



# Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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## The Pastoral Perspective

As I write this, Los Angeles is burning.

That may seem like an exaggeration, but the truth is that much of Los Angeles County has gone up in flames. Already, people are talking about who is to blame, which I believe is beside the point. Blaming [insert politician's name here] may make you feel better, but what does it actually achieve? A huge number of homes will still be nothing more than charred remains. People's lives will be disrupted. Some will have come to an end.

There are those who will ask where God was during all of this. They will ask, "Why didn't God stop the fires?"

The short answer is, "I don't know." A longer answer is, "God doesn't work that way." The more challenging but frustrating answer is, "God has given us the tools to deal with tragedies like these fires." We have the fire trucks. We have the water-distribution and delivery systems. We have the knowledge not to build in a fire zone.

And yet we are still left feeling a bit numb. Pointing fingers in the wake of poor disaster management may well be satisfying, and it may help us develop better procedures to deal with the next natural disaster. But this is not enough. So what, then, are we to do?

We can pray.

We can pray to God to help get the fires under control, we can pray for those affected by this conflagration, we can pray for our own safety.

Watching the construction next door draws my thoughts to Lebanon's own fire, the one that struck in the 1960s and destroyed a lot of businesses downtown. Then there are the more recent church fires that have hit two congregations, the Methodists and Baptists. We are fortunate that our meetinghouse has not burned, and we should all pray that it remains safe.

So, yes, LA is on fire. But LA will survive this disaster. It will do so thanks to the help of God and to the hard work of so many people who live in California. Take a moment to pray for peace, charity, and good will, not only among Angelenos but people everywhere.

Yours faithfully,  
*Steve*

# SUNDAY SERVICE

## Community Dinners Are Back!

Sunday, January 26, at 5:00 pm

Leaders: SUSAN COLE REALTY

Many, many thanks to Dawn Troutman's office group for leading the effort to serve this month's dinner! Volunteer signups will be available soon.

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

### Consider Hosting a Dinner in 2025

We're excited to continue our revival of Community Dinners in the new year—but we need leaders! If you're interested in leading a dinner in 2025, menu resources are available, and FCC can reimburse your costs—please contact the church office.

**Anyone can lend a hand with dinner planning, setup, serving, and cleanup—friends, coworkers, neighbors, ANYONE!**

## THE SOUPER BOWL RETURNS!

With pro football's championship game coming up in early February, it's time once again to support the SOUPER BOWL! We will tackle local hunger with a collection of soup and other non-perishable items, to be split among our neighbors at HEADREST, the UV HAVEN, and LISTEN COMMUNITY SERVICES.

**Donations will be collected in boxes in the Parish Hall January 12 through February 9. You may also bring them directly to the three beneficiaries if you'd rather (but please let us know, so we can count them). Thank you!**

## The Children of the Church Need YOU!

All adults in our congregation are invited to engage with FCC's fantastic kids on Sunday mornings. The purpose is mentorship, not just supervision. Please consider offering your time—and thanks!

**Interested? Please contact the church office or Rachel Silver at [rachelsilver@live.com](mailto:rachelsilver@live.com).**

## All Are Welcome to Worship at FCC

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

### Zoom Greeters and Liturgists Needed!

Congregation members sing in the choir, serve as ushers and Zoom greeters, and read as liturgists. All are invited to serve in these essential roles, and no prior experience is needed (although Zoom greeting requires some basic training).

### Would You Like to Serve Coffee Hour?

Coffee hour is a beloved time for fellowship after worship, but we rely on volunteers to supply and serve it. Please consider hosting a Sunday or two!

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

## 2025 ANNUAL MEETING

**Sunday, February 9, 11:15 am**

*(Following Worship, on Zoom)*

The Annual Meeting of the First Congregational Church of Lebanon, NH, will be held online (in Zoom format) immediately after the worship service on Sunday, February 9, 2025, 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.

*Please note that content for the*

### 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

*must be submitted to the Church Administrator by*

**Monday, January 12, 2025**

*This will ensure timely publication of the report prior to the Annual Meeting on February 9.*

# JANUARY 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29 10a Worship/CCC	30 No UVMC	31 3:30p FCC Choir	1 <i>New Year's Day</i> No UVMC	2 No UVMC 7p NA Group	3 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	4
5 10a Worship/CCC (Communion)	6 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	7 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir	8 8a-3:30p WIC 2-6:30p UVMC	9 3-5:15p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	10	11
12 10a Worship/CCC 3p Ben Kulp, Cello: Sign of the Times	13 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p Diaconate  <i>Due date to submit material for 2024 Annual Report</i>	14 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir  7p Jennifer Koh Masterclass 7p Council	15 2-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	16 3-5:15p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	17 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	18
19 10a Worship/CCC	20 <i>MLK Jr. Day</i> No UVMC	21 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir	22 2-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	23 11a-6p WIC 3-5:15p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	24	25 2p UVMC Children's Chorus Concert
26 10a Worship/CCC 5p Community Dinner	27 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program 7p MSA	28 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir 7p Cantabile Rehearsal	29 2-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	30 3-5:15p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	31 7:30p Anon Coffeehouse	1 11a-4p UVMC Student Recitals
2 10a Worship/CCC (Communion) 3p Cantabile: Night and Day	3 4-9p UVMC Suzuki Program	4 1p Cameo Baroque 3:30p FCC Choir	5 2-6:30p UVMC 7p Bel Canto Chamber Singers	6 3-5:15p UVMC Children's Choir 7p NA Group	7 6-9p Leb Rec Quilters Retreat	8 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.*

# NEWS AND NOTES

## CHURCH COUNCIL

Rev. Steve Silver opened Council's December meeting with his **pastor's report**. Steve thanked Brian Clancy for having shoveled our walkways so far this winter, but he noted that this is not a sustainable arrangement. Steve's son Chip, who has cleared walks in recent years, is no longer available to do so, and we should hire a dependable alternative. Steve and Brian have both inquired with the UV Music Center about their snow-removal plan; Brian has also asked Headrest about the possibility of their residents helping on occasion, as they are looking for service opportunities.

Steve clarified the worship schedule for **Christmas Eve**. Expanding on a conversation with the Diaconate, Steve asked Council whether there was interest in serving communion at the 8:00 service. While it requires some extra preparation, and Steve is wary of over-lengthening the service and distracting from Christmas Eve, he affirmed that serving communion is always a benefit, and he's happy to do so if church leadership supports that. (In pre-covid years we offered an additional communion service at 11:00.) Linda Jacobs, who ushers at the later service with husband Ike, gladly offered to help serve; Linda Gerlach expressed support on behalf of the Diaconate for communion as well. No one raised any objection.

Lastly, Steve reported the **Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association** had voted at its November 17 meeting to disband, as expected, opting to

join the planned consolidation of all associations across the NH Conference. The Association will continue operating until April 1, 2025, by which time it will resolve its affairs and finances. Jon asked about its assets, and Steve replied that those will transfer to the new state-wide association. He added, however, that the Association is interested in supporting community ministries of member congregations before that happens. Identifying our Open Door Ministry as a suitable purpose, Steve proposed that we could request a grant of up to \$2000, subject to approval by the Association executive committee.

Following up on discussion among the Deacons, Steve reiterated general dissatisfaction with the **Sanctuary sound system's** capabilities, urging us to address this in the spring. Walter Scott reported that he has conferred with Ben Van Vliet, fellow member of the Board of Governors and executive director of UVMC, who has some experience in this area and will help with a proposal.

Walter also revisited the discussion about **snow removal** to confirm that we only need walkway shoveling, not plowing. (Our parking lot has been plowed for many years by longtime FCC member Kevin Charbono as a gift to the church.) Brian further clarified that our shoveling needs extend beyond Sunday mornings to cover events here during the week. It was also noted that the Church St closure has increased pedestrian traffic through our property.

Surveying other **Board of Governors** issues, Walter noted the Parsonage garage door would soon be replaced as hoped. He reported that various factors (e.g., contractor health and FCC scheduling) have delayed the renovation of the front steps, but warmer weather will probably benefit this project anyway. Brian asked if the added lead time might allow us to replace the access ramp as well; while he appreciated the suggestion, Walter recommended assessing whether the ramp is in fact optimally designed, before we replace it as-is. Steve noted longstanding concerns about the ramp's effect on drainage along that side of the building. He also reminded Walter that the shed door needs repair. Walter thanked everyone for keeping him informed about these various items.

Linda Gerlach reported that the **Diaconate**, in addition to the sound system, had discussed the welcome board and the availability of the newly digital church directory. To promote awareness of the latter, Linda will make an announcement in worship.

Valerie Nevel noted that **Mission and Social Action** will not meet in December. Committee members are somewhat limited physically from

### *Committee Meetings*

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

**Diaconate** 1/13 and 2/10, 7:00

**Council** 1/14 and 2/11, 7:00

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

# NEWS AND NOTES

taking on larger projects, but they certainly hold good intentions and focus on the Open Door Ministry and shopping-cart collections.

Valerie continued with an update from the **Trustees**, monitoring our year-end balance of income and expenses. We are in decent shape in that regard, though Valerie reminded everyone that we'd been able to split a generous 2023 year-end stock gift between the two years. She planned to make several planned transfers on December 11, the largest of which was the final budgeted total-return distribution for 2024. As we'll likely need to make one more transfer to cover the final payroll of the year, Valerie obtained Council's approval to do so. She believes that we could probably budget more in total-return distributions going forward.

Valerie added a favorable report on a **fall presentation by UCF reps** to the Trustees about their investment management practices and policies. She commended UCF for its reliably diligent stewardship of funds and its rigorous screening on the basis of social-justice, human-rights, and environmental concerns. We are fortunate to have them working on FCC's behalf.

Returning to MSA, Corrine Erskine asked whether we are still offering **reimbursement for community-dinner expenses**, especially for meat and other costly items. The budget does include \$500 annually for that purpose, though volunteers express varying needs for reimbursement. Dinner notices regularly publicize

availability of this reimbursement for anyone who seeks it.

Before drawing the meeting to a close, Jon recognized that the **Finance Committee** was in the process of finalizing the 2025 budget. As a key part of that process, the **Personnel Committee** is determining staff compensation for next year. As these groups pursue their discussions, they hope to bring draft proposals to the January 14 meeting of Council.

Lastly, Jon appreciated what he has perceived as a slight uptick in recent worship attendance. To sustain that momentum, he reminded everyone that Christmas is an opportune time to **invite friends and neighbors** to visit our church and congregation.

unknown and, accordingly, trusting Jesus's authority and presence. The Deacons also discussed a number of ongoing pastoral-care situations.

The group also looked forward to installation of the Deacons' welcome board and checked on availability of the newly digital church directory. Congregation members are urged to submit new or updated photos if they haven't done so already. The Deacons further shared frustrations with the faults and inconsistency of the Sanctuary's sound system, with particular regard to announcements from the pews.

Rev. Steve Silver reported that the search for a Christian Education coordinator has been tabled for the time being. All joined in thanking Rachel Silver for filling this role as a volunteer during a prolonged interim period. It was noted that adult participation in children's education depends on whether activities happen before or during the worship service.

## DIACONATE

Phil Hammond opened December's Diaconate meeting with a reading from Mark (4:35-38), prompting a consideration of stepping into the

## PREPARED TO SERVE

Saturday, February 22, 8:00 am–4:00 pm  
Pembroke Academy, Pembroke, NH

*Prepared to Serve* is an annual training event for members of the NH Conference (UCC), offering workshops on topics ranging from lay leadership and church finances to Christian education, service, and mission. All are invited to participate in this enriching day of classes, exhibits, and worship with conference friends from across the state.

**FCC will pay for any interested congregation members to attend!**  
**Registration deadline is February 12. (Includes resources and meals.)**

**More details at [www.nhcucc.org/events/pts-2025](http://www.nhcucc.org/events/pts-2025).**



# THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION



## ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS 2024



# MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE



Music  
at the  
Meetinghouse

## WINTER EVENTS

All in the Sanctuary. Masks welcome but optional.

### **The Anonymous Coffeehouse—Fridays, Jan. 3, 17, 31, Feb. 14 and 28 (etc.), all at 7:30 pm**

Our comfy community venue for live music continues its fifth season as an informal “listening room” for the finest folk musicians in New England. *Free admission, donations welcome. For more, visit [anoncoffee.org](http://anoncoffee.org).*

### **Benjamin Kulp, Cello: Sign of the Times—Sunday, January 12, at 3:00 pm**

UV Music Center cellist Ben Kulp offers a program of music reflecting the current moment, from pieces by two contemporary women to an update of Jimi Hendrix. *Adults \$20, under-18 free; more at [uvmusic.org](http://uvmusic.org).*

### **Jennifer Koh, Violin: Masterclass and Conversation—Tuesday, January 14, at 7:00 pm**

Internationally renowned violinist Jennifer Koh joins a group of UVMC students and faculty to explore technique, interpretation, and approaches to new repertoire. *Donations welcome; more at [uvmusic.org](http://uvmusic.org).*

### **UVMC Children’s Chorus: A Celebration of Song—Saturday, January 25, at 2:00 pm**

Directed by Allison Pollard and accompanied by Will Ögmundson, this delightful ensemble of kids from all over the Upper Valley shares an informal concert with family and friends. *Free admission; more at [uvmusic.org](http://uvmusic.org).*

### **Cantabile Women’s Voices: Night and Day—Sunday, February 2, at 3:00 pm**

This superb ensemble offers an afternoon of choral settings celebrating the simple beauty found in the passing hours of an ordinary day. Music of Sergei Rachmaninoff, Irving Berlin, Jocelyn Hagen, Gwyneth Walker, Eric Whitacre, and more. *Adults \$15 suggested donation, online or at the door; more details at [cantabilewomen.org](http://cantabilewomen.org).*

### **LOH ON LOCATION: Dom Flemons—Saturday, February 15, at 7:30 pm**

Reviving our pre-pandemic relationship across Colburn Park, Lebanon Opera House brings us Dom Flemons, the Grammy-winning cofounder of the Carolina Chocolate Drops. A versatile instrumentalist as well as a historian and scholar, “The American Songster” will share his influential interpretation of folk, blues, bluegrass, and old-time country music. *General admission \$27; tickets and more at [lebanonoperahouse.org](http://lebanonoperahouse.org).*



UVMC Messiah Sing



Upper Valley Voices

# BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY

## *Send Us Your Directory Photos!*

Our newly-digital directory, easily updated as our congregation grows and changes, is distributed to everyone monthly as a PDF file (printed copies also available upon request). **Please be sure to submit current photos (along with any updated contact details) to the church office. Photos should be JPG or PNG files, in frontal, head-and-shoulders format clearly showing faces (like these fine examples!).**



*EVERYONE who feels a connection to FCC is included in our directory—whether or not they have formally joined as covenant members.*

## STEWARDSHIP 2025

### Doing What Is Right and Just

*To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. —Proverbs 21:3*

Scripture teaches us that God is more pleased by what we *do*, rather than by what we give up. Gifts of money are important and needed, but if we are looking to please God, we must do more. Perhaps we must consider what righteousness and justice mean, both for our church and for us individually.

*We're grateful to have received 24 pledges so far for 2025! No matter the amount of your pledge, faithful stewardship is vital to our mission and ministry. Thank you all for considering your commitment to FCC in the coming year.*

Offering envelopes for 2025 are in the Parish Hall. Please help yourself to a box and record it on the list.

There's no place like hope.

BECOME A CASA VOLUNTEER.

CHANGE A CHILD'S STORY.



## Volunteer in 2025 for CASA-NH

CASA (Court-Appointed Special Advocates) of NH trains compassionate citizens to advocate for abused and neglected children in our court system. Offering their common sense, experience, and commitment for 10-15 hours a month, volunteer advocates help ensure a brighter future for kids in safe, stable homes. **The need for court advocates in the state is urgent—CASA is able to meet less than 60% of demand.**

For more, contact Katie Pelczar (603-528-8006 x6 or [kpelczar@casanh.org](mailto:kpelczar@casanh.org)) or visit [casanh.org](http://casanh.org).

## 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 five years, HYH has funded over 2000 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 [heartsyouthold.org](http://heartsyouthold.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@fcclleb.org](mailto:church@fcclleb.org) • [www.fcclleb.org](http://www.fcclleb.org)  
Rev. Stephen R. Silver: [silver@fcclleb.org](mailto:silver@fcclleb.org) • Music: [music@fcclleb.org](mailto:music@fcclleb.org) • Newsletter Submissions: [church@fcclleb.org](mailto:church@fcclleb.org)



**First Congregational Church of Lebanon**

10 South Park Street  
PO Box 230  
Lebanon, NH 03766

DATED MATERIAL  
PLEASE DELIVER PROMPTLY

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**2025 ANNUAL MEETING**  
Sunday, February 9, 11:15 am  
*(Following Worship on Zoom)*

**THE SOUPER BOWL IS BACK!**  
Donations gratefully accepted at the church from  
January 12 to February 9. Thank you!

**NHC-UCC PREPARED TO SERVE 2025 — Saturday, February 22, Pembroke, NH**



Music  
at the  
Meetinghouse

**Winter Events**

*All in the Sanctuary. Masks welcome but optional.*

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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