



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

This isn't an anniversary that any of us wants to remember, but it was about a year ago that everything began to shut down because of the pandemic. I remember listening to a report on the radio as I drove away from moderating the spring meeting of the Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association that we held in Vermont. I heard how the coronavirus was scything its way through communities in Italy, and how difficult it was to impose lockdowns to contain the spread. Back then we imagined, with no evidence, that most of us would be fine here in America, that "this, too, shall pass," that we might somehow be able to hunker down for just a few weeks before being able to gather again.

Sigh. Reality intruded on our fantasies.

I remember sitting through a board meeting at the Congregational Library in Boston on Monday, March 9, seeing the alerts pop up on my iPhone: many places in the Boston area pulled the plug on classes and events in short order. We at the Library nixed a big conference that we were planning to hold later in the month. The pandemic would make itself felt everywhere, not just in big cities but in places like the Upper Valley. Later that week, we at FCC canceled in-person worship and took our first tentative steps into the world of Zoom-church. What a journey it's been.

I honestly can't say that this anniversary is a cause for celebration. But maybe it ought to be. Bear with me! Our congregation has been faithful, attending worship and giving generously to support the mission and ministry of FCC, while our national economy has held up after a very unnerving spring. Later, we survived a crazy campaign season. With God's presence, we made it through the storms that beset us.

The past year is not one for which I will feel unalloyed gratitude. Divinity school never prepared us aspiring clergy for doing church work amidst a pandemic, after all. I miss seeing you all in person every week. Frankly,

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Daily Lenten Reflections from the Rev. Steve Silver

Every day through Easter Sunday, receive a devotional reflection by email. Sign up by sending an email to silver@fccleb.org.

SUNDAY SERVICE

HOLY WEEK IS MARCH 28-APRIL 4

Sunday Worship Online

Zoom Services—Sundays at 10:00 am

Please join us on Zoom every Sunday morning for our familiar order of worship. We share prayers and readings, sing hymns, and listen to Steve's 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, we record the service each week and post it on YouTube, so you can watch it whenever convenient. The link is at www.fccle.org.

For either format, the weekly bulletin and other resources are posted on our website and sent out with the Sunday morning email. Stay connected!

Liturgists Still Needed!

Although we're not worshipping in person, we still invite volunteers to read scripture and prayers during our Zoom services. *Please contact the office if you are interested in participating in worship.*

Lenten Lunch Bag Offering

Our CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY CORNER has once again distributed decorated collection bags to ask your help for these important 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 lives of people in San Jose Villanueva, El Salvador, a model for focused global outreach and a town dear to many at FCC. Our offering funds scholarships for SJV's school.

The Lenten offering allows FCC's children to help kids in different 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—perhaps skipping a daily coffee or latte; forgoing munchies with your

TV or movies; or cooking dinner at home and contributing the cost of take-out. **Whatever your sacrifices, please plan to return all donations by EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 4.**

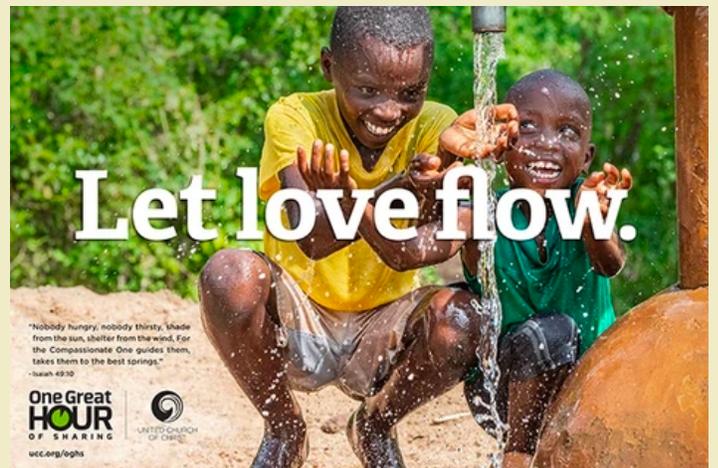


ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

Special Mission Offering
Spring 2021

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a vital, nationwide UCC offering for mission initiatives around the world. It funds healthcare, education, agriculture, emergency relief, and refugee assistance in over 130 countries. OGHS support is leveraged with local, national, and global service partners to maximize its impact in each of these areas.

OGHS is normally collected everywhere on the fourth Sunday in Lent, but we'll gratefully accept donations anytime through Easter, April 4. Please give as generously as you can—and thank you!



All contributions may be made payable to FCC, with "OGHS" in the memo line, and mailed to PO Box 230, Lebanon, NH 03766.

COMMITTEE NOTES

2021 ANNUAL MEETING

Roughly 45 people attended FCC's 2021 Annual Meeting on Zoom. After the Rev. Steve Silver offered an invocation, Moderator Barb Jones proceeded to invite **reports from officers and committee chairs**, all of whom expressed thanks to the congregation for diligent, faithful work amid the challenges of the pandemic year. Expanding on his words in the Annual Report, Steve noted that 2020, while strange, was fulfilling; he feels blessed to be FCC's pastor during this time. He's gratified by consistent worship attendance on Zoom, including familiar faces as well as others who have reconnected from a distance.

Steve highlighted three items. First, he asserted that our bylaws need to be updated to account for current needs and functions. Second, he suggested a committee to study how best to use technology for worship and other programs, during the pandemic and beyond it. Lastly, he called on us to clarify our campaign plans, which have been sidelined by the pandemic closure. Our church relies on these priorities to support its mission and ministry in the 21st century. Amy Driscoll endorsed the bylaw review in particular, as vital to strengthening and protecting the church itself going forward.

Speaking as our **church clerk**, Brian Clancy drew attention to the recently completed membership review, which has significantly changed our total. Valerie Nevel reminded everyone that the **church audit** by Parkers Accounting is a useful analysis but not a full, formal audit. On behalf

of the **Trustees** Valerie also thanked Steve for filing an application for a PPP loan, which we expect will be forgiven soon. She also gratefully referred to the list of those whose bequests have generously provided for FCC over the years.

Diaconate chair Barb Teeter thanked Larry Doyle for his service as he steps down and welcomed new deacon Chris Chase. Nan Parsons expressed gratitude to families of the **Children's Community Corner** for taking leadership roles and showing up on Zoom. Brandon Mason noted the update of interment forms and documentation for the **Memorial Gardens**. Kathy Beckett welcomed Lola Baldwin to the **Mission and Social Action Committee** and thanked Council for approving various MSA-advised donations throughout the year.

Barb Jones called attention to the work of the **Pastoral Relations Committee** to update pastoral compensation after this unusual year, and **Stewardship** chair Jon Scott added gratefully that the pandemic had not diminished the generosity of our congregation. Referring to the church's financial statements, Jon asserted that we need to "own the numbers" with a familiarity and transparency about FCC's finances—not so we obsess about the numbers, but so that we can do the more important work beyond them. He also reported that we are seeking IRS certification of our non-profit 501(c)(3) status.

Nominating chair Barb Jones then referred to our committee list and invited Church Council chair Linda

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate 3/8 and 4/12, 7:00

Council 3/16 and 4/20, 7:00

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

Jacobs to read a proposal to maintain all officers and committee rosters unchanged for 2021, except in a few specific cases. The congregation unanimously accepted the proposal after minimal discussion. Barb invited further input regarding our committee structure and a review of our bylaws, and it was noted that Council would be taking up these issues later in the month.

Revisiting the status of our **campaign planning**, despite the preoccupations of the pandemic, Rev. Silver invited us to have conversations to affirm or adapt our goals. Wendell Smith, on behalf of the planning committee, endorsed reviving it as well; Phil Hammond noted that launching a campaign would strengthen FCC despite the shutdown.

Treasurer Terry Ellison introduced the **proposed budget for 2021** by reiterating Jon Scott's appeal to "own the numbers." Terry pointed out a few details, including our receipt of the PPP loan in April, pay raises and vacation compensation for the staff, and a provision for contributions to our **escrow account**, which has been set aside for many years but mostly dormant. The Finance Committee recommends we resume contributions for "rainy-day" contingencies in a few

COMMITTEE NOTES

specific expense areas. (The budget report does not include the escrow account balance because it is only a summary of income and expenses, rather than a full statement of assets. Transactions to and from escrow will appear as they happen.) Some wondered whether the account could serve as a campaign start-up fund, but escrow funds are already earmarked for specific purposes, independent of (though perhaps related to) new campaign projects.

Asked about the budget for **capital improvements**, Terry explained that we intend to complete insulation projects and other items we'd hoped to address last year. Jon Scott added that these will yield return in energy-cost savings, as they improve our buildings' efficiency. Terry noted the Finance Committee intends to clarify what counts as a "capital expense," by amount or type of project.

Further questions concerned **organ maintenance**, recalling a suggestion to budget more for this annually. Ernie Drown replied with details of a modest, imminent repair that will be undertaken in the coming month and added his endorsement of the escrow plan, while cautioning that our aging organ will not last forever. Music Committee chair Brian Clancy explained that we've always budgeted enough each year for regular, required maintenance to sustain the organ; a full renovation or replacement would require extensive analysis, congregational discussion, and far more than any yearly allotment.

The 2021 budget was unanimously approved. Raising another item of new business, Rev. Silver related that

Volunteers Needed for Bylaws Review Committee

Following from previous discussions at our Annual Meeting and elsewhere, Church Council seeks volunteers to serve on an ad-hoc committee to review FCC's **Constitution and Bylaws**. The primary purposes of this review are:

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

If you are interested in serving on this committee—and in shaping FCC's policies and congregational governance in the future—please contact Council Chair Linda Jacobs (mrandmrs.j@comcast.net or 802-296-8251).

We ask that you respond by **TUESDAY, MARCH 16**, so that Council can move this process forward in a timely manner.

FOCUS ON STEWARDSHIP

FCC continues to depend on the offering contributions that you'd normally give in person on Sundays—in fact, the need is greater than ever. We realize that not everyone can give as generously as usual, but **we're grateful for contributions of any amount to these purposes:**

Regular Offering—Collected as unrestricted support for the general operations, ministries, and programs of the church. This includes all pledges and payments in our annual stewardship effort.

Communion/Open Door Offerings—Typically collected on the first Sunday of the month, 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 directed 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 OF YOU 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.

COMMITTEE NOTES

Mission and Social Action has been considering what public stance we can take to bolster the **Welcoming Lebanon** ordinance. Kathy Beckett, who led efforts to pass the ordinance, encouraged follow-through by both the city and our congregation. Jon Scott added that our actions should back up what the banner above our front door proclaims.

Amy Driscoll reinforced the need to review the process of **personnel and compensation evaluations** for everyone, especially non-pastoral staff who currently have no such process. Several noted that Church Council has prioritized this item on its upcoming agenda.

After Ernie Drown played the **closing hymn**, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” Rev. Silver again thanked the entire church staff and closed the meeting with a **benediction**. Everyone looks forward to returning to our familiar potluck tradition next year!

CHURCH COUNCIL

At Council **Mission & Social Action** chair Kathy Beckett celebrated the recent Souper Bowl record of 338 cans donated, divided among the Haven, Listen, and Headrest. She also relayed a suggestion from Ron Bailey that FCC get more involved in solutions for climate change. He and Wendell Smith will join a local Energy Advisory Council, a forum for several climate-advocacy groups. Council approved another \$1200 donation to UVIP’s Asylum and Sanctuary Fund, as it transitions to a new local organization called SHARe, which intends to bring

more asylum-seekers to the Upper Valley. Along with inquiries about other funding sources, there was firm agreement that FCC should support the transition to SHARe.

Nan Parsons thanked everyone for efforts to make the Zoom Christmas pageant a success. The **Children’s Community Corner** is focusing now on the Great Family. Despite pandemic conditions, the children are still offering decorated bags for the Lenten Lunch Bag collection.

Stewardship’s Jon Scott is leading an effort to verify FCC’s 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, as we cannot rely on the umbrella status of the national UCC. This effort requires a substantial filing of our financial records, along with the assistance of a professional accountant. Despite the associated costs, the process will firm up our non-profit status and enable us to set up online giving.

Speaking for the **Pastoral Relations Committee**, Jon affirmed the need to clarify processes for compensation and performance evaluation in our bylaws, relative to both the pastor and non-pastoral staff. The process should define job responsibilities as well. John Gilliatt reiterated a belief that responsibility for all staff and pastoral compensation be given to the Personnel Committee.

Similarly, Valerie Nevel highlighted the need for a Finance Committee representative in our **pastoral compensation** process, and the need to consider the pastor’s UCF stock benefits. She suggested we conduct some comparative research of other churches and pastors in the region, to ascertain that our pastor is fairly

paid. The Rev. Steve Silver dispelled any notion that he is underpaid; in recent years we have consulted NH Conference standards and calculating tools to ensure that. (Steve added, to general agreement, that comparison with other churches may be difficult, uneven, and not necessarily useful.)

It was agreed that these issues should be part of a **comprehensive review of FCC’s bylaws**. More broadly, our committee structure should reflect current volunteer capacity and the needs of our congregation and operations. From this premise came a motion to form a committee to update and refine our bylaws, which was unanimously approved.

In his **pastor’s report** Rev. Silver was pleased to say that Mascoma Bank has confirmed forgiveness of our PPP loan by the Small Business Administration. Another round of assistance may be available, but it’s unlikely that we would apply again.

Steve also revisited considerations around **reopening the church** for worship and other activities. With this pandemic and the possibility of future recurrences now unavoidable realities, he suggested we determine what FCC needs to be prepared going forward, in terms of health precautions, building ventilation, technology, and related issues. As vaccinations increase but remain inconsistent, we will have to be sure that returning to church is safe for everyone—and not just because the state government approves reopening, whenever that may happen. Other churches have not reopened; some have tried small-group in-person services, which may not work for us.

OUR LENTEN JOURNEY

LENT IS A TIME FOR US TO REFLECT upon our relationship with God, to examine our walk with Jesus, and to take stock of our lives as we prepare for the great miracle and gift of Easter.

LENT IS A TIME TO LOOK WITHIN our souls and hearts, to set aside those things that separate us from God and God's people.

LENT IS A TIME TO JOURNEY into the wilderness, so that we may fully enter into the New Creation.

HOLY WEEK WORSHIP AT FCC

March 28—Palm Sunday

10 am: Liturgy of the Palms (*on Zoom*)

April 1—Maundy Thursday

7 pm: Communion and Tenebrae, Stripping of the Altar (*on Zoom*)

April 2—Good Friday

12-3 pm: Quiet Meditation on the Seven Last Words, Sanctuary*

7 pm: Service of the Word and Prayer (*on Zoom*)

April 4—EASTER SUNDAY

6 am: Ecumenical Sunrise Service, Colburn Park*

10 am: Festival Worship Service (*on Zoom, or outdoors on front lawn if conditions allow**)

**We hope to offer these events in person; please look for more details as Holy Week approaches. Physical distancing, mask use, and other safety precautions required.*

In the short term, Steve noted that we do plan to have a safe, socially-distanced, ecumenical Easter sunrise service in Colburn Park. He was grateful for a good Ash Wednesday service and expressed appreciation of the Annual Meeting turnout and discussion on Zoom. Steve pursued an online study of Colossians with N. T. Wright, and he has planned a week of vacation in Maine in June.

DIACONATE

So far this year the Deacons have discussed successes and challenges of online worship, from our Advent and Christmas experiences to Ash

Wednesday practices and current plans for another Holy Week online. It's generally agreed that live music is an improvement over pre-recorded pieces, and using Zoom to produce a service recording seems to work well. Ernie Drown's brief historical notes in the bulletin are widely appreciated. For Easter, we plan a covid-safe sunrise service in Colburn Park, with the possibility of more outdoor worship as weather allows. Going forward, the Deacons agree that offering some online worship option is advisable.

Per Council's proposal, all Deacons agreed to continue serving through 2021 with the exception of Larry

Doyle, who asked to step down. The group extended its great thanks to Larry for his years of service, and in February they welcomed new deacon Chris Chase. We plan to formally commission Chris in person at the earliest opportunity. The Deacons are maintaining connections with their individual member contacts, with particular attention to a few specific pastoral-care situations.

Rev. Silver and the MSA Committee have discussed the next steps in our conversations about racial justice, as well as how FCC can support the new Welcoming Lebanon ordinance. The Deacons are considering how best to reinforce these efforts.

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

REMEMBERING THE VICTIMS OF COVID-19. On the eve of the Inauguration, the incoming Biden Administration organized a national vigil to mark the tragic milestone of 400,000 deaths in the U. S. from the pandemic since its arrival here early last year (that figure has now surpassed 525,000). The Lebanon Fire Department raised a massive flag in front of City Hall, and Jeff Williams tolled FCC's familiar bell, joining others across the region and country.



The Easter Lily Fund for the Open Door Ministry

As we're still unable to worship in the Sanctuary, we will not be offering our usual array of flowers on Easter morning.

However, as at Christmas, we still invite you to make a small contribution in honor or memory of family and friends. This "Easter Lily Fund" will support our Open Door Ministry for community assistance.

Please submit your dedication information by THURSDAY, APRIL 1; contributions will gratefully be accepted after that date. Dedications will appear in the bulletin on EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 4.

Many thanks for considering this special way of commemorating your loved ones while supporting our local mission.



The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

I'm all "zoomed out." But I think of the alternatives, of not meeting to worship or engage in shared ministry, and I am exceedingly grateful for the technology that allows us to maintain our communion with one another.

The coming weeks will be momentous. Many of us will have been vaccinated. But not all of us. And that means we will have to exercise discretion about gathering in person. But gather again we will.

We may meet outdoors at first, but we will see one another, worship with one another, and, as the cliché goes, be the church together. This will happen. The future will arrive. The question before us is, "Will we be ready?" The answer depends on our faith and preparation. Things will not simply go back to the way they were on March 8, 2020. They will be different, and not just at First Congregational. My hope is that we will be able to draw on our faith and one another, as we seek our way forward.

Yours faithfully,

Steve

Do Your Part to Fill the Cart—From Home!

Greater Lebanon has been struggling with rising poverty and food insecurity for some time, and these challenges have only increased during the past year amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

While we're not collecting items in our cart at church, local need is more urgent than ever.

Listen's food pantry on Hanover Street accepts non-perishable donations, and they serve to-go meals all week in WRJ. In addition to food donations, the Haven appreciates any financial contributions for its assistance programs.

In lieu of filling our cart, please consider contributing directly (online or by mail) to Listen, the Haven, the UV Humane Society, or another local service organization. Thanks to all for fighting poverty in our community.

A SOUPER BOWL RECORD!

While local interest in the football game was minimal this year, our congregation came up big in donations of canned soup and other non-perishable food items.

Between drop-offs at church and direct deliveries to our beneficiaries, FCC collected 338 cans this year!

The total was divided as always among HEADREST, the UPPER VALLEY HAVEN, and LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES.

Many, many thanks for a record year!



SEASONAL SMILES FROM A FAMILIAR FRIEND. Longtime member Edith Wheeler returned to the area last July to live at Wheelock Terrace in Hanover. Her daughter Brenda sent us these delightful photos from Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Edith's 95th birthday party in January. Edith is in "pretty good health," Brenda reports. "We do feel Wheelock Terrace has been a blessing," she adds. "She always looks good, and she is involved in activities and socializing, reading her newspaper every day... Her sense of humor has been very appreciated by the staff." Just as it's always been by all of us at FCC!

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

HOLY WEEK
AT FCC
MARCH 28 -
APRIL 4

Palm Sunday	10a Liturgy of the Palms (<i>on Zoom</i>)
Maundy Thursday	7p Communion, Tenebrae, Stripping of Altar (<i>on Zoom</i>)
Good Friday	12-3p Meditation on Seven Last Words (<i>Sanctuary</i> *) 7p Service of the Word and Prayer (<i>on Zoom</i>)
Easter Sunday	6a Ecumenical Sunrise Service (<i>Colburn Park</i> *) 10a Festival Worship Service (<i>on Zoom, or front lawn</i> *)

**Conditions permitting; physical distancing, mask use, and other precautions required*

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING / Lenten Lunch Bag Offering *Thanks for your support!*

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