



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

If ever there was a time when an ecclesiastical term seemed inapt, it is now, and the one I have in mind is the liturgical calendar's designation for the current season of "ordinary" time. Nothing about the present moment, with its protests, pandemics, and financial panics, seems ordinary. As a political columnist I read regularly has observed of a different context: This. Is. Not. Normal.

But how true is this? Yes, things seem to be in an unprecedented state of upset. But we as a people have lived through wars, plagues, hatred, financial meltdowns, and more. Truly, there is nothing new under the sun—not even this familiar truism, which is about 2,200 years old and comes from Ecclesiastes 1:9.

We do not know much about this book's author. Tradition held that it was Solomon, which would date the book even earlier, perhaps three millennia ago. But research now suggests that it was likely written in the 3rd century BC. The identity of the author may be found in the work's title, "Ecclesiastes" being a Greek attempt at translating the name of Qoheleth, who was perhaps a teacher or preacher. Regardless of his occupation, we may say that Qoheleth had already seen it all, that he's been there, done that. We see it in chapter 3: "For everything there is a season..., a time to be born, and a time to die."

Ecclesiastes was written at a late date for the canon of the Hebrew Bible, and its fatalism smacks more of Greek philosophy than of post-Exilic, pre-Jesus, Jewish theology. But it is part of Scripture, because those who assembled the Bible recognized that it had something to say to us and included it in the corpus of the Hebrew and, later, Christian Bible.

The beauty of the Good Book is in part to be found in the multiple voices it contains. There are differing styles, competing narratives, a diversity of thought. Yet within this maelstrom is a unifying principle, a life-giving witness to the God who walks with Israel and all humanity.

To say that this has all happened before is not to succumb to a sense of powerlessness. We are not strapped to some cosmic wheel, doomed endlessly to repeat the past. Instead, with God's help, we learn, we grow, we hopefully progress, and we may then move forward.

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SUNDAY SERVICE

Outdoor Service on FCC Lawn

Sunday, August 9, 10:00 (*August 16 if rain*)

All are welcome to our first in-person worship service since March, on the church's front lawn.

Our primary concern is ensuring everyone's health and safety, and we ask for patience and understanding of what it will mean to worship in person again—such as changes in liturgical practice, restrictions on singing and communal prayer, and reduced social interaction.

Those attending will have to RSVP in advance and follow requirements including health and symptom screening, physical distancing, and mask use. We will not have coffee hour.

Full details will be forthcoming. Please contact the church office or Rev. Steve Silver (silver@fcclcb.org) to RSVP or ask any questions.

Sunday Worship Online

Zoom Services—Sundays at 10:00 am

Please join us via Zoom conference every Sunday morning at our usual worship time! Following our familiar order of worship, we share prayers and readings, sing hymns, and listen to Steve's weekly sermon. There's even "coffee hour" afterward! **The Zoom invitation is emailed every 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, or if you can't make the Sunday morning time, you're invited to watch on YouTube whenever you like. We record and post the weekly service every Friday afternoon.

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

For either format, each week's bulletin—with an order of worship, prayers, scripture texts, hymns, and announcements—is posted on our website and sent out with the Sunday morning email. We also post the text of Rev. Steve Silver's sermon.

Connecting Our Congregation

FCC "Social Hour" on Zoom

Wednesdays, July 29, August 12 and 26, 7:00 pm

Would you like to chat and connect with your church family in this time of social distancing? All are invited to this informal, open time to catch up, ask questions, and connect. Zoom links will be sent out Wednesday afternoons; you may come and go as you please.

Congregational Support—Get Help, Give Help!

If you need some assistance with picking up groceries, running errands, getting to appointments, or other tasks in these isolated times, volunteers from our congregation are willing to lend a hand.

Fellowship Through Food

Would you enjoy a meal provided by a friend from church? If you're experiencing a loss of income or are just overwhelmed by our current circumstances, we'd like to help by dropping off a meal. If this offer speaks to you—or if you enjoy cooking and would like to provide a meal—please let us know.

If you are in need or you'd like to volunteer to provide help, we invite you to contact the church office (603-448-4281 or church@fcclcb.org) or Rev. Steve Silver directly (silver@fcclcb.org).

How Do You Feel About Reopening?

Church Council has extended the suspension of regular worship services and other on-site events **until at least September**, continuing to follow an abundance of caution regarding COVID-19. But as we consider eventually returning to in-person worship and reopening our building to a variety of uses, we welcome your thoughts, concerns, and questions. What would you need to feel safe to come back? Should we place any restrictions on outside users of church space? Would you like to continue online or remote services in some form?

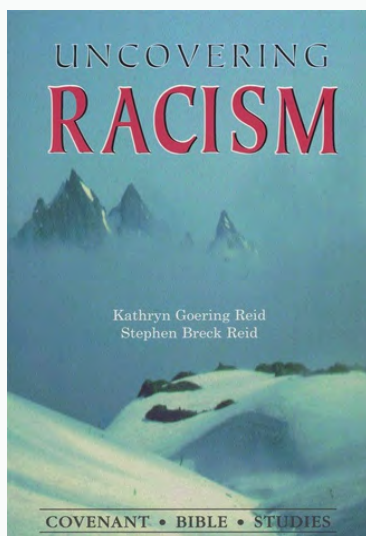
Please send your comments and questions to the church office or Rev. Steve Silver directly.

PLYMOUTH'S PILGRIMS: THEIR WORLD, THEIR CHURCH, AND OURS

A Four-week Class on Zoom—Tuesdays, July 28 through August 18, at 7:00 pm

Join us for an exploration of the Pilgrims on the 400th anniversary of their arrival in America, using a curriculum created by the Congregational Library in Boston for this milestone. This is a great opportunity to learn about our forebears in faith, what they actually believed and did, whom they met upon their arrival in the “New World,” and how their experiences impact us today. Readings and other study materials will be provided, and each session will offer a lively discussion. Please join us!

There is no cost and all materials are free; you are not required to attend all four sessions to participate. To RSVP or ask questions, please contact Rev. Steve Silver at silver@fcclcb.org.



Uncovering Racism: A Racial Justice Reading Group in August

We believe that as Christians, we are called to work for racial justice. To help us do this work better, we will read and discuss the book *Uncovering Racism*, by Kathryn Goering Reid and Stephen Breck Reid. Written from a faith perspective, this short but powerful book will help us see how racism persists today as an issue we must grapple with. All are invited to participate.

Exact dates and times tbd. Books will be provided free of charge, but advance reservations are required. To RSVP or ask questions, contact Rev. Steve Silver at silver@fcclcb.org or 603-448-4281.



BLACK LIVES MATTER IN LEBANON. While local groups have organized a weekly vigil in Lebanon for the Black Lives Matter movement on Tuesdays for months, national events in late May brought a surge of residents to Colburn Park, advocating for racial justice and long-overdue systemic reform. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others over the years have inspired peaceful protests across the country through June, and members of FCC's congregation have joined Lebanon's own response each week.

Black Lives Matter Vigils in the Upper Valley

All are encouraged to participate in one or more of these weekly **Black Lives Matter** vigils for racial justice. Church Council and the Mission and Social Action Committee have affirmed this as a relatively easy but visible and important way for our congregation to offer Christian witness to the tragedies of systemic racism and the demand for significant cultural change. Bring your own signs promoting racial justice, awareness, and action—and spread the word among your friends and social networks.

HANOVER—Mondays, 5:00-5:30
Hanover/Dartmouth Green

LEBANON—Tuesdays, 5:00-5:30
Colburn Park, opposite Opera House

MERIDEN—Wednesdays, 5:00-6:00
Corner of Route 120 and Main Street

CANAAN—Thursdays, 5:00-5:30
Downtown sidewalks (NOT on the Green)



THANK YOU!

Shelter Sunday Draws Record Amount

This year's Shelter Sunday collection totaled \$1590, essentially doubling what we typically have received (around \$600-800) in past years. We're so grateful to have celebrated fathers with this incredibly generous gift for Upper Valley Habitat for Humanity.

In a thank-you note, UV Habitat Executive Director Eva Loomis graciously recognized FCC's "beautiful annual Father's Day tradition" and was effusive in her appreciation. "I loved reading the names and tributes of the people that are special in your lives," she wrote. "It's clear that you and your loved ones are part of a very vibrant community."

Thank You for Supporting FCC's Ministry!

Amid the challenges of COVID-19, our congregation has generously responded in these special offerings and grants to mission partners so far in 2020:

| | |
|--|---------|
| Epilogos (Lenten Lunch Bag / MSA grant) | \$ 1030 |
| WISE (Lenten Lunch Bag) | 550 |
| UCC (One Great Hour of Sharing) | 1000 |
| Listen (Community Dinner) | 680 |
| UVIP (Asylum and Sanctuary Fund) | 1000 |
| CWS Blankets (Blanket Sunday) | 745 |
| UV Habitat for Humanity (Shelter Sunday) | 1590 |

We've also given out almost \$6000 in assistance to our neighbors through the **Open Door Ministry**.

Volunteer for CASA-NH Virtual Training Now Available

CASA of NH trains and supervises compassionate and concerned citizens to advocate for abused and neglected children in our court system. Offering their common sense, experience, commitment, and skills for about 10-15 hours a month, these volunteer advocates help ensure that children grow up in safe, permanent homes.

For more, contact CASA at 603-626-4600 or speakup@casanh.org, or join a virtual information session at www.casanh.org.

Hearts You Hold Meeting the Needs of Immigrants, Migrants, and Refugees

Hearts You Hold, a non-profit organization based in Thetford, VT, offers immigrants, migrants, and refugees new, self-chosen items they may need or want. HYH and its local partners help recipients determine these items and how to obtain them.

Donors fund purchases—from diapers to bikes, clothing to appliances—on HYH's website. In the past year, donors have funded over 250 requests!

HYH believes immigrants, migrants, and refugees should feel valued, respected, and appreciated, in part by asking them what they need and want.

Visit heartstyouhold.org to donate and learn more about this important service organization!

Do Your Part to Fill the Cart—From Home!

Greater Lebanon has struggled with rising poverty and food insecurity for some time. These challenges have only increased as COVID-19 restrictions have threatened employment and income.

We are no longer collecting items for our shopping cart at church, but local need is more urgent than ever.

Listen's food pantry on Hanover Street continues to accept non-perishable donations, and they are serving to-go meals during the week in WRJ. The

UV Haven, too, would greatly appreciate any donations for its financial assistance programs.

In lieu of filling our cart, please consider a direct contribution (online or by mail) to Listen, the UV Haven, the UV Humane Society, or some other local service organization. Thanks to ALL for fighting poverty in our community.

UV Strong Responds to COVID-19

If you're in need of assistance in these challenging times, or if you're looking for new opportunities to volunteer, UPPER VALLEY STRONG has mobilized its resources for both recipients and volunteers.

Visit uvstrong.org for more information.

Focus on Stewardship

While regular worship services are suspended, we continue to depend on the offering contributions that you'd normally give on Sundays—in fact, the need is greater than usual. We realize that not everyone can give so generously, especially in these newly austere circumstances, but **we're grateful for contributions of any amount to these purposes:**

Regular Offering—Collected weekly as unrestricted support for FCC's general operations, ministries, and programs. This includes all pledges and payments in our annual stewardship effort.

Communion/Open Door Offerings—Collected on communion Sundays, directly funding our Open Door Ministry for community assistance (gas/food cards, rent/utilities, etc.). Any contribution in a communion envelope goes to this fund, but Open Door gifts may be made at any other time, too.

Special Offerings (e.g., Lenten Lunch Bag Offering, Blanket Sunday, and UCC offerings such as One Great Hour of Sharing)—Each collected once a year, in conjunction with an event or national campaign for a particular mission or service cause.

THANKS TO ALL for so generously supporting these diverse purposes, at FCC and beyond!

All contributions may be made payable to FCC, with any specific purpose (as applicable) written in the memo line, and mailed to PO Box 230, Lebanon, NH 03766.

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

Our problems are not identical to the ones that tormented our ancestors. War, disease, animosity take on new forms and bedevil us in novel ways. But the good news is that we need not repeat these old errors. We have new knowledge, fresh understandings, rooted in the wisdom of those who came before us.

As we navigate these strange and baffling times, let us not surrender to helpless resignation but instead take heart from the example of the women and men of Scripture. They, too, faced long odds and at times a dark future. But rather than give up, they turned to God, they followed Jesus, they embraced the Holy Spirit—and, thus prepared for the future, they made their way forward.

May it be so for us in these days.

Yours faithfully,
Steve

COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

John Gilliatt reported to Council in June for the **Board of Governors** on some recent landscape maintenance, garden plantings, and paint touch-ups on the front portico deck. The gardening, done by the Ellisons and Nan Parsons, looks particularly nice and benefits from an additional hose and sprinkler for watering. We are also examining how to address the sewer-line clearing at the Parsonage.

Treasurer Terry Ellison reported healthy income to date, including solid Stewardship contributions. Valerie Nevel clarified that we should still consider our PPP grant as a loan for now, even though the spending period has been extended and it will likely be forgiven.

Valerie also noted for the **Trustees** that our investments, after declining through March, have somewhat recovered. We are still awaiting the annual distribution from the Waldo Trust, due to its change in trustees, but that seems now to be in process. Steve Silver thanked Valerie for looking after our investments.

Kathy Beckett reported on **Mission and Social Action** Committee discussion of racism and the Black Lives Matter movement. The group stressed the importance of building community networks and educating ourselves on racial justice issues and history. She also noted good study resources and the possibility of our congregation using a faith-based training program over the course of several months. Locally, Kathy also noted an effort to examine how people of color are treated at large institutions such as DHMC.

Steve Silver added that there are several complex aspects to this issue, and we can't assume all members of the congregation will agree about every one. Our efforts toward social change will take time, but it's most important now to start a process and honest discussion, rather than simply acknowledging the problem without action. Aside from offering a reading group, Steve asked Council and the Diaconate to take an active lead by, for example, joining the weekly BLM vigils on Tuesdays at 5:00. Council firmly supported these recommendations.

Nan Parsons expressed satisfaction with how the **Children's Community Corner** year wrapped up despite the circumstances, and several thanked her for the video shared in worship on Children's Sunday. Looking ahead, Nan would like to cultivate deeper learning with the children, but she noted the difficulties of irregular attendance and limited time each Sunday morning. Leslie Thomson asked about doing more activities outside of church, perhaps a monthly activity. The group did offer a couple such activities during the year, and Nan agreed this a good way to reach kids. She appreciates that parents are thinking along these lines and are willing to help.

Brian Clancy reported that eight applications had been received for the **organist/choir director position**, four of which deserve particular consideration. The shutdown gives us some flexibility in that there's no urgency to hire someone while we're still closed, but we do plan to move forward in our review process in the next month. Susan Sorensen,

who is not interested in the full position, has been great to work with as an interim.

In his **pastor's report**, Steve Silver focused on the question of when we might reopen for worship. The State of NH approved reopening with some restrictions (e.g., social distancing and a limit of 50% seating capacity), and the NH Conference has clarified that each individual church can make its own decision. Steve noted, however, that churches so far have experienced that it's hard to ensure that everyone follows the necessary guidelines and restrictions. There remain many questions about worship practice, singing, childcare, communion, and other aspects, and the average age of our congregation is a concern. Steve also pointed out that such a strictly regulated worship experience may be disappointing and frustrating for people. Worship attendance online (via recordings and Zoom services) has been steady, occasionally better than in-person services, so this format does seem to meet the current needs of many in the congregation.

All things considered, Steve advised that we consider Labor Day a target date for reopening, while remaining flexible and aware of larger events as they develop. He noted that we may try to plan an outdoor service this summer, partly to experience some of the changes and restrictions. (This would not be our usual Praise in the Park service, due to logistical challenges of that and to clergy transitions at other churches.)

In discussion Council generally agreed with this cautious approach. Several noted it was hard to imagine

COMMITTEE NOTES

how worship would effectively work within such restrictions on behavior, social interaction, and liturgical practice. Terry Ellison suggested we gather more information on other churches and recommended that we survey our own congregation for their feelings and concerns about reopening. All agreed that it would be good to revisit the reopening question later in the summer. In the meantime, it will be increasingly important to maintain connections by email, phone, and written cards, especially for those who aren't online or can't regularly participate in the Zoom services.

In addition to the book group, Steve is organizing an adult education class this summer, an exploration of the Pilgrims on the 400th anniversary of their landing at Plymouth. He continues to be involved in various professional activities via Zoom, such as the Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association and the Congregational Library in Boston.

Steve added a reflection that between the pandemic and widespread racial unrest, this seems to be a moment when God is asking us to discern what the Church can be in the world. He called the Upper Valley "a good place to be during these wild times," and he thanked Council and the congregation for being "a great group of people with whom to travel the way of Jesus during this moment."

DIACONATE

In June the Deacons affirmed the importance of sending cards and other personal mail in **staying**

connected to congregation members. They shared updates on several individuals, including Larry Doyle, who continues his brave, spirited recovery after losing his right foot and leg below the knee. They also checked in about the "fellowship through food" ministry; while there are few requests, the opportunity for fellowship is valuable and should be emphasized. Church members should consider what they might share with a fellow congregant.

In his **pastor's report** Steve Silver discussed the shift to Zoom-based activities, noting the need to collect responses from the congregation about this format. He has received some hymn requests and suggested that some might volunteer to offer music for remote services.

Steve also opened a discussion of options for a **potential outdoor service** on the front lawn. Social distancing would still limit capacity, perhaps necessitating reservations in advance, and we would invite only our own congregation. Worshipers would bring their own masks and chairs, with some extras available. While some live broadcast might be possible, we could at least record the service for YouTube, as we have with regular Sunday services. The idea would require a fair amount of advance notice and preparation.

The Deacons also discussed recent events and considerations regarding anti-racism protests and the Black Lives Matter movement. A faith-based training series and a racial-justice book group offer possible opportunities for acknowledging implicit bias and identifying an

education-based response to these urgent cultural concerns.

MISSION AND SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

Last month the Mission and Social Action Committee engaged issues of **racial justice** in depth, following the tragic deaths of George Floyd and others. The group affirmed the need to address racism and racial justice in our country and community and considered how FCC could be involved in faith-based conversations and action. Discussion emphasized education as a means toward cultural understanding, as students expect school to be a safe place where they will be listened to and supported. It's vital to recognize who in our community and church is included and given a sense of belonging (or not), and to examine the reality of white privilege and implicit bias.

Ideas for what FCC could do include adopting a long-term, faith-based educational training, which could be made mandatory for our church leadership; recommending and providing resources for group and individual study; and drafting a congregational statement on issues of racism. To pursue these options, we will examine ethics statements from local hospitals and other large institutions; form a summer reading and study group for all members of our congregation; and offer further resources for education, raising awareness, and fostering action. It is hoped that FCC's Diaconate and Church Council will take a leading role in this effort.

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION



SUMMER DURING SHUTDOWN. On Father's Day Dennis Brown read for an outdoor service that he and wife Katie attended at their home church, Christ Lutheran in Elizabethtown, PA; the service drew people from a full range of ages, children to seniors, all wearing masks and physically distanced. Back in Lebanon, our Sanctuary has two beautiful new chancel railings (thanks, Wayne Braley!) and our gardens look fantastic (thanks, Nan, Alyson, and Terry!). Corrine Erskine continues to quilt, and on July 5 a double rainbow soared over the bright towers of City Hall and, just right of center, FCC (as viewed from a certain porch on Summer Street).



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

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION ON ZOOM

Plymouth's Pilgrims: Their World, Their Church, and Ours
Tuesdays, July 28 through August 18, at 7:00 pm

Uncovering Racism: A Racial Justice Reading Group
August (Dates/Times TBD)

*There is no cost for either course; all materials are free.
RSVP to participate at silver@fccleb.org or 603-448-4281.*

Outdoor Service

FCC Front Lawn

Sunday, August 9, 10:00 am
(Rain Date: August 16)

*** * * RSVP Required * * ***

All attendees agree to health and
symptom screening, mask use,
and physical distancing.

Full details will be forthcoming.

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Susan Sorensen, Interim 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@fccleb.org • prayer@fccleb.org • music@fccleb.org • www.fccleb.org