



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

With a new year, for many people, comes the making of resolutions. And many tired old jokes about how one may fail to follow through on what one has resolved to do. I could be cynical and suggest that an easy-to-keep resolution would be: I resolve to fail in keeping my resolutions. Now, be honest, we can all do this, right?

But is this kind of cynicism worthy of us? Is this cynicism part of being a faithful follower of Jesus? The answer to each of these questions is a clear “no.”

Cynicism doesn't sit well with the committed Christian, for we are a people of hope.

That's right: hope.

Set aside any concerns you may have about the economy, the climate, or any other big-picture questions. If you believe that God is ultimately in control of the universe, and that he came to us in Jesus, defeated death in the process, and has left the Holy Spirit with us, how can you worry?

Now, I'm not saying you should forget about inflation, or paying the rent, or getting the brakes on your car repaired. Paying attention and planning ahead make sense.

But to act from a place of fear or despair, rather than one of possibility, is not what we do.

So, I'll ask you to think about something:

What would you like to see at our church going forward? What are you willing to do to make those hopes and dreams a reality?

I'm not going to say we face a future of ease or light, and demographics are bleak. We're located in an older state, New Hampshire, with one of the two least-churched populations in the country. The other is Vermont.

So, is this corner of the world a heathen wasteland? Or is it instead an unchurched place where people need the word of God, a Gospel that is presented with love and hope? I vote for the latter. I hope you do, too.

Yours faithfully, *Steve*

SUNDAY SERVICE

Sunday Worship at FCC

***In-Person Service at 10:00 AM
Remote Viewing Available on Zoom***

Please join us for worship every Sunday at 10:00, either in our Sanctuary or on Zoom. The weekly bulletin and Zoom link are emailed early Sunday morning; we also record the weekly service for posting later on YouTube.

All worshipers are required to wear masks at all times and observe distancing in the pews; singing and unison prayer are permitted, with masks. There is still no coffee hour after worship, and we ask that interaction be kept to a minimum.
Join us as we gather for worship together!

Greeters and Liturgists Needed

All are invited to serve as greeters/ushers, liturgists, or some other role in worship—reading the prayers of invocation or dedication, sharing a stewardship message, or even leading a children's moment.

As we continue to offer services online, we also need a volunteer "ZOOM GREETER" each week.

None of these roles requires special experience or training! If you're interested in serving in this way, please contact the church office.

Spend Some Time in the Corner!

The **Children's Community Corner**, that is! We would like more of the adults in our congregation to engage with FCC's fantastic kids, whether on Sundays or another day of the week. Our purpose for such interaction is ongoing mentorship and guidance, not merely supervision.

Please think about offering your time—thanks!

If you're interested in spending time with our young people, please contact Nan Parsons at nlp3721@yahoo.com or 603-863-8354.

THE SOUPER BOWL IS BACK!

A longer season, two more playoff teams, and the latest championship game ever—all means that we have plenty of time to shatter our SOUPER BOWL record! FCC will again tackle local hunger with a collection of soup and other non-perishable food items, to be distributed among our neighbors at HEADREST, the UPPER VALLEY HAVEN, and LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES.

Donations will be collected in the boxes in the Parish Hall January 16 through February 13. You may also bring them directly to those three beneficiaries if you'd rather (but please let us know if you do). Thank you!

2022 ANNUAL MEETING

**Sunday, February 13, 11:15 am
(Following Worship on Zoom)**

The Annual Meeting of the First Congregational Church of Lebanon, NH, will be held online (in Zoom format) immediately after the worship service on Sunday, February 13, 2022, 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.

***Please note that content for the
2021 ANNUAL REPORT***

***must be submitted to the Church Administrator by
Friday, January 14, 2022***

***This will ensure timely publication of the report
prior to the Annual Meeting on February 13.***

COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

Barbara Teeter reported that the **Diaconate** discussed Christmas Eve services with Rev. Steve Silver. He and Nan Parsons have carefully arranged for a covid-safe pageant at the family service. The Deacons also agreed that the late communion service could be canceled this year, considering lower attendance and the reduced appeal of individually packaged elements amid our covid precautions. Steve and the Deacons further considered that it may be advisable to continue worshiping in the Sanctuary through the winter, to better allow for distancing.

Treasurer Terry Ellison reviewed a favorable year-end budget outlook, with no serious concerns. In particular, he noted that we will exceed our stewardship goal for the year. Considering our escrow accounts, Terry and the Finance Committee recognize the need to assess their purposes and adopt a more proactive plan for funding them. As it is, some of the funds in that account may be better invested elsewhere.

The **Board of Governors** reported nothing major. The group intends to finish the Parsonage insulation upgrade this year, at an estimated cost of around \$17,000. The work will compensate for that cost with energy savings in future years.

For **Stewardship** Jon Scott stressed the importance of securing pledge commitments from as many members of our congregation as possible. Our application for IRS certification of our 501(c)(3) status is moving forward, and we should have the

capacity for online giving at some point in the next year.

The **ad-hoc Bylaws review** group has begun a productive discussion of a current proposal for revising our committee structure. The process requires more input and careful thought, but we are moving toward a framework that all can support.

Nan Parsons reviewed a good month for the **Children's Community Corner**, which has had regular Sunday-morning Zoom meetings. The Godly Play curriculum has worked very well, helping the kids enter into Advent and approach the Christmas story in an effective way. Despite some hesitation and illness, Nan and several families successfully adapted the Godly Play nativity narrative for a covid-safe, in-person pageant at the 5:00 family service on Christmas Eve.

Brandon Mason added his heartfelt, enthusiastic praise for Nan's tireless efforts to connect the children of the church amid these challenging circumstances. He applauded her ability to engage and captivate kids while communicating lessons, and he marveled at her willingness to overcome covid limitations by personally delivering craft materials to individual houses. Brandon wants the wider congregation to be aware of Nan's excellent work.

In his **pastor's report** Rev. Steve Silver reiterated his apology for continuing difficulties with our worship livestream on Zoom. While we've worked hard to improve this, he knows that viewers have been dissatisfied with audio quality in

particular. Council members then expressed clear, general support for decisive action to correct these persistent problems. After some discussion about whether to convene a working group for this purpose, Jon Scott agreed to lead the effort himself, given his own expertise and authoritative knowledge about sound technology.

Jon requested that Council reserve time at its January meeting to revisit our policies around worshiping in person and opening our building to outside events and meetings. He wants us to be sure that we remain comfortable with those policies as covid risks have persisted—and even risen sharply—this winter.

Steve expressed his gratitude for everyone's work to study and revise our Bylaws with careful thought toward our congregation's future. While he does have his own views about the Bylaws, he hasn't wanted to impose those on the process.

Steve added a final note to Council that he would be participating on December 21 at the Upper Valley Haven in the annual vigil for our homeless population, particularly all those who have died in such circumstances in the past year.

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate 1/10 and 2/14, 7:00

Council 1/11 and 2/8, 7:00

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

Lebanon's RSVP Volunteer Center

Getting things done in Grafton and Sullivan Counties

RSVP is a Lebanon-based program, sponsored by the Grafton County Senior Citizens Council and AmeriCorps Seniors, which connects volunteers with older adults in need of basic assistance with daily life and responsibilities. Its free services include several volunteer-run programs:

Chore Corps—Helps people remain in their homes, safely and with dignity, by assisting them with simple repairs and household tasks, from fixing windows to grocery shopping.

Good Morning—Keeps older adults connected by arranging volunteers to make daily phone calls to check in, chat, and offer friendly support and reassurance.

Bone Builders—Offers no-impact weight training and exercise classes by trained volunteers, to improve physical health (bone density and fall prevention) and provide social opportunities.

Preparing for the Unexpected—Teaches participants how to prepare an emergency plan and supply kit.

If you'd like more information about RSVP and its programs, or if you're interested in volunteering or receiving support, please contact RSVP at 877-711-7787 or rsvp@gcsc.org, or visit www.gcsc.org/rsvp.

Opportunities to Support Tornado Relief Through the UCC

The devastating tornadoes that hit Kentucky and other states in December will require a massive recovery effort well into this year. The NH Conference of the UCC has suggested two ways to support this effort:

Give directly to the Indiana-Kentucky Conference through its Disaster Preparedness and Ministry Response Team, with an online debit- or credit-card donation at ikcucc.org/connect/donate.

Give through the NH Conference either by mailing a check (memo "Kentucky Tornado Recovery") to the NHC office, 140 Sheep Davis Road, Pembroke, NH 03275) or online at nhcucc.org/donate-now.

Thank you!

Stewardship 2022: Giving From the Heart

[Jesus] watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

As this story in **Mark 12:38-44** recounts, Jesus offers a warning about following the wrong motives in both faith and philanthropy. While the scribes and wealthy act in ostentatious self-promotion, the poor widow is comparatively more generous, giving what meager amount she can simply because it is the right thing to do. As we approach our own stewardship, we're invited to follow her example—to give from the heart.

We're so grateful to have received 30 pledges so far for 2022!

No matter the size of your pledge, faithful stewardship is vital to our mission and ministry. Thank you for prayerfully and honestly considering your commitment to FCC this year!

Offering envelopes for 2022 are in the Parish Hall. Please take your preferred box and record it on the list.

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS EVE. Back in person after last year's all-remote Christmas, our congregation was able to celebrate in familiar ways—from decorations and candle-lighting to a superbly adapted Nativity pageant.



MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



Music at the Meetinghouse

Upcoming Concerts at FCC

All in the Sanctuary. Masks, distanced seating, and vaccination required.

A Joyful Offering: Cameo Baroque Benefit Concert—Saturday, January 15, at 3:00 pm

Having rescheduled this effort in the Upper Valley Haven's "19 Days of the Valley" campaign, Ernie Drown, Beth Hilgartner, Leslie Stroud, and Laurie Rabut present an excellent program, featuring G. F. Handel, Henry Purcell, G. P. Telemann, William Boyce, and others. Enjoy wonderful music, beautifully played—all to benefit the Haven. *Free-will donation (\$20 suggested); for more, please visit cameoarts.org or uppervalleyhaven.org.*

Relax Your Ears: Tristan Bellerive and Ben Kulp—Sunday, January 23, at 3:00 pm

Guitarist Tristan Bellerive and cellist Ben Kulp, two of the superb faculty teaching next door at UVMC, offer a reflective afternoon program of duets composed by acclaimed folk and film composer Joel Styzens. *Admission \$15; more information at uvmusic.org/event/relax-your-ears.*

The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, February 11 and 25, March 11 and 25, all at 7:30 pm

Come enjoy our popular community venue for live local music! Conceived as an informal "listening room" for emerging musicians, each show features several acoustic acts, and patrons may come and go. Baked goods and non-alcoholic drinks are available, and it's all free of charge. *For more, please visit anoncoffee.org.*



December 14, 2021
Dear Brian and Rev. Silver,
Thank you for all of your continued support for our Classicopia programs. **We are so fortunate to have such a warm and welcoming "home" church.** Hope you all have a safe and healthy holiday season.

**Thank you,
Dan Weiser**

HANDEL HIGHLIGHTS AND A SNOWY HALLELUJAH! UVMC organized a reduced Messiah Sing, with several student soloists performing selected arias for an appreciative audience. All joined in an outdoor finale—the Hallelujah chorus in the snow on our front lawn! (See the video: youtube.com/watch?v=SmI_zYnUTKM.)

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



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THE SOUPER BOWL IS BACK!

*Donations gratefully accepted at the church from
January 16 to February 13. Thank you!*

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Ernie Drown, Organist and Choir Director • Nancy Parsons, Children's Community Corner
Barbara Teeter, Chair of Deacons • Linda Jacobs, Chair of Church Council • Barbara Jones, Moderator
Brian Clancy, Church Administrator

Church Office Hours: Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9:00-12:00 (or by appointment as needed)

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