



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

The buzz right now is about the total solar eclipse that we'll experience on April 8. I keep hearing about "totalities" and "coronas." I know (and knew long ago) never to stare up at an eclipse. I know that long ago, an eclipse would be taken as an omen of something momentous about to happen. We now know why eclipses happen, and we can say that it will be an impressive event, hopefully not obscured by bad weather. But the omen aspect? Sorry, but this event signifies nothing.

However, I will share with you an event, recently transpired, that signals the future: Easter.

Okay, Easter is not as flashy as a total solar eclipse, but it is as big a deal. On Easter we celebrated God's triumph over death and evil and sin. Now, wait a moment, you may say. People are still dying, evil is still abroad in the world, and, sadly, people are still sinning. But the church responds. But.

But death need no longer have the final word. Evil may be combatted. And sin? Why do we all give in to its blandishments? The truth, if only we want to see it, is that we can live a life free of the scourge of death, the power of evil, and the temptation of sin. The only question that remains is: do we want to? Do I want to? Do *you* want to?

I suspect that all of us will answer, "Hell, yes!" but will then lead lives which answer, "No." Maybe not in big, definitive ways. But we'll do small things that will give power to death, that will enable evil to spread, and that will engage in sin.

Sounds pretty defeatist, doesn't it?

Well, Easter is not defeatist. Easter is an invitation to each of us to follow the path of Jesus, the risen one, the Son of God, to new life, to a future lived with our creator. That may be dangerous, but it's a risk worth taking.

Yours faithfully,

Steve

SUNDAY SERVICE

All Are Welcome to Worship at FCC

Sundays at 10:00 AM (Sanctuary/Zoom)

Coffee Hour Served Weekly!

New volunteers welcome to provide food and serve.

Zoom Greeters and Liturgists Needed!

Congregation members are essential to our worship services as ushers, Zoom greeters, and liturgists.

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

Do Your Part to Fill the Cart!

Join the fight against poverty and food insecurity by leaving contributions in our shopping cart in the Parish Hall, benefiting local service organizations. **This month, we're collecting non-perishable food and personal-care items on behalf of:**

THE UPPER VALLEY HAVEN

For a list of current and ongoing needs, please visit uppervalleyhaven.org.

Please consider a donation, and thank you!

Use This Box!

The **DIACONATE BOX**, located in the Narthex just inside the front door, is ready for your suggestions, comments, questions, prayer requests, and anything else FCC-related! Whatever's on your mind—thoughts about something our church does, or something you'd like it to do; questions about our worship service or liturgical practices; or simply a request for prayers or pastoral care—write a note, fold it, and drop it the box. Deacons will check the box periodically and forward notes to the relevant staff. You may remain anonymous if you wish, and all notes will be treated with appropriate discretion.

We're excited to see what the box will yield!



Focus on Stewardship

Whether dropped in the offering plate on a Sunday or mailed into the office, your contributions remain vital to our ministry throughout the year. We realize that not everyone can give at the same level, especially amidst ongoing economic challenges. But FCC is grateful for **any contribution** to these purposes:

Regular Offering—Collected as unrestricted support at any time, for our general operations, ministries, and programs. This includes all your pledges and contributions to our annual stewardship effort.

Communion/Open Door Offering—Collected on first (communion) Sundays, directly funding our Open Door Ministry for community assistance (see p.6 below). Any donation in a communion envelope goes to this fund, but you may contribute to the Open Door Ministry at any other time, too.

Special Offerings (e.g., the Lenten Lunch Bag Offering, Blanket and Shelter Sundays, and UCC offerings such as Neighbors in Need or One Great Hour of Sharing)—Collected once a year, usually in conjunction with an event or a broader, national campaign for a mission or service cause.

THANKS TO ALL for so generously supporting these diverse purposes—in our congregation, in the Upper Valley, and beyond!

All contributions should 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.

FCC's Memorial Garden Is Open to All

Many longtime members of our congregation have chosen to have remains interred in our Memorial Garden. As spring weather returns, all are invited to pause for reflection, read the names on the stone, and remember all those we've lost.

If you are interested in learning more about the Memorial Garden, please contact the church office.



APRIL 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31 EASTER SUNDAY 6a Sunrise Service (Colburn Park) 10a Festival Worship/CCC	1 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	2 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	3 3-6:15p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	4 4-6:15p UVMC/ Children's Choir 7p NA Group	5 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	6 10a-12p UVMC Chorus
7 10a Worship/CCC (Communion)	8 No UVMC (<i>Leb School Vacation Week</i>) 7p Diaconate	9 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir 7p Council	10 8a-3:30p WIC No UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	11 No UVMC 7p NA Group	12 No UVMC 6:30p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat	13 9a-5p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat 7p Revels North Spring Sing
14 10a Worship/CCC	15 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	16 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	17 3-6:15p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	18 4-6:15p UVMC/ Children's Choir 7p NA Group	19 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	20 10a-12p UVMC Chorus
21 10a Worship/CCC 2p Classicopia: The Folk Cello	22 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	23 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	24 3-6:15p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	25 11a-6p WIC 4-6:15p UVMC/ Children's Choir 7p NA Group	26 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	27
28 10a Worship/CCC 2p Piano Recital (Students of Eliz. Borowsky)	29 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	30 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	1 3-6:15p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	2 4-6:15p UVMC/ Children's Choir 7p NA Group	3 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	4 7:30p Bel Canto: Your Soul Is Song
5 10a Worship/CCC (Communion) 4p Bel Canto: Your Soul Is Song	6 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	7 1p Cameo Baroque 4:30p FCC Choir	8 8a-3:30p WIC 3-6:15p UVMC	9 4-6:15p UVMC/ Children's Choir 7p NA Group	10 5-6p UVMC Suzuki Program 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse (Season Finale)	11 10a-12p UVMC Chorus 7p Harmony Night

If you have questions or corrections regarding any event, please notify us at church@fccleb.org or 603-448-4281.

NEWS AND NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

Dawn Troutman opened Council's March meeting with a reflection about the importance of looking forward, not toward the past, in our work together. Rev. Steve Silver then reviewed his **Pastor's report**, emailed prior to the meeting. He explained that he'd been in touch with West Lebanon Congregational and Lebanon United Methodist about collaborating on an Easter sunrise service in Colburn Park. He also thanked Pierce Plumbing for their good work in replacing the Parsonage kitchen faucet. Lastly, Steve described the bylaws review as a "dark cloud hanging over us"—we need to restart this critical process and move it forward.

Referring to her **Treasurer's report**, Dawn thanked Brian Clancy and Jon Scott for having clarified the stewardship total, which includes a portion of a 2023 year-end gift and a large grant from a donor-advised legacy fund. Jon expressed gratitude for the foresight in providing for FCC in such an estate plan, and he commented that references to our budget "deficit" haven't quite been accurate, as we're not creating debt or spending money that we don't have. We've always paid our bills. Jon encouraged us as church leadership to be clearer about the language we use to discuss church finances. Brian observed that our 2023 budget had a similarly sizeable "deficit," but we ended up spending far less than projected; our budget is more an illustration than a fixed commitment or obligation to spend a certain amount. Jon hopes we can

better communicate and explain church finances to the congregation this year. The financial summaries in our Annual Report are much clearer now than even a few years ago, but we could still do better; Jon offered to speak about this in worship if helpful.

Jon then invited Council members to state two things they'd like to see us achieve this year, short-term or long-term. Linda Oronte, recalling large numbers of kids at FCC when she taught Sunday school many years ago, wants us to focus efforts on **growing our children's program** and bringing more families to the congregation. Jon agreed that this should be one of our top priorities. Dawn shared a conversation she recently had on the front sidewalk with a woman passing by with her young daughter, recently moved to the area. The girl was curious about what happened at church, having had no experience with it, but her mother responded by telling her that a worship service was "the most boring hour" she knew. Dawn's point was that we need to maximize the activity at church, to have the lights on and things happening, to invite the kind of curiosity the girl showed, in hopes that such curiosity would win out and draw more folks inside, young and old alike. Barb Jones agreed with Linda's emphasis on growing the children's program; she also identified the **Sanctuary sound system** as a priority, maybe not the biggest but very important.

Linda Jacobs also voiced support for drawing more children and families to church, and she joined others in

naming the **bylaws review** as an urgent priority. To expand on that point, Jon asked people to try to identify what might be better or different with a revised, updated set of bylaws in place. Linda replied that we wouldn't need so many to fill committees and positions, better respecting the capabilities of our smaller congregation. Brian added that volunteer responsibilities and roles would be more meaningful, as they would address needs that we've thoughtfully identified and that more accurately reflect how our church now functions.

Walter Scott acknowledged needing to have a sense of who's currently serving on the **Board of Governors**, in order to connect, plan, and work together as a committee. He named the improvement of the front steps as a tangible, finite goal that would enhance our accessibility and image. Brian added the related need for discreet but clear signage around the property, particularly for the benefit of first-time visitors or those attending events other than worship.

Dawn added the goal of reviving a schedule of **community dinners**, even if just every other month, as that's both a service and a way to create activity in our building. There

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate	4/15 and 5/13, 7:00
Council	4/9 and 5/14, 7:00
MSA	4/22 and TBD, 7:00

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

NEWS AND NOTES

seems to be sufficient interest in reviving these dinners, and we have history and experience in providing them. The main challenge is finding volunteer labor to cook and serve, as our congregation's capacity for that is diminished, but it's possible we could draw on outside groups to collaborate with us. Dawn has spoken to WISE and LISTEN for guidance about when to offer the dinners, how to promote them, and how to facilitate transportation.

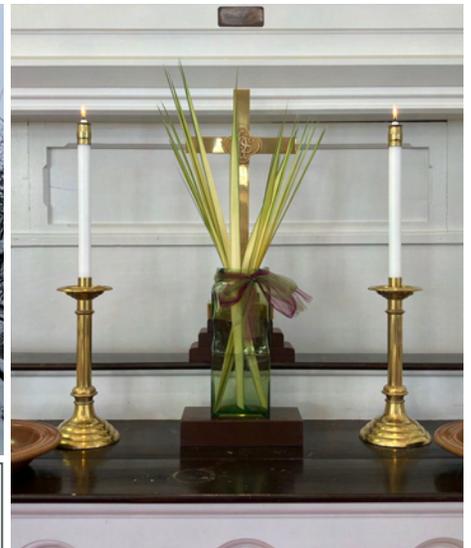
Linda Oronte suggested that local social workers might be a resource to consult as well.

Walter Scott and Barb Jones both reiterated their desire for enabling **online donations**. There is broad, long-standing support for this goal among the congregation.

Jon endorsed all the various goals mentioned. He added the urgency of holding a **Pastor-Parish Relations Committee** meeting before this

summer—this is an essential way for us to support our pastor and offer the congregation an opportunity to advise and inform his work with their feedback.

Lastly, Jon reported that new staff compensation rates for 2024 had been communicated to our payroll service (retroactive to January 1). The **Personnel Committee** will be working to codify our procedures, policies, job descriptions, and other basic HR items in coming weeks.



SNOW FOR HOLY WEEK. After a relatively mild winter, an unexpected storm buried Lebanon under two feet of snow March 23—a day before Palm Sunday.



BARBARA L. SARGENT
(1932-2023)
GORDON F. SARGENT
(1932-2024)

Three months after his beloved Barbara passed, Gordon Sargent made a final visit to our Sanctuary, where both had been confirmed almost 80 years earlier. The Sargents' passing is surely a loss—both for FCC and for Lebanon itself—but our congregation is far richer for their decades of community devotion, faithful service, and good humor.

Our Open Door Ministry

Supporting Our Community, One Gift Card at a Time

Throughout the year our neighbors come to the church office seeking assistance. Whether it's a tank of gas, food for dinner, or payment toward rent or utility bills, our congregation offers help through the **OPEN DOOR MINISTRY**. Available to anyone in Lebanon and nearby towns, this ministry is one of the most vital services we extend to our community, especially amidst so many post-pandemic challenges.

We don't ask for proof of need; the "Open" Door is just that. We do ask recipients to wait at least four months between requests, just to ensure fairer distribution. FCC has responded to these needs for years, but we *never* have enough to assist everyone—**demand has increased considerably, and we now have helped over 600 people.**

Those who come to us aren't irresponsible or lazy, and most (about 75%) request help just once or twice, rather than becoming dependent on the program. Some are chronically unhoused; some have just been evicted or moved to the area. Some have just lost a job or started a new one. Some are driving more to care for an ill family member; some are referred to us by a counselor at LISTEN or WISE. **All are our neighbors.**



The Open Door is kept open by your contributions, including monthly communion offerings, supplemented by the Mission and Social Action Fund (from the Dole Trust). We distribute \$25 gift cards for gas and food (purchased from Jake's Market and Price Chopper, respectively), and we write checks in modest amounts for rent and utilities. **In every case, our ability to help those in need depends on you, our congregation. And because of you, we can serve a lot of people—your neighbors thank you!**



EASTER 2024
He Is Risen! Alleluia!



MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



Music
at the
Meetinghouse

Spring Concerts

All in the Sanctuary. Masks welcome but optional.

The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, April 5, 19, and 26, and May 10, all 7:30 pm

Our comfy community venue for live folk music is thriving in its fourth season! An informal “listening room” for emerging musicians, each show features several acoustic acts. Come and go as you please; baked goods and hot drinks available. *Free admission, donations welcome. For performers and more, visit anoncoffee.org/.*

Revels North Spring Sing: Music of the Green and White Mountain States—Sat., April 13, 7:00 pm

Celebrate the return of Revels North’s Spring Sing, with music of Vermont and New Hampshire as well as some sing-along favorites. Following a day of workshops, the concert at FCC will feature Artistic Director Alex Cumming and some special guests. *Tickets (concert only) \$15-35; more details at www.revelsnorth.org.*

Classicopia: The Folk Cello—Sunday, April 21, at 2:00 pm

South African cellist Jacques-Pierre Malan joins Dan Weiser for an exploration of folk influences in music for cello and piano. The duo will play Edvard Grieg, Astor Piazzolla, and a suite based on Georgian folk tunes by Sulkhan Tsintsadze. *Adults \$20, FCC members \$15, children free; more at classicopia.org/concert/the-folk-cello/.*

Bel Canto Chamber Singers: Your Soul is Song—Saturday, May 4, at 7:30 / Sunday, May 5, at 4:00

Director Jane Woods and Bel Canto celebrate the hope and renewal of spring in a varied program for choir, piano, and strings, featuring music of J. S. Bach, Felix Mendelssohn, Eric Whitacre, Joan Szymko, Ola Gjeilo, and more. *Adults \$15, students \$10, under 13 free; for more, visit www.belcantosingers.org.*

Harmony Night A Cappella Concert—Saturday, May 11, at 7:00 pm

Harmony Night, the Upper Valley’s multi-generational *a cappella* community chorus directed by Mark Nelson, offers a spring program of music from a variety of eras and cultures. *Free-will donation.*

Cameo Baroque Benefit Concert—Sunday, May 12, at 2:00 pm

This superb ensemble (Ernie Drown, Beth Hilgartner, Leslie Stroud, and Laurie Rabut) shares a selection of music by French Baroque composers François Couperin, Marin Marais, Jean-Baptiste Quentin, and Jacques de Bournonville. *Free-will donation, beneficiary TBD; more at www.cameoarts.org.*

UVMC Sing & Play Festival—Saturday, May 18 (various times/events throughout the day)

Classicopia: Fabulous Females—Sunday, May 19, at 2:00 pm

Brooks Hubbard: A Benefit for Good Neighbor Health Clinic—Sunday, May 19, at 7:00 pm

Cantabile Women’s Chorus: Early Voices—Saturday, June 1, at 4:00 pm

Register Now! Classicopia Summer Music Camp at FCC/UVMC—August 5-10, 9a-3p Daily

This immersive but seriously fun program offers instrumental and vocal instruction to students aged 8-18, 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



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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