



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

Lent begins this month.

Is everybody excited? Or at least interested?

Lent is a time of repentance. A time of getting right with God. A time for us to focus.

Yes, you've heard this before. I say it every year. Why? Because it bears repeating. Because we need to be reminded of this call. Because nobody is particularly excited about recognizing their shortcomings, or confessing their failings, or starting over.

The truth is you *need* to repent. I *need* to repent. Like death and taxes, the need to repent is unavoidable. We all sin. We all need to ask God for his forgiveness—even when we're sure we are right and have nothing for which we need to apologize. We can all do better.

So, where's the good news in all this? That's what Jesus was all about, right?

Well, the good news is that God never spurns us. We can always seek God's forgiveness. What does that mean for us?

First, do not confuse God's forgiveness with anybody else's. If you speed and are pulled over by a police officer, the cop will most likely write you a ticket, which you will have to pay, unless you want to go to traffic court and plead your case before a judge. You will be judged. Period. Sure, you may get away with a warning, but do you want to play the odds that way? With God, you won't be gambling.

But doesn't God judge us? Yes, he does. And he will forgive us, if we are repentant. We'll go forward with a clean slate. That's a big deal.

As I and many others have noted, God's grace is infinite. It doesn't run out. We can all receive God's forgiveness. All of us. Each one of us. No exceptions. The only catch, if you want one, is that you must *want* that forgiveness, and that means... repenting.

Think of repenting not so much as self-abnegation, but as opening a door. So, I invite you to join me in repenting this Lent, in welcoming God's forgiveness, in opening the door to God's love and healing power.

Yours faithfully, *Steve*

SUNDAY SERVICE



**One Great
HOUR
OF SHARING**

OGHS is a vital, national offering for mission initiatives around the world. Supporting healthcare, education, agriculture, emergency relief, and refugee assistance in over 130 countries, OGHS funds work with service partners to maximize impact.

We gratefully accept OGHS donations until Easter, April 20. Please give as generously as you can, thanks! (Payable FCC, memo "OGHS")

Community Dinners Are Back!

Sunday, March 23, at 5:00 pm

Leaders: ANN GARTNER & DAWN TROUTMAN

Many thanks to Ann and Dawn for leading this month's dinner! Look for volunteer signups soon.

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

Consider Leading a Dinner in 2025

If you're interested, menu resources are available, FCC can reimburse costs, and you'll *always* have help! **Questions? Contact the church office.**

Anyone can collaborate on leading a dinner—friends, coworkers, neighbors, ANYONE!

All Are Welcome to Worship at FCC

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

Ushers, Zoom Greeters, Liturgists Needed!

All are invited to serve in these essential worship roles, and no prior experience is required.

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.

LENT BEGINS MARCH 5



Ash Wednesday
Ecumenical Service

March 5 at 5:30 pm

United Methodist Church
18 School Street, Lebanon

All are invited to gather for this community service to initiate the holy season of Lent.

Lenten Lunch Bag Offering

With the beginning of Lent on March 5, the CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY CORNER asks again for your generous participation in our annual Lenten Lunch Bag Offering for two great organizations:

**WISE (wiseuv.org) and
Epilogos Charities (epilogos.org)**

WISE seeks to end gender-based violence through survivor-centered advocacy and education. Our Lenten collection will fund welcome bags given to the children and women at WISE's Safe Home. Epilogos seeks to improve the lives of those in San Jose Villanueva, El Salvador, a model for focused global outreach and a town dear to many at FCC. Our offering funds scholarships at SJV's school.

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

You are asked to collect savings from the sacrifice of a regular treat during Lent. Some suggestions include skipping a daily coffee or latte; foregoing munchies when watching TV; or having dinner at home and contributing the cost of eating out. **Whatever your sacrifices, please plan to return your donations on**

PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 13.

HOLY WEEK IS APRIL 13-20

MARCH 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
23 10a Worship/CCC 1p Rehearsal: Rua, Drown, et al. 5p Community Dinner	24 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p MSA	25 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir	26 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	27 3:45p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	28 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	1 10a UVMC Comm Chorus 1p UVMC Student Recitals
2 10a Worship/CCC (Communion) 11:30a Potluck Lunch Theater: <i>The Chosen</i> 1p Rehearsal: Rua, Drown, et al.	3 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	4 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir	5 ASH WEDNESDAY 3-6:30p UVMC 5:30p Ecumenical Service (LUMC) 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	6 3:45p 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 6:30p UV Coalition Commtty Forum	10 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p Diaconate	11 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir 7p Council	12 8a-3:30p WIC 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	13 3:45p UVMC Children's Choir 6p Terry Barber Master Class 7p NA Group	14 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	15
16 10a Worship/CCC	17 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	18 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir	19 3-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	20 3:45p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	21	22
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If you have questions or corrections regarding any event, please notify us at church@fccleb.org or 603-448-4281.

2025 ANNUAL MEETING

About 30 people attended Annual Meeting, which this year was held entirely on Zoom due to inclement winter weather. Leading all reports with a summary of his **pastoral message**, Rev. Steve Silver reminded everyone that Jesus had called all of us to be part of this community, and he would ask us now to step up and volunteer—which many already have, and we’re grateful for that.

Council chair Jon Scott thanked Brian Clancy for supplying reports for both Council and Stewardship. He noted that it had been a busy year, and Council had gotten much done. Steve reiterated our collective obligation to improve the Sanctuary audio system, as we’ve previously committed to do. He also called anew for action on our bylaws review, to decide what governance structure best suits the congregation’s current needs and capacity. Corrine Erskine suggested that we start with a new subcommittee, volunteering to serve on it herself. Moderator Barb Jones invited others to join this effort.

Trustees chair Valerie Nevel reported that Lisa Bybee of Parkers Accounting, in addition to her usual informal audit for the Annual Report, had visited FCC in May to conduct a more comprehensive review of our policies and procedures, interviewing staff and several volunteers. Lisa did note some weaknesses and potential improvements, and the Personnel Committee is addressing those.

Valerie noted that our investments had performed well in the past year, increasing in value despite our

having to draw from them more than we’d like. She honored and thanked those on the bequest list (including newly added Barbara and Gordon Sargent), who have built our endowment over the years through their generous provisions. She invited anyone who hadn’t yet provided for FCC in their estate plans to consider doing so.

For the **Diaconate**, Linda Gerlach offered her personal thanks to all deacons for their service. She noted that the new Diaconate welcome board was now displayed in the narthex. Rachel Silver, reporting for Christian Education, simply and enthusiastically summarized that “we have great kids.”

Although **Board of Governors** chair Walter Scott was unable to attend the meeting, Brian noted that Walter had gotten him in touch with our contractor for renovating the front steps. They are working to identify times this spring when the project would least disrupt the church’s busy calendar.

For **Memorial Gardens** Linda Jacobs reported that the memorial stone had been cleaned this year, and she reviewed work done on plantings and maintenance. Nan Parsons added that she plans to return to tending the back garden this spring, for which all are grateful.

Barb Jones admitted that the **Pastor-Parish Relations Committee** had not met in 2024, despite her stated intention to do so. She pledged to call at least one meeting this year and asked others to hold her “feet to the fire” on that commitment.

Reviewing the year in **Stewardship**, Jon emphasized that this is not just about money, however important and impressive that may be. It also depends on volunteer hours put in by the congregation. One of our proudest achievements this year was the resumption of Community Dinners, which, together with our Open Door Ministry, is perhaps our best expression of what stewardship means. He thanked those involved, particularly Dawn Troutman.

The congregation voted to accept all committee reports and moved on to the **Nominating Committee**. Barb referred to the proposed slate in the Annual Report, thanking Valerie also for doing considerable work to confirm members. She noted that a waiver of term limits was required for Bob Gerlach and Phil Hammond to continue serving as deacons, which the congregation granted by vote. Rachel added that after the report’s publication, Alicia Casey had agreed to join the Christian Ed Committee. With these updates, the congregation elected the full slate of 2025 nominations.

Outgoing Treasurer Dawn Troutman then introduced the **2024-25 budget report**, thanking all who had helped

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate	3/10 and 4/14, 7:00
Council	3/18 and 4/8, 7:00
MSA	3/24 and 4/28, 7:00

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

create it, including Valerie, Brian, Steve, and all committee chairs. Reviewing income and expenses for 2024, she pointed out that while we'd budgeted \$308k in total expenses in 2024, actual spending amounted to about \$51k less than that. We've discussed the need for a balanced budget, but committees and program areas have been responsible in their spending. Jon clarified that if a given amount is budgeted, it is not then guaranteed to be spent. Everything is reviewed by Council, and there are controls and safeguards in place. Some items, such as a sound-system upgrade, are not explicitly budgeted

for, but we do have resources to pay for these important items.

The congregation voted unanimously to approve the 2025 budget. Barb thanked Dawn and Valerie for their work and congratulated Bob Gerlach as he succeeds Dawn as Treasurer. All recognized Dawn for her years of service as Treasurer, and Brian noted that she'd made the work easier.

With the meeting limited to Zoom, members agreed to forgo singing the closing hymn. Barb instead read a final prayer written by a member of the congregation, asking for God's guidance for our church. Rev. Silver

thanked Barb and offered his own succinct benediction, thanking all for their time and service.

Full minutes of the 2025 Annual Meeting and copies of the 2024 Annual Report are available from the church office.

DIACONATE

Linda Gerlach opened the Deacons' February meeting by reading Pope Francis' words on being a Christian in action and a hypocrite in the absence of action. The group looked at a number of congregational-care needs and considered the usefulness of having a table or two set up at coffee hour to facilitate conversation. With the Diaconate welcome board now on display in the narthex, all thanked Deb Scott for moving that project forward.

Rev. Silver noted that Lent would open on Ash Wednesday, March 5; an ecumenical service will happen at the Lebanon United Methodist Church. Looking further ahead, Steve will likely begin his sabbatical sometime in early June.

The Deacons further discussed the children's ministry, with preference expressed for offering church school before (rather than during) Sunday worship. A summer break seems reasonable, though there is interest in a summer camp, remotely or with other congregations. The group suggested consulting Nan Parsons on what worked well. Linda will speak with Steve and Rachel and report back, and many feel that the ongoing forum for this discussion should be the Christian Education Committee.

Bylaws Review Subcommittee to Reconvene

A subcommittee of Council, chaired by Corrine Erskine, will soon revive earlier efforts to revise FCC's **Constitution and Bylaws**:

- ❖ To update our governance and committee structure in order to better reflect the current size and character of our congregation.
- ❖ To ensure that all responsibilities and functions necessary to the church's current operations are accounted for in our bylaws.

If you're interested in serving on this committee, or simply have questions or suggestions for this effort, contact the church office or Corrine Erskine (cerskine2@yahoo.com / 603-448-3919).

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.

What's WIC? *Getting to Know One of FCC's Regular Guests*

For over a decade now, FCC-Lebanon has hosted bi-monthly clinics of the Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program—popularly known as WIC. The Belknap-Merrimack Community Action Program operates the clinics, where income-eligible families can obtain free health screenings, nutritional advice, breastfeeding support, and basic service referrals. Practicing responsible healthcare and nutrition can be difficult for any family, but without WIC's help it would be impossible for many parents with limited means, working multiple jobs. "Thanks to WIC," says a typical client, "my children's health is on track." (And despite its name, many fathers take advantage of WIC's services, too!)

As an itinerant program with scarce resources, WIC depends on sites across the state to offer space for its clinics at minimal cost. The program has struggled with budget and staffing limitations, which aren't likely to improve soon. By providing WIC the space it needs, our congregation extends the compassion that Christ asked us to share with each other.

For more information, call 800-942-4321 or, for Belknap-Merrimack Community Action Program (which runs clinics in Grafton County), 603-225-2050. Alternatively, please visit www.dhhs.nh.gov.

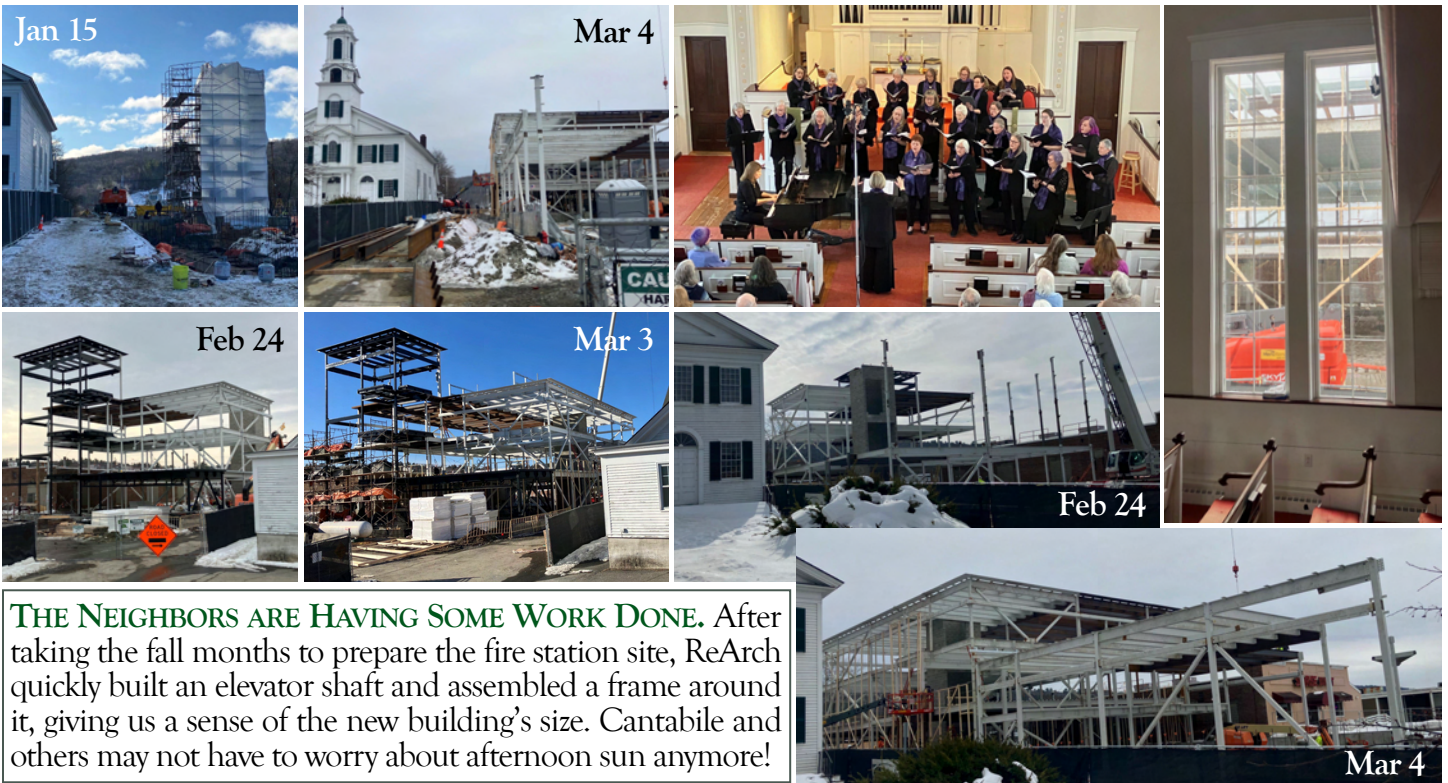
NH Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

In addition to its WIC clinics, the Belknap-Merrimack Community Action Program manages CSFP, a free healthy-food program for eligible seniors. This state-funded resource offers up to \$50 worth of food monthly to anyone aged 60 years or older who may need help stretching their food budget.

For further details about CSFP, please consult the brochures in the Parish Hall or contact BM-CAP directly (information at left).

SOUPER BOWL 2025 300 CANS

MANY THANKS TO ALL who generously contributed to this year's SOUPER BOWL! We may not have set a record—*call it another rebuilding year*—but we still helped provide for our neighbors. As always, we split the total among HEADREST, the UV HAVEN, and LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES.



THE NEIGHBORS ARE HAVING SOME WORK DONE. After taking the fall months to prepare the fire station site, ReArch quickly built an elevator shaft and assembled a frame around it, giving us a sense of the new building's size. Cantabile and others may not have to worry about afternoon sun anymore!

MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



Music
at the
Meetinghouse

Spring Concerts

All in the Sanctuary at First Congregational Church

The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, March 14 and 28, April 11 and 25, and May 9, all 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.*

Classicopia: Blowin’ in the Winds—Friday, April 4, at 7:30 pm

In an uncommon but expressive combination of instruments, pianist Dan Weiser joins oboist Margaret Herlehy and bassoonist Janet Polk for a selection of trios. Dan will also remember 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 with Andy Davis—Sunday, April 6, at 7:00 pm

Celebrate the arrival of spring with the Revels Spring Chorale and special guest Andy Davis of Nowell Sing We Clear. Their program will offer a magical blend of traditional and modern folk songs—with plenty of audience participation! *Slidingscale donation; tickets and more information at revelsnorth.org/programs-events.*

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

FCC welcomes a performance that has been a Holy Week tradition across Vermont for over three decades. Four singers (Martha Peck, Cara Hill, Brian Clancy, and Jose Schmidt) join a string quartet (Susan Janes, Jane Tulloh, Jody Racht, and Melissa Perley) for Haydn’s bracingly dramatic and sublimely poignant portrayal of Christ’s final hours on the cross. *Free-will donation (\$20 suggested; proceeds will support.*

Upper Valley Music Center CelloFest—Saturday, April 26, at 6:00 pm

Upper Valley Music Center again brings Sara Bennett Wolfe’s advanced Cello Choir from Connecticut for a collaborative concert with Ben Kulp and other UVMC faculty and students. *More details at uvmusic.org.*

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

UVMC hosts this ensemble of talented teenage musicians and singers for a concert and jam session, as they enjoy their New England tour. A program of Vermont Folklife, the group nurtures youth involvement in traditional music and dance. *Suggested \$10-20 donation, under-18 free; more at uvmusic.org.*

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

Cameo Baroque Benefit Concert—Saturday, May 10, at 7:00 pm

Register Now! Classicopia Summer Music Camp at FCC/UVMC—August 4-9, 9a-3p Daily

This immersive but seriously fun program offers instrumental and vocal instruction to students aged 8-17, with outstanding faculty and guest artists. *Details and registration at classicopia.org/summer-camp/.*

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

LENT BEGINS ON ASH WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5
Ecumenical Worship, Lebanon United Methodist, 5:30 pm
HOLY WEEK IS APRIL 13-20

One Great Hour of Sharing
Lenten Lunch Bag Offering
Thanks for your support!



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Meetinghouse

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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