



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

Happy New Year!

Okay, let's be honest: Things aren't that happy or festive just now. We saw off 2020, and rather than celebrate and make merry, it seemed as if most of the world just collectively sighed, squared its shoulders, and put its head down, determined to tough out the change of the calendar. While we would like to get on with 2021, it is with the hope that the months to come will be better than those that are now behind us. As the faithful, we might well ask, "How should we navigate these times?"

Being Christians, we know that there are times to rejoice and times to mourn. We are called not to resign ourselves to a fatalistic view of life, but to acknowledge that God is sovereign over all. The world is God's, and it is good.

We might wish for God to make all of our troubles disappear, for nothing ever to harm us or our loved ones, but that is not the way of this world. What we know and we can count on is that God is not only sovereign over all of us, but that God stands in solidarity with each of us. Remember, it was God who chose to go to the cross, to suffer as one of us, to endure the worst that life can offer—because God wanted to be able to look at us and say, "I've been there. I know what you're going through. You are *not* alone!"

God is with us when we celebrate and when we grieve, in our achievements and in our failures. God takes no vacations, never steps away from the human condition, but is always, faithfully present. That is one of the great lessons from the life of Christ. That is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God is with us. Period.

We look to the future in hope, but we are realistic. We want things to be better, but we don't assume that will be the case. As the pandemic continues to rage, we wonder how things might be better. In truth, we don't know. But we can be sure of this: they *will* be better. Different, perhaps, but better.

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THE SOUPER BOWL IS BACK!

If the NFL can play football without fans, FCC can collect canned goods without worship services! We will once again tackle local hunger with a collection of soup and other non-perishable food items, to be distributed among HEADREST, the UPPER VALLEY HAVEN, and LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES.

Donations may be brought to the church office from January 11 through February 10. You may also bring them directly to any of those three beneficiaries if you'd rather (but please let us know if you do). Thank you!

Sunday Worship Online

Zoom Services—Sundays at 10:00 am

Please join us via Zoom every Sunday morning at our usual time! Following our familiar order of worship, we share prayers and readings, sing hymns, and listen to Steve's weekly sermon.

The Zoom link is emailed early Sunday morning; if you're not receiving it but would like to, please contact the church office.

YouTube Recordings—Watch Anytime!

If Zoom isn't your thing, you're invited to watch on YouTube whenever you'd like. We record and post the weekly service every Friday afternoon.

The YouTube link is posted at www.fcclb.org and sent with the Sunday morning email.

For either format, each week's bulletin and other resources are posted on our website and sent out with the Sunday morning email. We also post the text or a recording of Rev. Steve Silver's sermon.

Please note that Church Council has extended the suspension of indoor worship and other on-site events at FCC until Easter, April 4, in an abundance of caution regarding COVID-19.

Council will continue to assess circumstances in our area and determine our status accordingly.

FCC ANNUAL MEETING 2021

**Sunday, February 14, 11:00 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 14, 2021, 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.

Would You Like to Participate in Worship?

Despite the suspension of in-person services, we invite you to play a role in worship each week! Lay readers for scripture and prayers are always most welcome, for either the YouTube or Zoom format. We also invite those who are tech-oriented to assist us with video and sound production.

If you're interested in the opportunity to serve in any of these important worship roles, please contact the church office.

ASH WEDNESDAY IS FEBRUARY 17



As we approach the holy season of Lent, we plan to offer opportunities for worship and study (TBD).

If you would like to receive daily Lenten devotions by email, please contact the church office or the Rev. Steve Silver at silver@fcclb.org.

HOLY WEEK IS MARCH 28-APRIL 4

COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

Nan Parsons reported to Council that the **Children's Community Corner** has been focusing on the Creation story, with kids working on their own projects at home to share during their monthly Zoom meeting. They also made Nativity scenes at home, and Nan worked with Rev. Steve Silver to adapt the Christmas pageant to Zoom.

Brian Clancy reported for the **Music Committee** that a couple outside musicians used church space for recording and instruction this fall, posing no risk to FCC's staff or congregation. These guests have all been grateful to play at FCC again.

Organist and choir director **Ernie Drown** met with Council for the first time in December, expressing how happy he is to be at FCC and thanking everyone for the support. Ernie has made quite a favorable impression this fall with worship involvement, staff interactions, and guest collaborations. He invites comments and feedback from the entire congregation, asking to hear about what's worked in the past and what he's been able to do here so far. Barb Jones appreciated the historical notes supplied in recent bulletins, and Ernie noted a desire to offer more such background in an informal, non-worship context.

Steve Silver recognized Ernie's rich contributions as an active participant in weekly worship planning. Ernie has brought several guest musicians in to enliven our online worship experience, and FCC staff worked hard to plan Christmas Eve services in this unusual year.

Steve elaborated on a conversation with the **Diaconate** about the role of the Gloria and other familiar elements of worship, affirming that these rituals remain meaningful to our congregation. In part because Ernie had noted that the traditional, gendered text was increasingly rare in some denominations, Steve invited opinions from Council. Many voiced a strong affinity for the familiar text and music, feeling that the Gloria is a spiritually vital moment in the service. And while more progressive versions have evolved in this country, we are in communion with most of the world in using the older format. All agreed that it's important at least to evaluate these worship elements periodically, to ensure that we engage in them consciously and not simply out of habit.

Steve has also asked for feedback on **sound quality and the integration of music** into our online worship offerings on Zoom and YouTube. To improve sound quality, he has discussed the technical aspects of producing music on Zoom with UVMC's Ben van Vliet; Jon Scott suggested a possible consultant who has worked on producing services for the UCC church in Hanover. Steve added that while we hope to improve the technical aspects of our remote services, it's important to balance that with content.

Kathy Beckett noted that the **Mission and Social Action Committee** had not met regularly during the fall, as the pandemic has suspended so many of its regular events. Kathy will invite MSA members to be creative about our outreach efforts in these circumstances.

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom teleconferences:

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

Council 1/19 and 2/16, 7:00

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

Some members have asked about the **congregational survey of mission priorities** planned earlier in the year. Suggestions received from church members this summer have not yet translated to a full survey, intended to focus mission efforts. Steve Silver apologized for the delay and pledged to conduct the survey early in 2021.

Referring to an email she had sent Council prior to its last meeting, Linda Jacobs opened a discussion about what we might do to replace or compensate for our **community dinner ministry**, which has been shut down by the pandemic. Several agreed it is important to determine what Listen, the UV Haven, and other organizations need right now, before deciding what support we should and can offer them. Some noted that Listen and the Haven are already supported relatively well, suggesting that other organizations may need the help more. It was also noted that in the lack of in-person volunteer opportunities, we have asked a lot of our congregation this year in terms of financial donations. All recognized, though, that FCC already has investment funds for mission support, notably the Dole Trust. Council unanimously voted

COMMITTEE NOTES

to make additional contributions to local organizations from these dedicated mission funds.

Council also surveyed the funding sources of the **Open Door Ministry** and other mission projects. Some wondered whether we should raise funds specifically for such purposes. It was noted that unrestricted funds allow us greater flexibility to fund projects as they come up.

Linda Jacobs further noted that the Black Lives Matter vigil in Lebanon on Tuesdays was perhaps less effective during the darker, colder winter months, asking if FCC might seek other opportunities for **action in the area of racial justice**. Noting that the BLM vigils are not an FCC event, despite the participation of a number of church members, Kathy Beckett agreed that our congregation should explore other ways to address this important issue. Several agreed

that this fall's racial-justice reading group would offer a good forum to plan next steps in this exploration. Ernie Drown also suggested that Dartmouth professor Randy Ballmer, who has visited FCC in the past, might be a useful resource.

Treasurer Terry Ellison reported that our income for 2020 included fewer trustee transfers than in past years, mainly because we received a PPP loan in the spring. Stewardship contributions have nearly reached our \$80,000 goal. Expenses kept pace with income, falling slightly because of the pandemic shutdown. Terry also reiterated his desire to step down from the Treasurer job, as soon as a willing volunteer offers to take over this important role.

Expanding on that note, Steve Silver recommended that we consider amending our **by-laws** for the coming year, using the pandemic shutdown

as an opportunity to reassess FCC's governance structure as we've often discussed. Essential leadership roles will need to be filled or continue, but perhaps we can forgo our full nominating process for annual meeting and examine our committee structure. After some discussion and concern about what amending (or "suspending") the by-laws would entail, it was agreed that Council members would individually review the current by-laws in advance of a fuller discussion in January.

Steve also invited comments on the **continued suspension of in-person worship** and other events. All agreed that caution and safety should still prevail amid rising case numbers in our area. Even as vaccines arrive, our timeline should be both informed and realistic. Council unanimously voted to extend our closure until at least Easter, April 4.

Lenten Lunch Bag Offering

With the beginning of Lent on February 17, the **CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY CORNER** asks again for your generous participation in our annual Lenten Lunch Bag Offering. While the kids won't be able to distribute decorative bags this year, they are excited to support **WISE** and **Epilogos** for another year.

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

The idea is to collect savings from a regular sacrifice during Lent—perhaps skipping a daily latte, forgoing munchies with TV, or eating at home and donating the cost of dining out.

Whatever your sacrifice, please return your donations by PALM SUNDAY, MARCH 28.

Stewardship 2021 By the Grace of God

"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land... Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.'"

—Deuteronomy 8:7,17

Deuteronomy 8 tells us of the reminder given to the children of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land: Don't let wealth go to your head, and remember that it is by God's grace that you have prospered. This is a call to give thanks, and also to be humble.

Many thanks to all for prayerfully considering a commitment to FCC in 2021. No matter the size of your pledge, YOUR faithful stewardship is vital to our mission and ministry, now and in the future.

Offering envelopes for 2021 are available. Please contact the church office to reserve or pick up your box set.

COMMITTEE NOTES

DIACONATE

Following this fall's rich, provocative discussion in the weekly book group, the Diaconate has discussed follow-up action in **the area of anti-racism**. One suggestion was to engage more diversity through worship music in other languages, despite challenges of unfamiliarity and our reliance on Zoom and recordings. An alternative might be hymn translations from other cultures. Some are concerned by our current dependence on pre-recorded music in online worship. Deacons wondered if traditional music was more or less responsive to the congregation's interest in participating in worship.

Beyond music, the group discussed the effectiveness of other aspects of our **online worship** service. Given Rev. Steve Silver's preference for extemporaneous sermons without a manuscript, congregants could be referred to the recorded service. Setting up the sanctuary as a Zoom location will also be investigated, but the church lacks an experienced videographer. Steve has sought advice from the UV Music Center

regarding the production of Zoom services, such as a new microphone better suited to music.

Deacons also discussed traditional and alternative language for some foundational service music (e.g., the Gloria and Doxology) and prayers. The Prayer of Confession usually appears in the seasons of penitence, Lent and Advent. It was observed that responsive readings are not as well suited to Zoom format.

In the Deacons' conversations about **Christmas Eve**, it was noted that the

familiar pageant format remains popular with children, encouraging its adaptation to the Zoom format for this year. Families collected the costumes and props from the church for use in their homes.

The Diaconate has also considered how to foster a **sense of family and community** within the limitations of remote worship services. Keeping our Joys and Concerns list current is important, and it was suggested that participants be reminded to use care and discretion when sharing.

From Church Council and the Nominating Committee

Volunteer Opportunities Available

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

We want to know!

As we approach a new year and 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 available opportunities for service and ministry at FCC, please contact the church office or Barbara Jones (603-863-9664 or basketmaker@icloud.com).

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

I make this prediction not because I'm a Pollyanna or in possession of secret information. No, I say this because I trust that God is with us. And with God by our side, we can handle any of life's troubles. That gives me hope, that instills in me... joy.

So, with that thought, let me once again wish you a Happy New Year!

Yours faithfully,



THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

First Congregational Church extends its warmest wishes for a peaceful, prosperous, and restorative new year to all those who normally use our building for their events:

The Anonymous Coffeehouse

The Bel Canto Chamber Singers

Boy Scout Troop 279 / Cub Scout Pack 279

The Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association

Lebanon Opera House

Lebanon Recreation Department

NH Women, Infants, and Children Program

Upper Valley Music Center

UV Professional Resource Network

Valley Improv

...and the many performers in our

Music at the Meetinghouse Series

Our church building is empty without you and our congregation! We look forward to welcoming you all back as soon as we can safely do so.



ADVENT DURING THE PANDEMIC. Amid the ongoing suspension of in-person activities at FCC, musicians were grateful to record a few seasonal selections for use in our online worship experiences. And the mighty storm that dumped two feet of snow on the region a week before Christmas was no match for Chip Silver and a snowblower.

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

NO PLACE LIKE HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS. Shifting FCC's Christmas Eve services to Zoom required some creative adaptation of our beloved pageant, but Nan Parsons and the Children's Community Corner pulled it off with delightful results. Nan also sent families some at-home Advent craft projects.



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@fcclb.org • www.fcclb.org
Rev. Stephen R. Silver: silver@fcclb.org • **Music:** music@fcclb.org • **Newsletter Submissions:** church@fcclb.org



First Congregational Church of Lebanon

10 South Park Street
PO Box 230
Lebanon, NH 03766

DATED MATERIAL
PLEASE DELIVER PROMPTLY

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

THE SOUPER BOWL IS BACK!

Food collection benefiting HEADREST, the UPPER VALLEY HAVEN, and LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES

*Donations gratefully accepted at the church office
January 11 to February 10. Thank you!*

FCC-Lebanon

2021 Annual Meeting

Sunday, February 14, 11:00 am
Following Worship on Zoom

LENT BEGINS ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Ernie Drown, Organist and Choir Director • Nancy Parsons, Church School Superintendent
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@fccl.org • prayer@fccl.org • music@fccl.org • www.fccl.org