



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

For some of us these days, the calendar is not so much a lived reality as it is an abstract concept. Whether we no longer have to go to work, or we are up to our eyeballs meeting the demands of the present crisis, familiar schedules and routines have gone by the wayside. At some level, we are all experiencing time differently.

All of this can be disorienting. One thing that can help us maintain our bearings is the liturgical calendar. Despite what is going on in the world around us, the church still observes its feasts and festivals. As always, at least in the Western church, Easter fell on the first Sunday after the Paschal full moon. This year, we celebrated our Lord's Resurrection on April 12. That means we will observe Pentecost on May 31.

What will it mean to mark the birth of the church in our socially-distanced world? To paraphrase a question asked by our Jewish neighbors at the Passover Seder, "How is this year different from all other years?"

Well, we know that we won't be having birthday parties at church. And we know that many of us will be grieving all the losses and disruptions that the coronavirus has caused us. Traditions like Children's Sunday will have to be modified to meet the moment. But while none of us wished for all the disruption, I'd like to suggest that we take a moment to focus on the good that has arisen in the midst of the chaos.

We have had long-ago members and homebound friends join us for Sunday worship online.

We have employed and adjusted to new technology, and people have asked how we might expand our service offerings in the future so more people might be involved in worship. We have used this technology to meet and to socialize, even though we cannot gather together.

We have continued to support the wider community.

We have, in short, continued to be the church.

So in some ways, nothing is different this year.

But that is too facile an answer. The truth is, we're still learning how things have changed, and we can predict that things will continue to

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SUNDAY SERVICE

Sunday Worship Online

Zoom Services—Sundays at 10:00 am

Please join us via Zoom conference every Sunday morning at our usual worship time! Following our familiar order of worship, we share prayers and readings, sing hymns, and listen to Steve's weekly sermon. There's even "coffee hour" afterward!

The Zoom invitation is emailed every 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, or if you can't make the Sunday morning time, you're invited to watch on YouTube whenever you like. We record and post the weekly service every Friday afternoon.

The YouTube link is posted at www.fcclb.org and sent with the Sunday morning email.

For either format, each week's bulletin—with an order of worship, prayers, scripture texts, hymns, and announcements—is posted on our website and sent out with the Sunday morning email. We also post the text of Rev. Steve Silver's sermon.

Connecting Our Congregation

FCC "Social Hour" on Zoom

Alternate Wednesdays, May 6 and 20, 7:00 pm

Would you like to chat and connect with your church family in this time of social distancing? All are invited to this informal, open time to catch up, ask questions, and connect. Zoom links will be sent out Wednesday afternoons; you may come and go as you please.

Congregational Support—Get Help, Give Help!

If you need some assistance with picking up groceries, running errands, getting to/from appointments, or other tasks while we're all staying at home, volunteers from our congregation are willing to lend a hand.

If you are in need of help—or if you'd like to volunteer to provide it to someone else—please contact the church office. Thanks!

Liturgists Still Needed!

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

Mother's Day is Blanket Sunday

We're pleased to participate again in the CWS BLANKETS program, a special mission project by which Church World Service offers blankets and other relief supplies to people in crisis around the world (for more details, visit cwsblankets.org). Please consider a contribution in honor or memory of the mother(s) in your life. A minimum of \$10 is suggested, but any amount is welcome. *Dedications will appear in the bulletin MOTHER'S DAY, MAY 10.*

Please submit your dedication information to the church office by Thursday, May 7. Contributions may be sent in after that date.



Thank You!

from the

**Children's
Community
Corner**

This year's **LENTEN LUNCH BAG OFFERING** raised \$919—the highest total since 2015! The total collection will be evenly split between funding welcome bags for families finding refuge at WISE's safe house and awarding scholarships through Epilogos Charities to the schoolchildren of San Jose Villanueva, El Salvador.

Many thanks for such generosity, at such a challenging time!

SUNDAY SERVICE

Do Your Part to Fill the Cart—From Home!

Greater Lebanon has struggled with rising poverty and food insecurity for some time. These challenges have only increased as COVID-19 restrictions have threatened employment and income.

We are no longer collecting items for our shopping cart at church, but local need is more urgent than ever.

Listen's food pantry on Hanover Street continues to accept non-perishable donations, and they are serving to-go meals during the week in WRJ. Yet the closure of the Listen Store is a huge financial loss. The Haven, too, would greatly appreciate any donations for its financial assistance programs.

In lieu of filling our cart, please consider a direct contribution (online or by mail) to Listen, the UV Haven, the UV Humane Society, or some other local service organization. Thanks to ALL for fighting poverty in our community.

UV Strong Responds to COVID-19

If you're in need of assistance in these challenging times, or if you're looking for new opportunities to volunteer, UPPER VALLEY STRONG has mobilized its resources for both recipients and volunteers.

Visit uvstrong.org for more information.

FOCUS ON STEWARDSHIP

While regular worship services are suspended, we continue to depend on the offering contributions that you'd normally give on Sundays—in fact, the need is greater than usual. We realize that not everyone can give so generously, especially in these newly austere circumstances, but **we're grateful for contributions of any amount to these purposes:**

Regular Offering—Collected weekly 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 Offerings—Collected on communion Sundays, 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 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 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.



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

Special Mission Offering, Spring 2020

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a vital UCC offering for mission initiatives around the world. It funds healthcare, education, agriculture, emergency relief, and refugee assistance in over 130 countries. And it's more important than ever!

Normally collected nationwide on the fourth Sunday in Lent, OGHS is extended this year because of church closures. We will continue to accept OGHS contributions anytime in the weeks ahead. Please give as generously as you can.

THANK YOU!



COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

John Gilliatt had little to report to Council for the **Board of Governors**. He has remained in contact with other Board members, but amid COVID-19 circumstances, not much progress has been made on specific projects in the past month. Wayne Braley plans to finish the chancel railings whenever possible. John noted that the date of the spring clean-up has not yet been set, but aside from a couple landscaping tasks, the anticipated workload is relatively minimal.

For **Stewardship**, Jon Scott again expressed gratitude for the offering contributions that have been sent into the church in recent weeks. He recognized that some may be unable to give as much as they have previously, while others may not be in a position to contribute anything. We have to anticipate a decrease in offering receipts as the virus crisis continues. Jon did point out a few changes to tax rules in the current climate, like reduced requirements for claiming charitable deductions and the waiver of mandatory IRA distributions.

For **Christian Education**, Nan Parsons has sustained connections with FCC's children by sending them several packages, two in virtual form and one as a physical mailing. (For the latter, she utilized some craft kits purchased in past years by Marcia Corkins.) Nan is wary of sending too much to the kids, who she notes may be overwhelmed by uncertainties and challenges of their remote learning programs. While she may try to do a short

Zoom meeting at some point, she is sensitive to the fact that children are already spending a lot of time in Zoom meetings and other online formats for school.

Barb Teeter reported that the **Diaconate** had met via Zoom the previous week, although nothing significant needed to be brought to Council. The Deacons continue to follow up on their individual member contact lists. Council expressed deep appreciation for the meaningful cards and notes sent out in this difficult time.

The **Mission and Social Action Committee** has not met since early March, but Kathy Beckett hopes to call a meeting online in May. A new survey of the congregation about which mission beneficiaries FCC supports will be distributed soon. Kathy and Steve Silver explained the option of funding a community dinner at Listen, which Council agreed would be an appropriate gesture while we're unable to host our own monthly dinner. This would require a donation of \$680, which could be funded by the MSA account or, by extension, the Dole Trust's mission funds. Council unanimously approved the idea.

Corrine Erskine inquired about protocols for reopening the church once that is deemed safe. Mainly she wanted to ensure that we'll be able to clean the Sanctuary and other spaces thoroughly and regularly enough without overburdening Barb Teeter, who normally manages those tasks as Sexton.

For the **Music Committee**, Brian Clancy confirmed that virtually

every musical event through June has now been canceled. He noted that Bel Canto Chamber Singers had paid their full year's rental last fall; thus, we will apply a credit to their rental starting this fall. Brian also explained that the search for a new organist and choir director is essentially dormant due to the COVID-19 shutdown, as it makes little sense to hire someone until we resume live services. He noted that while we do have three declared candidates, none seems viable at this time. (Two of them, in fact, have not yet confirmed that they'll be located in the Upper Valley.)

Treasurer Terry Ellison reported an income shortfall relative to this point last year, mostly due to a decrease in stewardship collections and transfer amounts. Some of the church's expenses are also down, but many are unchanged by the building's closure.

In his **pastor's report** Steve Silver described settling into new weekly worship routines, as preparations for recorded services and Zoom meetings required changes in his sermon process and other practices.

Committee Meetings

In lieu of in-person meetings at church, some FCC groups will continue to meet remotely via Zoom teleconferences:

Diaconate 5/11, 7:00

Church Council 5/19, 7:00

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

COMMITTEE NOTES

Congregational Survey *Coming Soon from MSA*

It has been over four years since we last surveyed the congregation about the mission partners that FCC supports. The Mission and Social Action Committee seeks everyone's input now in order to update our mission priorities. A new survey will be distributed by email in the coming weeks.

To help us prepare the survey, we invite your suggestions of local, national, and global organizations that you feel FCC seems most naturally suited to support.

Please send your suggestions to the church office. Thanks!

Steve thanked both organist Susan Sorensen and administrator Brian Clancy for their help in putting together services each week. Steve happily noted that participation in worship seems to be at or even above typical levels—a trend that has been reported at other area churches as well. Several people who haven't normally attended in person have joined the Zoom services.

Steve is preparing an application for the Payroll Protection Program,

which depends largely on Mascoma Bank's processing. He reported that while our investment portfolio has recently suffered, we've maintained stability with more balanced funds. Steve will participate on behalf of FCC in a conference call among the top 250 clients of United Church Funds. He has also continued in various non-FCC roles via Zoom.

The first FCC "social hour" online on Zoom was a success; more are planned with the help of volunteer moderators. Steve noted, however, that he and Brian genuinely miss having people in our building, and we all look forward to resuming our usual patterns of activity as soon as we can.

Following up on an earlier proposal, Steve noted that we will ring the church's bell at noon on April 22, joining a number of area churches and other institutions in observing the 50th anniversary of Earth Day.

DIACONATE

In April the Diaconate discussed the status of **Open Door Ministry** funding, in light of a slight decrease in receipts due to the suspension of services. The need for food and gas cards continues, however, and if

needed this ministry could also be supplemented by the Dole Fund. Community dinners in March and April have been canceled, but it is possible we'll sponsor a dinner at Listen instead, which typically feeds about 140-150 people. Dawn Troutman remains willing to lead the June dinner for the Diaconate, should that go ahead.

The Deacons also checked in with each other about **congregational care** in this challenging time. In particular, support was expressed for Stacey Steele, who continues her work in health care while Dominic remains at home for school. In addition to following up with their individual member contact lists, the Deacons agreed the congregation might benefit from a mid-week "check-in" time on Zoom, perhaps on Wednesday evenings.

In his **pastor's report** Steve Silver noted that online worship activities had been fulfilling and successful for many. Participation has ranged between 30 and 55 for the various Zoom services (the highest being on Easter), with another 20-30 views logged weekly for YouTube videos. Several of those who have joined Zoom services haven't attended worship in person in some time.

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

change. In that, we're no different from previous generations that have had to experience dislocation. Like our forebears, we will rely on God and God's people to get us through.

I cannot tell you what the future holds for our community and our world. But I can say that I am blessed to journey through these challenging times with each and every one of you.

Yours faithfully,
Steve

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE Annual Senior Luncheon

*normally served in April or May
will be rescheduled this summer
or perhaps in September.*

Masks Available

Thanks to a couple of generous members of our congregation, we have a limited supply of non-medical masks available at FCC for anyone who wants or needs them. We try to distribute them to the community members who come in for assistance through our Open Door Ministry, but **all are welcome to stop by the office for masks as needed.**

Music at the Meetinghouse

Please note that these events in May and June have been canceled:

Bel Canto Ch. Singers	5/2-3
UVMC Suzuki Recitals	5/2-3
Anonymous Coffeehouse	5/8
UVMC Sing & Play	5/16
Joe Jewett and Friends	5/16
Cantabile Women	6/7

As of publication, the May 29 Anonymous Coffeehouse and Classicopia's "Musical Mothers" concert on May 30 may still happen, but neither is likely. *More details will be forthcoming.*



EASTER SUNDAY AND LIFE AT HOME. With our congregation keeping its social distance, a modest trio of lilies graced the church altar and 55 people rejoiced in the Resurrection together online. Members filled time at home in creative ways—Nan Parsons and Kailyn Rappaport threw a colorful "garden party" for Grantham's town-wide decorative yard display; Corrine Erskine crafted several lovely quilts; and Barb Jones shared a Corinthians-themed face mask made by a good friend.



THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

Creation Care—A Priority for FCC, Our Community, and Our World **Some Basic Tips for Greener Living and Resource Conservation**

In the past several years, our congregation has tried to identify ways to be better stewards of God's creation. We've taken some steps as an institution to reduce energy and resource usage, and we're making **Creation Care** a priority of our campaign. If you'd like to support this effort at home, here are some suggestions:

Reduce material consumption and waste. Avoid single-use, disposable dishes and paper products. Reuse bags and containers. Print double-sided, use scrap paper, and make digital rather than printed copies when possible. Use rechargeable batteries. Recycle materials responsibly.

Reduce electricity usage. Turn off lights, computers, and other devices when not in use. Use Energy-Star appliances and light bulbs. Inform yourself about how your utility company generates energy.

Improve resource efficiency. Conduct an energy audit or consult an expert about insulation, appliances, and heating and cooling systems. Use a programmable thermostat. Reduce water usage and install water-saving plumbing fixtures. Combine weekly errands into fewer trips.

Create a healthier environment. Avoid toxic chemicals and cleaning products. Drive less, carpool/bike/walk more. Grow houseplants, gardens, and produce at home. Compost organic food waste.

Thanks to everyone for responding to the call to care for God's creation!



RINGING THE BELL FOR EARTH DAY. To celebrate fifty years of Earth Day on April 22, FCC joined a several area churches in ringing its bell at noon. (With first-class ringer Jeff Williams unavailable, a lesser backup barely managed.)

Seeking Organist and Choir Director

Despite the ongoing suspension of worship services, we continue our search for a new organist and choir director, looking ahead to when those services may resume. This vital member of our ministry team is responsible for all musical aspects of our worship life, playing organ and piano and leading our small but dedicated choir. This quarter-time position offers a flexible schedule during the week, professional development funding, and use of the church for practice and concerts; salary is negotiable based on qualifications and experience.

If you know someone who might be interested in this opportunity to serve FCC, please refer them to the church office or have them email a cover letter and resumé to church@fccleb.org.

First Congregational Church of Lebanon does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other characteristic.

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

Welcome!

We are a Christ-centered community that celebrates the love of God. Although we are of varied minds, with varying measures of belief and unbelief, we are one body, bound together in Christ. We recognize the uniqueness of every individual as God's beloved child. We seek to respond faithfully to God's call for justice for all creation. We strive in word and deed to be faithful to Jesus' model of loving acceptance. We seek to create a sanctuary where all will know they are welcome and included.

No matter your age, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, race or ethnicity, physical or mental ability, or economic circumstance, you are invited into the full life and ministry of First Congregational Church of Lebanon, including its worship, sacraments, and rites.

Join us as we grow together in God's love.

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Susan Sorensen, Interim Organist and Choir Director • Nancy Parsons, Church School Superintendent

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