



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

Have you ever been interested in getting things done “the easy way”? Well, if acquiring a title is on your to-do list, I may have a way forward for you, courtesy of an ad in a recent *New Yorker*. For only \$49.95 you can be a lord or lady—and help save the planet! That sounds a lot easier than doing something heroic, or giving away a boatload of cash, or going back in time to win a battle, or marrying into the aristocracy. No, just make a payment to the vendor, save some trees in Scotland, and you will be titled. True, you will most likely be shunned by those whose titles were inherited, bestowed by the Queen, or earned by doing something useful in the United Kingdom. Still, you’ll have a piece of paper showing the location of the plot of land you helped preserve, along with the knowledge that you paid to plant a tree. Frankly, this sounds about as legit as a star registry. Yeah, you can get a certificate stating that a particular celestial object has been named after you.

Both of these ventures remind me of the medieval practice of selling indulgences. Supposedly, they shaved time off the sentence one would serve in purgatory. Now to be clear, purgatory has no clear Biblical roots. But your gift would not only help your loved one escape limbo sooner; it would also help the Pope build St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. And while yes, the Roman Catholic Church got a building for the ages, it came at the cost of the Reformation, sundering the Church in the West.

The easy way is not always the right way. It will often lead to awful, or at least disappointing, consequences. This is just as true in our religious life as in other parts of our lives. If you’ve ever been on an exercise regimen, you know the old adage, “No pain, no gain.” There is a reason religious practices are known as disciplines. These things take effort, dedication, work. Prayer should be worth a bit of commitment. Nobody ever said it would be easy—why should praying be easy? We’re talking about communicating with the Almighty, the Divine Being, the One who created heaven and earth, and you and me.

This past year has been a discipline unlike any we might have imagined. But we’ve been creative and innovative, both in the church and beyond. While our political and social responses to the pandemic have often been

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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 worshippers are required to wear masks at all times and observe distancing in the pews; 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!

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.

None of these roles requires special experience or training! If you’re interested in serving in this way, please contact the church office.

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 at nlp3721@yahoo.com or 603-863-8354.

Do Your Part to Fill the Cart

Greater Lebanon continues to struggle with rising poverty and food insecurity, exacerbated by all the economic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. To address this need, we have resumed collecting items in our shopping cart in the Parish Hall, for a different beneficiary each month.

In October and November, we’ll collect non-perishable food and personal-care items for

THE UPPER VALLEY HAVEN

Thanks for fighting poverty and hunger in our wider community!

Neighbors in Need: “Unfailing Love”

Special UCC Mission Offering in September/October

The Neighbors in Need program supports ministries of justice and compassion across the US. Two-thirds of the collection supports the UCC’s Justice and Witness Ministries for various local and national initiatives, advocacy efforts, service projects, and the fight against systemic injustice. The rest goes to the Council for American Indian Ministry, the voice for Native Americans in the UCC, sustaining a proud denominational tradition of assisting Native populations.

This year, NIN is focused on serving homeless and immigrant neighbors and their communities.

Please contribute as you are able, either payable to FCC (memo “NIN”) or online at ucc.org/nin.



COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

For the **Children's Community Corner**, Nan Parsons reported to Council on plans for Kick-off Sunday, held outside to take advantage of weather and fresh air. Considering the ongoing community covid risk, she and Rev. Silver have decided that children's programming should start the year on Zoom, rather than downstairs in person. There was general support for this approach.

Nan has heard some feedback from parents hesitant about doing Zoom every week, and she is surveying families about best times to meet. Curriculum will use Godly Play resources and focus in part on stories of the prophets, Advent, and Jesus' parables. Nan would like to recruit more adult volunteers, in part as mentors. She and Steve have met with Kailyn and Chip about possible programming for older kids, beyond their help with the younger group.

For **Mission and Social Action**, Corrine Erskine noted that monthly dinners for Dismas House would end in October, unless there is any interest in continuing. The overall experience has been quite positive for FCC volunteers, but the MSA committee hasn't yet discussed it.

Rev. Silver presented an inquiry from a local group that provides **temporary housing for homeless families** in a mobile RV or tiny house. The initiative relies on a variety of property owners to host the home for scheduled periods of time, based on willingness and local zoning ordinances concerning temporary structures. Referring to a detailed

proposal, Steve noted that the project requires only a site on our lot, without using any of our facilities or resources unless we decide to offer those. He endorsed this "low-impact" proposal as both a ministry of compassion and a reflection on FCC's community presence.

Concerns focused on parking and snow removal, as the likely site for the tiny house would be the unpaved area at the far end of our lot, where snow is typically piled during winter. (It's not yet clear when FCC would host the project or for how long, but the group is planning for needs during winter months.) While snow removal can be resolved with Kevin Charbono, several Council members asked about insurance implications and the potential draw on FCC's resources. Council supported the project in principle, pending answers to these practical questions.

Linda Oronte expressed her sincere thanks to the congregation and church leadership for their support and assistance with Jim's memorial service in August. All recognized Jim's contributions to FCC's life and ministries over the years.

Church Administrator Brian Clancy reported that several **concerts and other events** are scheduled, and all users have been informed of (and have readily agreed to) our covid requirements of masks and distanced seating. Although Council voted in June only to *encourage* vaccinations among users, members considered whether that should now be *required*, even though FCC itself is unable to enforce that at every event. Council

voted to require vaccination, with the responsibility for enforcement falling to users themselves. Brian will communicate this new policy to user groups.

Responding to an inquiry about the **bylaw review process** initiated by an ad-hoc committee in the spring, Jon Scott explained that the process had slowed for a variety of reasons. The ad-hoc committee generated a productive survey of categorized responsibility areas, but a primary challenge is the need for a broader investigation into what we want our volunteers to do relative to what we want paid staff or professionals to do. Valerie Nevel volunteered her time to help resolve these challenges.

For the **Diaconate**, Barb Teeter reported on a discussion of current challenges in our worship services, as we continue to pursue both in-person and remote options. Rev. Silver noted that the NH Conference has actually recommended churches not meet indoors amid renewed covid concerns, and soon ventilation options will be limited by colder weather. Having viewed a few Zoom services while on his vacation, he appreciates those who continue to attend FCC remotely. He invited

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate 10/11 and 11/8, 7:00

Council 10/12 and 11/9, 7:00

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

COMMITTEE NOTES

comments about how comfortable people are with in-person worship as the pandemic persists.

Linda Oronte shared perspective as a DHMC nurse, attesting that the current delta-variant wave poses real danger for all ages. Other members of Council expressed concern as well, though all would prefer to continue in-person worship with our current precautions as long as possible. Our worship attendance is manageable in the spaced pew arrangement, and we are able to ventilate while it's warm enough. Steve asked about the possibility of the choir singing again, and while support for the choir's return is unanimous, all agreed that it would be safest for them to sing masked. Steve has appreciated Council's advice and leadership throughout the pandemic.

Steve, Linda Jacobs, and Brian Clancy reported on conversations with the leadership of Scouting Troop 279, reevaluating **our role as its charter organization**. While FCC has long provided the Troop with meeting

and storage space, it has become increasingly difficult for us to offer an effective charter representative to conduct essential administrative business on the Troop's behalf. The Scouts' leaders, meanwhile, have been considering the possibility of transferring to the local American Legion, which seems ready to provide these essential services. While there is some disagreement about this choice among the Scouts themselves, Council members are unanimous in accepting that we may no longer be able to serve their needs, despite our decades of tradition and respect for the program. The Scouts have submitted a formal request for FCC to release its charter, and all agreed that the Scouts should be enabled to pursue whatever they decide is in their best interest. Linda will sign the release on FCC's behalf.

DIACONATE

The Diaconate continues to discuss worship practices in our post-covid environment, from the serving of

communion to technological issues. We will keep relying on pre-packaged communion elements for now but may reconsider in coming months. September. The need for additional Zoom greeters persists, although several deacons have been trained now for this role. The Deacons will consider a wireless microphone for speakers sharing joys and concerns in worship, in addition to reviving the use of wireless hearing aids that FCC already owns. Jon Scott has advocated hard-wiring an ethernet connection to the Sanctuary, a project he recently completed with help from Brian Clancy; this stable internet signal should greatly improve our Zoom stream.

In other discussions, the Deacons have shared ongoing pastoral-care situations and addressed the need to recruit ushers, perhaps among youth as well. They also recognize that youth programming may have to involve ecumenical or inter-faith initiatives in order to attain enough participation.

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

wanting, we persisted and continued with our lives. Cheap solutions, easy answers might have been tempting, but most of us rejected them out of hand.

So, why do we continue to look for the easy way out? Why do we look for the path of least resistance? I might as well ask why the birds sing, or why the sky is blue. There are laws of physics and nature at work in our lives. We might try to deny them, but make them go away? Not happening.

You want to know something else that won't be going away? God's love.

Yeah, it may sound trite, but it has the benefit of being true: God loves each of us. Think about that. Then ask what you might do in thanksgiving to God, on whose endless, wondrous grace each of us depends.

Yours faithfully,

Steve



FCC's Building Use Policy

As we host worship services, concerts, and other regular events at FCC, we have continued to be cautious about the risks of COVID-19. Council has regularly revisited this important issue, and we are working closely with our user groups to ensure a safe environment for all.

All users are now required to be vaccinated, wear masks, and maintain physical distance (when possible) while inside our building. User groups themselves are responsible for enforcing these requirements at events.

FCC's policies are subject to change, depending on local data and circumstances.

Focus on Stewardship

Whether dropped in the plate on a Sunday or mailed in once a month, your offering contributions continue to be vital to our ministry as we move beyond the worst of the pandemic. We realize that not everyone can give to the same degree, especially as economic conditions remain unpredictable. Nonetheless, FCC is grateful to receive contributions of **any amount** to these purposes:

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

Special Offerings (e.g., the Lenten Lunch Bag Offering, Blanket and Shelter Sundays, and UCC offerings such as One Great Hour of Sharing or Neighbors in Need)—Collected once a year, in conjunction with an event or national campaign for a 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 either dropped in the collection plate or mailed to PO Box 230, Lebanon, NH 03766.



TWO ANNIVERSARIES. On September 11, with help from expert bell-ringer Jeff Williams, FCC joined Lebanon's morning ceremony marking 20 years since the 9/11 attacks. That evening Ernie Drown and Linda Radtke (both in early-20th-century period fashion) streamed a Zoom program of music and biographical sketches celebrating the centenary of Vermont's ratification of women's suffrage.

CHRISTMAS COMES TO ALL The Listen Holiday Basket Program



For years FCC has participated in the **Holiday Basket Program** organized by Listen Community Services. The economic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have increased demand for this program, as families struggle to provide warm clothing for their children and food for holiday meals. **There is already a wait list.**

Listen is once again doing all the shopping this year, **but they need our help.** While we won't be offering items on our familiar giving tree, please consider a gift toward FCC's share of this program. **Contributions gratefully accepted until November 15** (payable to FCC, memo "Listen Baskets").

Thanks to all of you for giving to our neighbors in the true spirit of Christmas!

Operation Christmas Child is Happening Online

National Collection Week: November 15-22

You're invited to participate in OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD, an annual gift campaign organized by Samaritan's Purse, which ships shoeboxes of supplies and toys to children worldwide. Gloria and Phil Hammond have managed our collection at FCC in recent years; this year you may build shoeboxes online before national collection week, November 15-22.



For more information about this year's virtual operation, and to build a box online, please visit www.samaritanspurse.org/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/. Thank you!



A HAPPY CLASSROOM IN SJV. We received this delightful photo from Epilogos Charities, showing a group of students and teachers gathered around an abundance of learning resources, supplies, and fun games. The school in San Jose Villanueva, El Salvador, purchased the items with part of our donation from this year's Lenten Lunch Bag offering, by which FCC has "adopted" this particular classroom. As a card that accompanied the picture attested, "The students and teachers were very excited to receive new, fun learning materials!" **Thanks to all who have supported Epilogos over the years!**

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

EARLY FALL AT FCC. We enjoyed gorgeous weather for our Kick-off Sunday celebration on September 19 outdoors—with pizza and treats afterward reminding everyone what coffee hour feels like. A few weekends later a small but dedicated band of walkers sustained FCC's history of participation in the CROP Walk.



MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



**Music
at the
Meetinghouse**

Upcoming Concerts at FCC

All in the Sanctuary. Masks, distanced seating, and vaccination required.

The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, Oct. 22, Nov. 5 and 19, and Dec. 3, all 7:30 pm

Come enjoy our popular community venue for live local music! Conceived as an informal “listening room” for emerging musicians, each show features several acoustic acts. *For more, please visit anoncoffee.org.*

Classicopia: Four-hand Holiday—Sunday, December 5, at 1:00

Pianists Dan Weiser and Elizabeth Borowsky collaborate on a program of holiday favorites. *Adults \$20, FCC members \$15, children free; for more details and discounted advance tickets, please visit classicopia.org.*

Bel Canto Chamber Singers—Saturday, December 11, at 7:30 / Sunday, December 12, at 4:00

We’re delighted by the prospect of Bel Canto returning to our Sanctuary under the direction of Jane Woods. Program details TBA. *Adults \$15, students \$10, under 13 free; more at www.belcantosingers.org.*

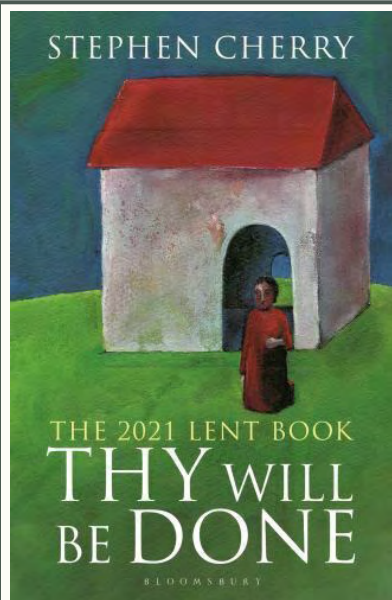
UVMC Messiah Sing—Saturday, December 18, at 3:00

After a year off, we hope to join our neighbors again in bringing back our annual performance of George Frideric Handel’s beloved oratorio, just in time for Christmas! *More details to come—please stay tuned.*



PLENTIFUL FALL MUSIC. Margaret Gilmore played her cello for communion, and we enjoyed several concerts—Elizabeth Borowsky and mother Cecylia Barczyk; Ernie Drown and Cameo Baroque; Roseminna Watson and Melody Fader; and Classicopia’s Dan Weiser with the other two Borowskys, Emmanuel and Frances.



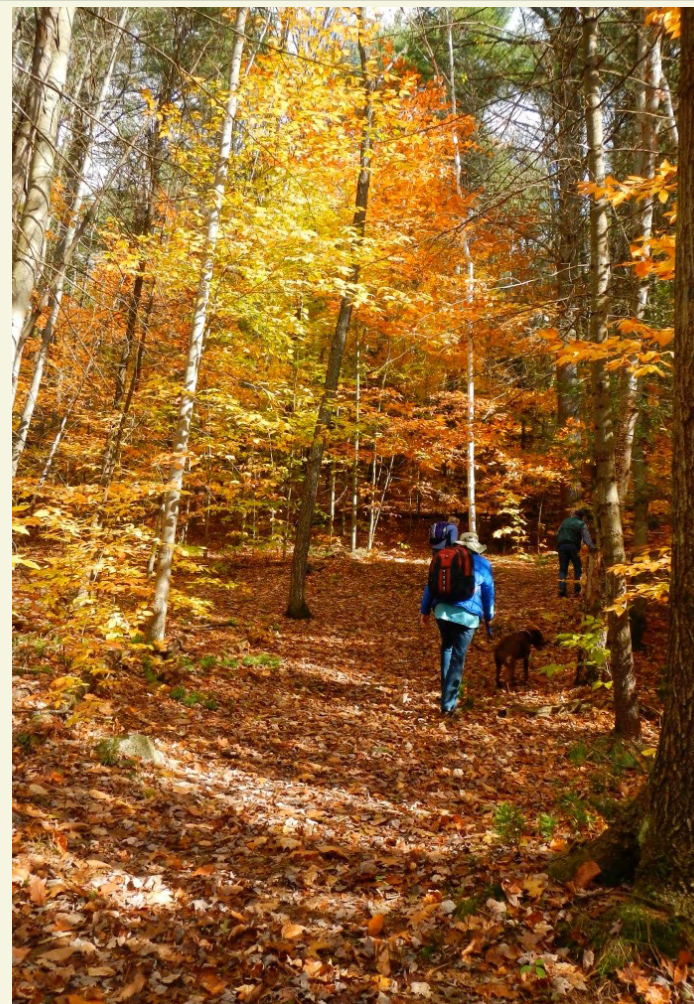


Thy Will Be Done: A Zoom Reading Group

We say it every week. Many of us say it more frequently. You know, the Lord's Prayer. But how familiar are we with the text and what it means? Think about that phrase—"Thy Will Be Done." What are we asking for when we say those words? What does this prayer mean to you, to the church, to all of us? To consider these questions we'll read Stephen Cherry's accessible, well-researched study, *Thy Will Be Done*. Interested? Just let us know and we'll get you the book!

All are invited to participate. Books will be provided free of charge, but advance registration is required. Sessions will be scheduled according to participants' availability, starting the week of October 17.

To join the reading group or ask questions, contact Rev. Steve Silver at silver@fccleb.org or 603-448-4281.



FCC Outing Club: Farnum Hill

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 24, AT 12:30 PM

Meet at Trailhead on Poverty Lane

(across from entrance to Poverty Lane Orchards)

Plan to join this next adventure of FCC's Outing Club, led by Lebanon's Park Ranger—Ron Bailey!

Farnum Hill features glacial boulders, beautiful stone walls, and gorgeous stands of hardwood trees.

The hike covers relatively easy terrain and offers good views north and south; there is a short loop option in addition to the longer, two-mile loop.

Bring a picnic lunch, water, and appropriate clothing.



All church members and friends are invited to share this experience of God's creation!

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

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at the
Meetinghouse**

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All in the Sanctuary. Masks, distanced seating, and vaccination required.

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CHRISTMAS COMES TO ALL

The Listen Holiday Basket Program

Contributions accepted until November 15



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