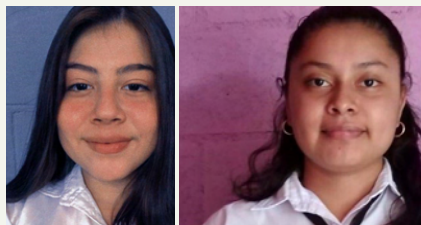


Grace Notes

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The Pastoral Perspective

It's been about two weeks since Champlain Tower South, the condo building in Surfside, Florida, collapsed, leaving potentially more than 100 dead, scores more homeless, and many, many more fearful that the building in which they live might be the next one to collapse. What are we to do?

Well, I think we begin by acknowledging the surreal horror and reality of this incident. "Stuff like this doesn't happen in America, right?" we may think. Apparently, it does. Cupidity, incompetence, arrogance of engineers and real estate developers, complaisance among inspectors—all exist right here in the U. S., and we need to recognize this fact.

Well, okay, you might say, before asking, "Why did God allow this to happen?" This question is understandable. We want someone to be in charge, someone to take responsibility. If God is all powerful, why not assume that God should stop things like this from happening? Indeed, some might assume these bad events occurred because it was God's will, that those who perished were sinners whom God wished to punish.

Luke 13:4 puts paid to such notions. Jesus has just been approached by people who want to know why some Galileans had been slaughtered by Pilate. Were they sinners? Would Jesus join in the general discontent and condemn Pilate for this act? Jesus' answer tells us much about God and how he acts. Those Galileans were no more sinful than anyone else in Jerusalem—including those who died in the collapse of the Tower of Siloam. All people, Jesus taught, need to repent. Not just those one might disapprove of, but all people. That includes you and me.

We need to be careful before assuming something bad has happened to someone because God was angry. We are not in a position to judge anyone, Jesus argued, because we will all be judged!

Now, how are we to handle that news? Do we see God as a hanging judge, one who is out to get us? Or do we see him as merciful, looking to our salvation? Is God punitive or loving? If we assume the latter—that God in his love and grace came to us in Jesus and has given us the Holy Spirit—we will know that God doesn't punish people with disasters, that God is neither vindictive nor sadistic.

Continued on Page 5

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 physical distancing; 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.

Let Us Gather for Worship Together!



Outdoor Service on FCC Lawn

Sunday, July 25, 10:00 (Weather Permitting)

All are welcome to another of our open worship services in the fresh air on the church's front lawn. Masks and distancing, while still encouraged, will not be required for this outdoor service, and no RSVP is necessary. Folding chairs will be available, but you may bring a comfy lawn chair if you prefer!

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.

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

STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH Special UCC Offering



Contributions Welcome Until Labor Day

Inspired this year by a simple theme—"Renew!"—the Strengthen the Church offering supports the expansion of ministry and the growth of local congregations across the country. By renewing older spiritual communities, building new ones, and funding fellowships for the young, emerging leaders in our church, this program is vital to the health of our denomination.

Please contribute as you are able. Thanks!

Spend Some Time in the Corner!

The **Children's Community Corner**, that is! We'd like to involve more of our congregation's adults in engaging with FCC's great kids on Sunday mornings.

Volunteers will either take children outside or work on indoor crafts, as well as share a light snack with them. **Our ultimate purpose for this interaction is mentorship, not just supervision.** Please consider offering your time to our young people—thanks!

If you are interested in volunteering or have any questions, please contact Nan Parsons directly at nlp3721@yahoo.com or 603-863-8354.

Steve Silver to Vacation in August

The Rev. Steve Silver will be taking a well-earned vacation during most of August, including three Sundays (Aug. 8-22). We're still working to secure pastoral coverage for that period, but we do plan to offer worship services each week as usual.

COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

Council has focused on **reopening the church**, as we transition beyond the worst of the pandemic. Proposing a return to in-person worship on Pentecost Sunday, the Rev. Steve Silver balanced a need for continued restrictions against the real value to our community of gathering in person again. Many have deeply missed the connection to others.

Steve learned at the Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association spring meeting that while we seemed to be among a minority of churches reopening in May, we weren't doing so rashly. Council recommended a survey of the congregation about reopening, which revealed a high proportion of respondents who are both vaccinated and comfortable with resuming in-person worship with precautions.

Mechanical engineer Bruce McCoy had also visited church to conduct a thorough analysis of ventilation, advising an air-flow plan using the balcony fan and two box fans in the Parish Hall. Based on these efforts to gather information, Council ultimately agreed that it was safe to proceed with reopening, as long as we require masks, distancing, and reduced socialization.

Council has also discussed **use of the church by outside groups**, which have begun to inquire about events for later summer and fall. While encouraging these inquiries, Church Administrator Brian Clancy has informed groups that arrangements remain contingent. He has stressed that we expect to continue mask use and distancing and that FCC can't assume any responsibility for the ongoing risk of illness. Brian noted

that all requests have come from familiar, established users, all of whom defer to whatever policies we might impose. Most of our regular events in the past, moreover, have been manageably sized and could safely be distanced now. Brian also emphasized the benefits and public value of inviting the community back into our building.

In discussion, members of Council noted that Lebanon and other towns are lifting mask mandates and have relaxed requirements in businesses and public spaces. Still, our church includes many people with health vulnerabilities, and the safety of our congregation remains imperative. There was extensive discussion of vaccinations and whether we can or should require them, and it was advised that we reserve the right to cancel events should there be an unexpected covid spike. Council agreed to continue requiring masks and distancing for all events at church, while strongly encouraging vaccinations among users.

Brian also relayed an inquiry from **Headrest's** Lori Bartlett, who works with residents in recovery to build professional skills and pursue jobs. She was seeking storage space for a collection of donated clothes that Headrest residents can wear for interviews. Council all supported facilitating this important service, though there was some concern that we may not have the space in downstairs storage rooms. It was agreed that the children's classroom spaces should not be sacrificed. After Brian was able to consolidate and clear some items in the storage room opposite the music office,



INSULATED TOP TO BOTTOM.

Coby Mason eagerly helped his dad Brandon inspect the work completed by Chey Insulation, which installed a plastic vapor barrier in the dirt cellar under the Sanctuary and a spray-foam and cellulose system along cellar walls and the attic spaces above.



COMMITTEE NOTES

Headrest staff and a few residents delivered the clothing bins. Use of this collection will be infrequent, by appointment only, but Headrest is grateful to have such a convenient space for their professional attire.

For the **Board of Governors**, John Gilliatt thanked Brandon Mason for his work to research and obtain estimates for the Sanctuary insulation project. Brandon summarized for Council the estimate from Chey Insulation, noting particular issues in both the ceiling and cellar phases. Regarding moisture concerns with the vapor barrier in the cellar, it was noted that this is a standard approach to securing a building envelope in any new construction. Brandon also confirmed that prior structural reinforcement had more than anticipated the combined load of new insulation and any snowfall. He assured Council that the project could be considered independently of future work on the Sanctuary walls, in terms of both cost and structure. Council unanimously approved this significant capital expense, and after some prep work by Brandon and Terry Ellison, Chey Insulation completed the job as planned in mid-June (*see photos*).

Speaking as **Treasurer**, Terry then confirmed that we had ample funds budgeted for this work, as he and Trustee chair Valerie Nevel had anticipated capital expenditures in 2021. For the budget outlook overall, Terry noted that stewardship totals and income-expense figures all look healthy for this point in the year.

Terry also brought to Council a recommendation from the **Finance Committee** to cover the Church Administrator's monthly healthcare premiums. Council approved the proposal, retroactive to January 1. Brian expressed his deep, heartfelt gratitude to everyone for this added compensation and the professional and personal support it represents.

For the **Children's Community Corner**, Nan Parsons reported numerous positive responses about Children's Sunday. Despite some issues with hearing the children present, the format worked well, and Nan appreciated that the kids were invited to present during the sermon time. The children, she said, have been "good sports" all year, despite pandemic limitations.

This summer Nan will consider the roles older youth can play, seeking

input from them directly. She also hopes to encourage more adult volunteers to spend time with the children, for both supervision and mentorship. Nan also asked about using downstairs rooms for indoor curriculum this fall. Council agreed that the Children's Community Corner should resume its familiar format in the fall, and Nan will plan accordingly.

For **Mission and Social Action**, it was reported that Kathy Beckett has stepped down as chair for personal reasons. She remains a member of FCC but is exploring other outlets for community engagement. FCC volunteers, meanwhile, are delivering monthly meals to Dismas House, and Corrine Erskine reported the residents' need for personal-hygiene supplies, suggesting that we use our July cart collection for that purpose.

Jon Scott reported that the **Bylaws Review Committee** had engaged in two productive meetings, gathering good ideas and a thoughtful sense of how various responsibilities can or should be organized. He, Amy Driscoll, and Brian Clancy have met to refine these notes and will report back to the committee and Council.

Meet Our Epilogos Students!

Each year half of our Lenten Lunch Bag collection funds student scholarships through Epilogos Charities, serving the people of San Jose Villanueva, El Salvador. This year FCC's 2020 donation has been helping two students—Alison and Gabriela, who are finishing their first and second years, respectively, of high school.

Thanks for generously supporting this important relationship each year! For more about Epilogos Charities, please visit www.epilogos.org.



Alison



Gabriela

COMMITTEE NOTES

In his **pastor's report**, Rev. Silver noted that it's been a challenging time to work in ministry and connect as a congregation, amid pandemic restrictions and now the gradual and tentative progress beyond them. He looks forward to preaching to people in person!

Steve supports opening the church to outside groups again, adding that FCC's own committees should also consider meeting in person again. Similarly, he asked for input about whether the choir should return to singing in worship. While the choir itself is fully vaccinated and eager to resume, Steve wonders whether the congregation might still be wary of risks specific to singing. Outdoor services may alleviate that concern, but singing outside isn't as effective or satisfying. Some suggested that another congregational survey might be helpful with this question.

Considering program ideas for the fall, Steve wants particularly to foster more active spiritual development and faith formation, which is a challenge for many small churches at this time. He would like to build

on the potential and energy of the post-pandemic moment; some ideas include another book group, guest preachers, and a spiritual growth program around prayer.

Lastly, Steve expressed his sincere thanks for the condolences in cards, calls, and emails in May following the passing of his mother, Ruth Silver, at the age of 101. Having comforted bereaved parishioners in the past, he appreciated having that same comfort reflected back to him. Steve also was grateful for a week of vacation in June, which afforded him much needed rest and relaxation in Maine. He is planning to take more time off in August.

DIACONATE

The Deacons have been involved closely with the Rev. Steve Silver in the **transition back to in-person worship**. They have discussed with church staff various safety protocols, including required mask use and the designation of physically distant seating in the pews. Kathy Beckett recommended her friend Bruce

McCoy, a mechanical engineer with HVAC training, as a consultant for air flow in the Sanctuary.

Deacons felt that most liturgical procedure could resume as before, although communion service will rely on individual, pre-packaged elements. It was also agreed that the Children's Community Corner should not return to their downstairs space this summer; Steve and Nan Parsons will work out alternatives.

Steve stressed the need for a weekly volunteer "**Zoom Greeter**," someone who is comfortable with remote-meeting set-up and hosting. We continue to monitor the technical aspects of our Zoom broadcasts of the worship service, with particular attention to sound quality (especially away from the pulpit and lectern mics) and wireless signal strength.

Outdoor worship services during the summer months continue to be an appealing option for many in our congregation. Deacons agreed that church members enjoy the outdoor format, which also affords increased community visibility.

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

That leaves us wondering how a loving, gracious God can exist in the world as it is currently configured. And if this God exists, why does this loving, gracious God let bad things happen? The answer to the first question is "Yes." The answer to the second is "Who knows?" What we can say is that God endows us with the ability to make a lot of things right. We can stamp out corruption, we can save lives that are endangered, we can offer support and caring to those who suffer.

Jesus offers each and all of us an example of how to live our lives, of sacrificial giving, of risking all for the Kingdom of God. We just have to look to Scripture for answers, to the life and service of Jesus, and overcome the all-too-human desire to find answers that may offer us facile and meaningless comfort but, ultimately, deny the truth of a God who cares.

Yours faithfully, *Steve*

OUR MISSION NEAR AND FAR

Wow! Your generous contributions to **Blanket Sunday** (\$1365) and **Shelter Sunday** (\$1390) combined to support two worthy causes, while honoring our mothers and fathers past and present. Both totals were *significantly* above average—Blanket Sunday nearly doubled last year's amount and raised more than in any previous year except 2007! FCC forwards Blanket Sunday contributions to the worldwide **CWS BLANKETS** program (cwsblankets.org), while Shelter Sunday gifts fund the important work of the Upper Valley chapter of **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY** (uvhabitat.org).

These offerings are vital to their recipient organizations. Many thanks to all who contributed!

THANK YOU For Blankets and Shelter!

Helping Our Headrest Neighbors Dress for Success

Getting the right job often depends on looking the part—perhaps more so for those recovering from addiction. Lori Bartlett, Vocational Employment Specialist at **HEADREST**, works with residents in recovery to apply for jobs and set up interviews. Headrest needed a new place to store a collection of professional clothing donated for this purpose.

Given FCC's proximity to Headrest's residential facility across Church Street, Lori wondered if we might have some space available. After rearranging and discarding some things downstairs, we found that space (*see below*)! Residents will visit FCC with Headrest staff by appointment, try on a few options, and maybe start to gain the confidence they need to build a new professional identity and career.

Do Your Part to Fill the Cart!

Greater Lebanon continues to struggle with poverty and food insecurity. Exacerbated by the economic challenges of the COVID-19 shutdown, local need remains high and will persist as pandemic benefits are phased out. To help address this need, we are resuming the monthly collection of items in our shopping cart in the Parish Hall, with a different beneficiary designated each month.

JULY—personal hygiene and laundry supplies for the residents of **DISMAS HOUSE**

AUGUST—non-perishable food and personal-care items for **LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Direct financial contributions to any Upper Valley service organization are always welcome. Thanks for fighting local poverty and hunger!



THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

SPRING WORK AND PLAY. A handful of volunteers cleaned up around the church grounds and spiffed up our trusty shed; UVMC has held outdoor classes at FCC while their building is renovated; and Ron Bailey guided a small hike on Signal Hill.



THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION



PENTECOST REOPENING AND CHILDREN'S SUNDAY! FCC resumed in-person worship in the Sanctuary on Pentecost Sunday, with masks and distanced seating required, and we welcomed Lola Baldwin and Nan Luebbert as covenant members that morning. June brought our annual celebration of the Children's Community Corner, with added joy and gratitude for being together after a year of remote learning.



MUSIC (BACK!) AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



Music
at the
Meetinghouse

Live Music Returns to FCC!

Classicopia—Sunday, Aug. 15, 1:00 (Violin/Piano) and Friday, Sept. 17, 7:30 (Four-Hand Piano)

Having logged countless hours of online concerts in the past year, pianist Dan Weiser is excited to play for an audience again in FCC's Sanctuary! He'll be joined by a violinist on August 15 and by his good friend Philip Liston-Kraft in September. The latter concert will honor Classicopia president and co-founder **Marcia Colligan**, who is retiring after 20 years of bringing great music to the Upper Valley. Program details still to come, but plan on enjoying live music again in our Sanctuary! For more, please visit classicopia.org.

The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, September 10 and 24, October 8 and 22, all 7:30 pm

Our comfy community venue for live local music returns with a full fall schedule. Conceived as an informal "listening room" for emerging musicians, each show features several acoustic acts, and patrons may come and go as they please. For more, please visit anoncoffee.org or email anoncoffeehouse@gmail.com.

Welcoming Our Wider Community

FCC has hosted innumerable outside groups, concerts, and events over the years, and while we do try to cover costs with rental fees, our primary purpose is to invite the community at large into our building—beyond our congregation's use of the Sanctuary for Sunday morning worship. Of course, the pandemic has prevented us from doing that for well over a year, but we're slowly returning to this important service.

We recently received some eloquent testimony about FCC's broader community role in a thank-you email from Heidi Jaarsma, whose daughter Chloe gave her senior cello recital in our Sanctuary in mid-June:

I wanted to let you know that yesterday's recital went perfectly. There is something so unique, and impossible to reproduce in other forms, about the shared experience of a live musical performance. The church is a beautiful, sacred, and joyful space for such an event, and we so appreciate the willingness of your congregation to share it.

*All the best,
Heidi Jaarsma*

On-Site Events at FCC

Things are beginning to happen again at your church! Just as we have resumed in-person worship services, some familiar outside groups are returning to FCC:

UV Professional Resource Network
Wednesday evenings, resumed June 16

Lebanon Recreation Department
Quilters' Retreat, July 16-17

Upper Valley Community Band
Monday rehearsals in July and August

NH Women, Infants, and Children
Resume bi-monthly clinics on August 26

Bel Canto Chamber Singers
Wednesday rehearsals resume September 15

All users are being asked to continue wearing masks and distance themselves while inside our building. Vaccination is strongly encouraged, and some groups are requiring that for their participants. (FCC's requirements remain subject to change, depending on local circumstances.)

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



Music
at the
Meetinghouse

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The “listening room” returns! *For more, please visit anoncoffee.org or email anoncoffeehouse@gmail.com.*

Outdoor Worship Service

All Are Welcome! (No RSVP Necessary)

Sunday, July 25, 10:00 am
FCC Front Lawn

Mask use and distancing encouraged but not required
Lawn chairs welcome; folding chairs will be available

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