

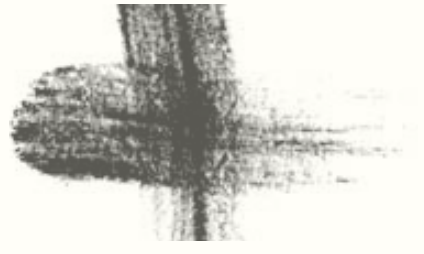


# Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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## The Pastoral Perspective

I'm writing this a couple days after eastern Turkey and northern Syria were hit by an earthquake which led to the deaths of more than 19,000 people. People are without homes and shelter, and the temperatures are bitterly cold. The pictures and videos that have been published are gripping and moving.

Another disaster, more dead people.

Remember the Asian tsunami back in 2004? Almost 228,000 people in countries around the Indian Ocean perished. How about the quake in Haiti in 2010, which devastated its capital and killed thousands? How about Hurricane Katrina in 2005? Between 1,300 and 1,800 lost their lives, and New Orleans was flooded. The litany of destruction is seemingly endless. So much damage, so many injured.

All of these were natural events, or, as the insurance industry would categorize them, "acts of God."

Really? Is this what God does? I don't think so.

I understand the urge to categorize everything and every event. That's what we humans do. We seek to make sense of the incomprehensible, to offer up simple, easy-to-digest explanations when none exist. Talk about shifting tectonic plates, and many peoples' eyes will glaze over.

But eye glazing doesn't obscure reality. The earth is a physically complex place that God, working through the laws of nature, fashioned in such a way that we, and all life on the planet, are able to exist.

None of this means that God does not love us, that Jesus is not with us, that the Holy Spirit is not present when we suffer and hurt. God is with us at such times, and if we recall, Jesus told us that we will be his hands and feet. So, we are called to help those in need, with both our physical presence and our money.

Sometimes, it feels all too much. "When will it stop?" we ask.

The short answer is, "never." People will always be in need; people will always suffer from acts of nature. According to Matthew 26:11 and John 12:8, Jesus told the disciples that they would always have the poor. That

Continued on Page 7

# SUNDAY SERVICE

## All Are Welcome to Worship at FCC

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

*For in-person worshippers, masks and vaccination are strongly encouraged but optional.*

### Coffee Hour Served February 19!

We've resumed this popular fellowship opportunity on one Sunday monthly. Many thanks to Corrine Erskine and Barb Laro for volunteering this month. New volunteers always welcome—on any Sunday!

### Greeters and Liturgists Needed!

Congregation members sing in the choir, serve as ushers and Zoom greeters, and read as liturgists. Additional options include reading prayers, sharing stewardship messages, or even leading children's moments. **All are invited to serve in these essential roles, and no prior experience is needed (though Zoom greeting requires some basic training).**

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



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING (OGHS) is a vital, nationwide 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 various service partners to maximize its impact in these areas.

*OGHS is observed nationally on the fourth Sunday in Lent, but we'll gratefully accept donations until Easter, April 9. Please give as generously as you can, thanks! (Payable to FCC, memo "OGHS")*

## LOOKING TOWARD LENT



Ash Wednesday  
Ecumenical Service

February 22 at 7:00 pm  
Lebanon United Methodist Church

*Please join with our neighbors in this annual service to initiate the holy season of Lent.*

## Lenten Lunch Bag Offering

With the beginning of Lent on February 22, 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](http://wiseuv.org)) and  
Epilogos Charities ([epilogos.org](http://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 children to help other kids in tough circumstances, encouraging them to see stewardship as a way to share God's love.*

You are asked to use the decorated bags to collect savings from the sacrifice of a regular treat during Lent. 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 2.**

## HOLY WEEK IS APRIL 2-9

# F E B R U A R Y 2 0 2 3

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>29</b> 10a Worship/CCC 3p UV Baroque: Italian Concerto	<b>30</b> 4-8p UVMC Suzuki Program	<b>31</b> 4:30p FCC Choir 6p GB Tai Chi	<b>1</b> 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	<b>2</b> 7p NA Group	<b>3</b> 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	<b>4</b>
<b>5</b> 10a Worship/CCC (Communion)	<b>6</b> (No Suzuki Program)	<b>7</b> 4:30p FCC Choir 6p GB Tai Chi	<b>8</b> 8a-4p NH-WIC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	<b>9</b> 4:45p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>12</b> 10a Worship/CCC 11:30a Annual Meeting 2023 (Zoom only) 3p Ben Kulp and Will Ogmundson	<b>13</b> 4-8p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p Diaconate	<b>14</b> 4:30p FCC Choir 6p GB Tai Chi 7p Church Council	<b>15</b> 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	<b>16</b> 4:45p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	<b>17</b> 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	<b>18</b>
<b>19</b> 10a Worship/CCC	<b>20</b> (No Suzuki Program)	<b>21</b> 4:30p FCC Choir 6p GB Tai Chi	<b>22</b> Ash Wednesday 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	<b>23</b> 11a-6p NH-WIC 4:45p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> Prepared to Serve 2023 (Pembroke, NH)
<b>26</b> 10a Worship/CCC 2p Classicopia: Black Brilliance	<b>27</b> 4-8p UVMC Suzuki Program	<b>28</b> 4:30p FCC Choir 6p GB Tai Chi	<b>1</b> 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	<b>2</b> 4:45p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	<b>3</b> 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	<b>4</b> 9a-2p UV Habitat Board Retreat
<b>5</b> 10a Worship/CCC (Communion)	<b>6</b> 4-8p UVMC Suzuki Program	<b>7</b> 4:30p FCC Choir 5p Cooking for Families (LISTEN) 6p GB Tai Chi	<b>8</b> 8a-4p NH-WIC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	<b>9</b> 4:45p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	<b>10</b> 6-9p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat	<b>11</b> 9a-5p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat

If you have questions or corrections regarding any event, please notify us at [church@fccleb.org](mailto:church@fccleb.org) or 603-448-4281.

CHURCH COUNCIL

Jon Scott opened January’s meeting of Council by inviting comments on both **worship in the Parish Hall** and experiences with our **revised COVID policies** in the past month. The relaxed protocols seem to be working well, with people opting to wear masks only when needed, and both that and the change of venue made for a nice transition back to more social interaction. Coffee hour the previous Sunday was well attended and thoroughly enjoyed. All shared concerns about poor sound quality on Zoom, which was hard to explain since the same equipment is used in both worship spaces. (Adjustments made for January 29 seem to have improved sound significantly.)

Expanding on his **pastor’s report**, the Rev. Steve Silver offered positive feedback about the transition to the Parish Hall, while sympathizing with those who’ve endured sound issues online. It’s essential to accommodate those participating from a distance.

Steve also repeated an appeal to be open to **volunteer recruitment**. He noted that one Deacon wished to continue serving despite being term-limited, suggesting that our current volunteer resources perhaps warrant waiving term limits (which are specified in the Bylaws). Council agreed and will recommend the waiver at Annual Meeting.

Continuing his report, Steve invited everyone to think carefully about what our **post-pandemic church** will look like, in terms of our programs, community life, and worship practice. He doesn’t want to decide these questions on his own, without any

**2023 Annual Meeting—Sunday, February 12  
11:30 AM on Zoom, Following Worship**

The Annual Meeting of First Congregational Church of Lebanon, NH, will be held online (in Zoom format) immediately after the worship service on Sunday, February 12, 2023, for the purpose of:

1. The election of all officers provided for under the CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS of the church.
2. To hear the reports of all officers, committees, and organizations, as required under the CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS of the church.
3. To consider and act upon any other matters relating to the general church welfare that may properly come before this meeting.

congregational input. He also asked for suggestions for an **upcoming Bible study**, wanting to know what books people might be of interest.

Lastly, Steve promoted the **Prepared to Serve** conference on February 25, organized by the NH Conference and offering seminars, workshops, and other activities. Topics include post-pandemic possibilities, church finances, and campaign planning. Jon Scott endorsed this opportunity to exchange information, share experiences, and hear solutions from other churches that might give us new inspiration.

Valerie Nevel reported on a recent meeting of the **Mission and Social Action** Committee, noting that Steve has been trying to arrange for representatives of area non-profits to speak in worship (e.g., LISTEN, the Haven, WISE, UV Gear). Linda Jacobs advised that we open up donation ideas to the congregation, not just the committee.

**Diaconate** chair Linda Gerlach made an urgent appeal for Zoom Greeters, explaining that a small group of volunteers were unfairly

overburdened and hoping others might step forward. She also asked for knitters to make prayer shawls, as only Sue Pratt has been doing so. Linda Oronte suggested that residents of Harvest Hill might help, as they have done similar things for newborns in the past. Dawn Troutman noted that this would be an opportunity for outreach, a way to connect new people with our congregation.

The **2023 Annual Meeting** will take place February 12 at 11:30, entirely on Zoom so as to make participation consistent for all regardless of format. Considering a small but important number of people who may not have online access, some solution will be offered either on-site at church or in someone’s home.

**Committee Meetings**

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

- Diaconate** 2/13 and 3/13, 7:00
- Council** 2/14 and 3/14, 7:00
- MSA** 2/27 and 3/27, 7:00

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

Jon Scott stressed the importance of attending Annual Meeting, adding that it may be a good place to at least start a conversation about our post-pandemic plans. He suggested that other non-business items could be raised, like recognizing our longest-tenured members, and asked Council to bring ideas for engaging members. Walter Scott suggested reviving the possibility of a kitchen renovation, particularly as we return to dinners and fellowship. There followed a general discussion about fundraising and how to make the congregation aware of particular funding needs.

Barb Jones reported that she's actively working to fill open spots in the **Nominating Committee** slate, while also expressing gratitude for all those who are already serving (especially on Council itself). Everyone's contributions are valuable! She invited ideas for new candidates.

On behalf of **Finance and Personnel Committees**, Jon, Valerie Nevel, and Dawn Troutman led a discussion of the **2023 draft budget**. Jon explained that the draft included a single line of \$10,000 for compensation and benefit increases split among all staff, in proportions still to be determined. The congregation would approve that figure as a cumulative limit, pending approval of details by Council and staff. Using that full amount would have implications for wider church finances, however. All agreed it was important for Council to be familiar with the budget's scope and primary issues prior to presenting it to the full congregation at Annual Meeting.

Valerie reviewed **income categories**, pointing out that the budget was not balanced as drafted, with expenses far outpacing income. Jon noted that just because an expense is listed in the budget, we're not obligated to

spend that; it's acceptable to present an imbalanced budget document at Annual Meeting if we choose. Dawn added that capital projects may need to be postponed if we're not strong enough on the income side. Valerie cautioned that our endowment value declined sharply in 2022, and there is some question of whether that's just a market correction in a volatile time. We can expect value to rise again, at least in the longer term, but for now it's challenging to consider increasing our endowment spending.

Dawn carefully walked through **expense categories**, pointing out changes from last year's amounts (both budgeted and actual). The compensation adjustment amount represents an 8% increase overall, which Jon pointed out was an effort to adapt to the effects of inflation for both staff and church expenses. The Personnel Committee still has work to do in figuring out staff pay and benefits, whether or not those are offered retroactively to January 1 as in prior years. Dawn pointed out a new Diaconate line for potential expenses incurred for congregational care. Other increases account for sharply rising costs in oil, electricity, and other utilities. Capital expenses, based mostly on estimates obtained previously, will certainly depend on available funds.

Jon pointed out that the amount by which expenses exceed income happens to correspond to the current balance of our **escrow account**, which could perhaps fund some of these needs. The Finance Committee will consider that possibility without compromising our escrow. Dawn

## Stewardship 2023: Dream Big

*For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. —Isaiah 65:17*

The prophet Isaiah offered these words at a time when the exiles of Judah were wondering about their future. Having seen promises go unfulfilled in the past, they despaired. They hoped to restore their imagined glory, and they wondered just what God had planned for them. Isaiah told them that God sought a break with the past, a fresh start for his people, grounded in possibility. Following the disruptions of COVID, we may now ask, "Who do we want to be? Where is God calling us to go?" We may disagree on the answers, but we can agree on the destination: **a sustainable, healthy future for our community.**

*We're so grateful to have received 28 pledges so far for 2023. No matter the size of your pledge, faithful stewardship is vital to our mission and ministry. Thank you for prayerfully and honestly considering your commitment to FCC this year!*

Offering envelopes for 2023 are available in the Parish Hall.

again asked about implementing **online giving**; Jon repeated that that depends on IRS certification, which has been severely delayed by that agency's many shortages. Other options for setting up valid online-giving processes present their own problems.

Council voted to recommend the draft budget for approval at Annual Meeting, with some reservations about its future sustainability. All thanked Dawn and Valerie for their diligent, honest work on the budget and finances of the church. Council next meets on February 14, two days after the Annual Meeting.

## DIACONATE

The Deacons opened the new year with a review of Christmas worship services and other recent events, along with a survey of current congregant concerns. There was no objection raised to the absence of an 11:00 communion service; the two earlier services were both well received. On Christmas we successfully resumed our familiar service of communion elements, including fresh-baked bread. A prepackaged option remains, just as some worshipers still choose to wear masks—making all our COVID protocols optional does not seem to have adversely affected worship.

The large, convivial reception after the Larry Kirkpatrick memorial demonstrated comfort with social gatherings, and we're resuming coffee hour monthly. The Deacons welcome opportunities for revived fellowship and interaction, as long as volunteer duties are fairly shared.

Preparing for the Annual Meeting, Diaconate chair Linda Gerlach submitted a report that calls attention to the diminished number of Deacons. Rev. Steve Silver will discuss this with the Nominating Committee. The group also agreed that an all-Zoom format for Annual Meeting would broaden and equalize participation.

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

In 2014 First Congregational Church started hosting bi-monthly clinics of the Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program—popularly known as WIC. Subject to income guidelines, families can obtain free health screenings, nutritional advice, breastfeeding support, and service referrals. (And despite WIC's name, fathers utilize its services, too!) An itinerant program with limited resources, WIC depends on sites across the state that offer enough space for its clinics at minimal cost.

Having overcome the pandemic shutdown, the state WIC program still struggles with staffing needs, but the Belknap-Merrimack Community Action Program has resumed its two monthly WIC clinics at FCC.

Practicing responsible healthcare and nutrition can be challenging for any family, but without WIC's help it would be impossible for many parents with limited means, working multiple jobs. WIC offers them vital assistance, and they in turn are tremendously grateful. "Thanks to WIC," says a typical client, "my children's health is on track."

By offering this program the space it needs, our congregation extends the love and 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](http://www.dhhs.nh.gov). Brochures are also available in the Parish Hall.*

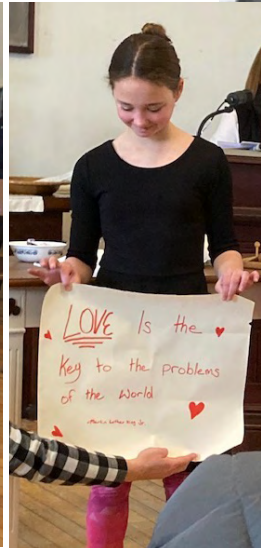
## The NH Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

In addition to operating WIC clinics in Grafton County, 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 needs help stretching their food budget.

**For more information about CSFP, including the required income guidelines, consult the brochures in the Parish Hall or call Belknap-Merrimack CAP (contact details at left).**

# THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

**“WE HAVE A DREAM.”** Exploring the work of “saints” past and present, the Children’s Community Corner learned about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rep. John Lewis, and the “good trouble” of civil-rights activism. After singing in worship, they marched with their colorful signs from the Parish Hall to Colburn Park.



## The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

doesn't mean we should be complacent or that we should stop trying to eradicate poverty. People will *always* need our help; just as tectonic plates will shift and there will be earthquakes and tsunamis. And while we may be tempted to succumb to compassion fatigue, we remember that God is counting on us, just as our neighbors count on us, to care for the sick, the injured, the lost, those whose hopes have been dashed.

We respond to pleas for assistance by responding with generosity, and in doing so we help others and simultaneously worship God. I pray that you are able to remember this in the days ahead, that we all remember what God gave us as we consider the needs of others.

Yours faithfully, *Steve*

# MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



**Music  
at the  
Meetinghouse**

## Midwinter Concerts

*All in the Sanctuary. Masks and vaccination recommended.*

### **The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, February 3 and 17, March 3, 17, and 31, all at 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. Patrons come and go as they please; baked goods and non-alcoholic drinks available. *Free admission. For performers and more, visit [anoncoffee.org/](http://anoncoffee.org/).*

### **Benjamin Kulp, Cello, and William Ögmundson, Piano—Sunday, February 12, at 3:00 pm**

These accomplished members of the UVMC faculty offer a selection of pieces that they have returned to throughout their musical lives, discovering new aspects at different stages of their careers. The program includes music of Zoltán Kodály, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, and Claude Debussy—along with a creative interpretation of the heavy-metal band Metallica. *Sponsored by UVMC and Vermont Violins. Adults \$20, under-18 free; more information at [uvmusic.org/event/kulp-ogmundson](http://uvmusic.org/event/kulp-ogmundson).*

### **Classicopia: Black Brilliance (A Celebration of Black Composers)—Sunday, February 26, at 2:00 pm**

Pianist Daniel Weiser and Borowsky siblings Emmanuel (violin) and Frances (cello) offer this program to celebrate Black History Month, from ragtime and spirituals to blues-inspired compositions. They’ll play music of Scott Joplin, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Undine Smith Moore, Florence Price, and William Grant Still.

*Adults \$20, FCC members \$15, children free; for more, visit [classicopia.org/concert/black-brilliance/](http://classicopia.org/concert/black-brilliance/).*



**CANTABILE AND CONCERTI.** January featured excellent concerts that filled the Sanctuary—first by the superb women’s chorus Cantabile, then by the Upper Valley Baroque chamber orchestra, which explored the harmonic richness of the Italian concerto in six virtuosic pieces.



## OUR LOCAL MISSION

### IT'S *Still* SOUPER BOWL TIME!

This year's SOUPER BOWL has been exciting, and we are closing in on 500 cans—with a **new record in sight** just beyond that! Our total collection will be distributed among HEADREST, the UV HAVEN, and LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES.

*Donations accepted until February 12 in the collection boxes in the Parish Hall. Thanks!*

### Help LISTEN's Heating Helpers

Amid a sharp rise in utility costs, LISTEN's **Heating Helpers Program** has struggled to assist those of our neighbors who need help warming their homes.

*The Byrne Foundation has offered a \$25,000 match for this winter's program. Please consider a donation, and it will be doubled! For more, visit [www.listencs.org/heating-helpers](http://www.listencs.org/heating-helpers).*

**Hearts  
You Hold**   
Meeting Needs of Immigrants and Refugees

HEARTS YOU HOLD, a non-profit organization based in Thetford, VT, offers immigrants, migrants, and refugees new, self-chosen items they need or want. HYH and its local partners help recipients identify these items—from clothing to diapers, technology to appliances to bikes—and learn how to obtain them. Donors then fund the requests on HYH's website. **In four years, HYH has funded over 1900 requests!**

*HYH believes immigrants and refugees should feel valued, respected, and appreciated—in part by asking them what they need and want.*

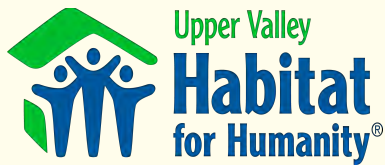
Donations and more at [heartsyouhold.org](http://heartsyouhold.org).

**UV GEAR**  
Giving Emergency  
Aid & Resources



UV GEAR is a non-profit organization that provides assistance and supplies to Upper Valley citizens who are experiencing homelessness. It was created to fill gaps between government social-service programs, and it serves all kinds of people—individuals and families, young people and seniors, veterans and marginalized groups. Assistance ranges from tents, sleeping bags, and backpacks to personal hygiene items, prepaid phones, and gas cards.

*FCC has supported UV GEAR in recent years, recognizing that its mission aligns with our own. Visit [www.uvgear.org](http://www.uvgear.org) to learn more and donate.*



UPPER VALLEY HABITAT FOR HUMANITY, our partner every Father's Day for **Shelter Sunday**, works with local families who could not otherwise afford to buy their own home. They work alongside HfH staff and volunteers to build a new home, which they can then purchase at cost with a zero-interest mortgage.

*UV Habitat is ALWAYS in need of financial support and volunteers on its build sites! Its next project—a multi-unit development in Weathersfield, VT—will be its most ambitious ever. Please consider supporting Habitat's efforts to address the affordable housing crisis; for more, visit [www.uvhabitat.org](http://www.uvhabitat.org) or contact Executive Director Eva Loomis ([eva@uvhabitat.org](mailto:eva@uvhabitat.org)).*

### 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](mailto:church@fccleb.org) • [www.fccleb.org](http://www.fccleb.org)  
Rev. Stephen R. Silver: [silver@fccleb.org](mailto:silver@fccleb.org) • Music: [music@fccleb.org](mailto:music@fccleb.org) • Newsletter Submissions: [church@fccleb.org](mailto:church@fccleb.org)



**First Congregational Church of Lebanon**

10 South Park Street  
PO Box 230  
Lebanon, NH 03766

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**Music  
at the  
Meetinghouse**

**Midwinter Concerts**

*All in the Sanctuary. Masks and vaccination recommended.*

*The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, February 3 and 17, March 3, 17, and 31, all at 7:30 pm*  
*Benjamin Kulp, Cello, and William Ögmundson, Piano—Sunday, February 12, at 3:00 pm*  
*Classicopia: Black Brilliance (A Celebration of Black Composers)—Sunday, February 26, at 2:00 pm*  
*Upper Valley Music Center Faculty Showcase—Sunday, March 19, at 3:00 pm*  
*Classicopia: Violin and Piano—Saturday, March 25, at 7:30 pm*

**2023 ANNUAL MEETING**  
**Sunday, February 12, 11:30 am**  
*(Following Worship, on Zoom only)*

**ASH WEDNESDAY IS FEBRUARY 22**  
*Ecumenical Ash Wednesday Service, 7:00 pm*  
*Lebanon United Methodist Church, School Street*

**First Congregational Church of Lebanon**

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Ernie Drown, Organist and Choir Director • Nancy Parsons, Children’s Community Corner  
Jon Scott, Chair of Church Council • Linda Gerlach, Chair of Deacons • Barbara Jones, Moderator  
Brian Clancy, Church Administrator

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