo de mi parte. Per una carta no puedo expresar de la mejor manera mi gratitud, pero lo intentare...

Este año he podido tener muchas experiencias con mis amigos y he disfrutado mucho mi vida. Mi familia se encuentra feliz ya que tanto de graduarme y es muy emocionante y claro que para mi tambien, ya que es un paso mas para lograr mis sueños. Mi familia me profundamente agradecida al igual que yo. Todo lo que he logrado, experimentado, conocido, disfrutado y aprendido se hizo posible gracias a su apoyo, y quisiera demostrarles mi agradecido que me siento, pero por el momento decirles, gracias y MUUUCHAS gracias!!

My family is happy that I'm about to graduate, and it's very emotional for them and also for me, since it's a step toward attaining my dreams.

—Josue

Josue Torres.

FCC Lebanon

Estimados miembros de FCC Lebanon, pero que se encuentren bien. Me dirijo a ustedes con un profundo sentimiento de gratitud por la beca que recibí este año. Ha sido un año lectivo lleno de aprendizaje y crecimiento personal y cada día he podido avanzar en mis estudios y acercarme más a mis metas académicas, lo cual no hubiera sido posible sin el apoyo que ustedes me han brindado.

Mi familia está inmensamente feliz y agradecida por la ayuda que hemos recibido. Esta beca no solo ha aliviado una carga importante, sino que también nos ha dado la tranquilidad de saber que puedo concentrarme completamente en mis estudios y alcanzar mis sueños. Este respaldo ha sido clave en mi desarrollo académico y personal.

L | | **O**

Quiero expresar mi agradecimiento.

Estoy comprometido a seguir dando lo mejor de mí en cada paso de este camino académico, honrando a quienes me han depositado en mí.

Gracias nuevamente por su generosidad y por el apoyo positivo que me han dado.

Con gratitud y aprecio,
Rafael Alejandro Orellano Mejía.



We recently received these delightfully artistic thank-you letters from our **EPILOGOS** scholarship students in San José Villanueva—(clockwise from top left) Gisela, Josue, and Rafael. Our **Lenten Lunch Bag** offering may not seem like so much to us, but it goes a long way toward enriching the education and lives of these children. “I’m committed to giving my best in every step along this academic journey, honoring the trust you have placed in me,” writes Rafael—with the spirited determination that runs through all three letters. **Thanks for supporting the Lenten collection!**

MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



Music
at the
Meetinghouse

Winter into Spring

All in the Sanctuary. Masks welcome but optional.

Tommy Mesa, Cello: Masterclass and Performance—Saturday, February 1, at 12:30 pm

Upper Valley Music Center presents Cuban-American cellist Tommy Mesa, who joins faculty and students in a combination of education and performance. *Suggested \$25 donation, under-18 free; more at uvmusic.org.*

Cantabile Women's Voices: Night and Day—Sunday, February 2, at 3:00 pm

This superb ensemble offers an afternoon of choral settings celebrating the simple beauty found in the passing hours of an ordinary day. Music of Sergei Rachmaninoff, Irving Berlin, Jocelyn Hagen, Gwyneth Walker, Eric Whitacre, and more. *Adults \$15 suggested donation, online or at the door; more details at cantabilewomen.org.*

The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, Feb. 14 and 28, March 14 and 28 (etc.), all at 7:30 pm

Our comfy community venue for live music continues its fifth season as an informal “listening room” for the finest folk musicians in New England. *Free admission, donations welcome. For more, visit anoncoffee.org.*

LOH ON LOCATION: Dom Flemons—Saturday, February 15, at 7:30 pm

Reviving our pre-pandemic relationship across Colburn Park, Lebanon Opera House brings us Dom Flemons, the Grammy-winning cofounder of the Carolina Chocolate Drops. A versatile instrumentalist as well as a historian and scholar, “The American Songster” will share his influential interpretation of folk, blues, bluegrass, and old-time country music. *General admission \$27; tickets and more at lebanonoperahouse.org.*

Classicopia: Remembering Marcia Colligan—Friday, April 4, at 7:30 pm

Pianist Dan Weiser—joined by oboist Margaret Herlehy and bassoonist Janet Polk—presents this special program to celebrate the life and memory of his Classicopia co-founder Marcia Colligan (1931-2025).

Adults \$20, FCC members \$15, children free; more at classicopia.org.

The Apple Hill String Quartet—Saturday, April 5, at 4:00 pm

The Apple Hill Center for Chamber Music in Nelson, NH, is one of our state's musical treasures. Its renowned resident quartet offers eclectic programs, ranging from canonical works to new compositions and globally inspired pieces. *Adults \$25, under-18 free; more at uvmusic.org/event/apple-hill-string-quartet.*

Revels North Spring Sing—Sunday, April 6 (evening time TBD)

Franz Joseph Haydn: The Seven Last Words of Christ—Sunday, April 13, at 4:00 pm

Upper Valley Music Center Cello Fest—Saturday, April 26, at 2:00 pm

Young Traditions Vermont Touring Group—Sunday, April 27, at 2:00 pm

Bel Canto Chamber Singers Spring Concert—Saturday, May 3, at 7:30 / Sunday, May 4, at 4:00

UVMC Sing & Play Festival—Saturday-Sunday, May 17-18 (various times/events)

Classicopia: Alive and Kicking (Music by Living Composers)—Sunday, May 25, at 2:00 pm

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

2025 ANNUAL MEETING
Sunday, February 9, at 11:30 am
(Sanctuary, Zoom Available)

ASH WEDNESDAY IS MARCH 5
Ecumenical Service, 7:00 pm (Location TBD)

NHC-UCC PREPARED TO SERVE 2025 — Saturday, February 22, Pembroke, NH



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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