

Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

Flurries were falling as I began to write this. The cold weather, the feeling of winter just didn't seem to want to leave. And that's a shame, as we observed the spring equinox over a month ago. Time still seems to be following its own strange, willful drummer during this season. Life in New England has always been like this, the seasons notional. This year is different, however, because of the pandemic. We are now being vaccinated, and we are wondering just when and how we might resume something approaching normal life. Which, of course, begs some questions: Just what is normal? What *should be* normal?

Each of us will have our own answer to these questions, one that will be shaped by our experience of the pandemic and unrest that have shaped our society this past year, by our faith, and, one hopes and prays, by our sense of community.

As Christians, we are anything but "normal," despite the fact that most of us grew up in what is known as "Christendom," a culture in which Protestant Christianity was considered normative. Those days, of course, are in the past. Rather than be the definers of culture, we in the church now must accept it, or at least abide it. And we have to work hard to make the case to our society that the Christian faith is a wise, life-affirming choice.

How we live our lives will not only shape our individual prospects but also make a huge impression on our friends and neighbors. People will seek spiritual sustenance, no matter what. If the way of Jesus appears to be a dead end, people will chase after other religions, be that Islam, Buddhism, or some form of Animism. Today, we see huge numbers of people trying to get meaning from politics.

Think about that, and be depressed, very depressed.

Don't get me wrong—I enjoy politics as much as the next person. But the tribal forms it has taken on, on both the left and the right, are not healthy. I am not the first to say this, but people on the other side of an issue are not the enemy. They are fellow citizens. More important, they are children of God, our brothers and sisters. We need to listen, to hear,

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SUNDAY SERVICE

We're Returning to Our Sanctuary!

Pentecost Sunday, May 23

In-Person Worship at 10:00 am—WEAR RED!

Remote Viewing Available on Zoom

Having surveyed vaccination progress and comfort levels among our congregation, church leadership believes that it is safe to resume indoor worship with some basic precautions. It will have been 14 months since we closed for the pandemic—we're grateful for everyone's perseverance, and we're joyful to return!

All worshipers will be required to wear masks at all times and observe physical distancing; singing and corporate prayer to be permitted only with masks. There will be no coffee hour, and we ask that social interaction and contact be kept to a minimum.

Let Us Gather Again for Worship Together!

Sunday Worship Online

Zoom Services—Sundays at 10:00 am

Please join us on Zoom for worship every Sunday; the link will be emailed early that morning.

We will continue offering a Zoom option even after resuming in-person worship on May 23.

YouTube Recordings—Watch Anytime!

If you can't worship with us on Zoom or in person, we post a recording on YouTube and our website.

Bulletins and other resources at www.fccleb.org.

Greeters and Liturgists Needed!

Whether on Zoom or in person, we invite volunteers participate in worship, either as greeter/ushers or lay readers. *Please contact the office if you are interested.*

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 9.*

Please submit your dedication information to the church office by Thursday, May 6. Contributions may be sent in after that date.



SHELTER SUNDAY FATHER'S DAY, JUNE 20

Every Father's Day FCC makes a commitment to support the work of Upper Valley Habitat for Humanity, the local affiliate of an international, ecumenical ministry. Since 1976, Habitat has provided decent, affordable housing and home ownership for deserving families who could not otherwise afford to buy a home. Achieving home ownership is one of the most valuable steps a family can take to establish a firm footing, in order to thrive on their own. Families work alongside staff and volunteers, benefiting from discounted materials and services, to renovate or build their own home, which they are then able to purchase at cost with a zero-interest mortgage.

If you'd like to honor or remember the father(s) in your life with a contribution to Shelter Sunday, please contact the church office with your dedication information no later than noon on Thursday, June 17 (contributions gratefully accepted after that date). Any amount is welcome—thanks!

COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

Treasurer Terry Ellison reports to Council that stewardship income has so far been very strong this year. Income overall exceeds expenses by a healthy margin. As a member of the Board of Governors, Terry also recommended we move forward on some of the larger projects for which we've budgeted additional capital expenses. These include our multi-phase insulation upgrade and the repair of the front walk.

Valerie Nevel plans to call a meeting of the **Trustees** in coming weeks. She wants to arrange an opportunity to meet with advisors from United Church Funds, which handles some of FCC's investments. We received the annual Waldo Trust distribution in March, and the church's overall investment outlook is solid.

Stewardship chair Jon Scott has initiated our effort to file for IRS certification of our 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. He clarified that the process will not expose FCC, only confirm the exemption we already claim—neither state nor federal government is interested in pushing enforcement of tax regulations among churches. Jon notes that

there is a fair amount of work to be done for the filing, and despite our hiring an accounting firm, the onus is on us to complete the process expediently and at minimal cost. Jon will coordinate with church staff to solicit volunteer help and gather the required documents.

The **Board of Governors** has set May 22 as Spring Clean-Up Day, with a rain date of June 5. John Gilliatt invites volunteers and ideas for projects to be done, beyond the usual tasks around the grounds.

Nan Parsons reports that FCC's **Children's Community Corner** has made matzo and studied the Ten Commandments in monthly Zoom meetings, part of a discussion of Exodus. They'll also be talking about the ark and tabernacle. Nan received feedback that the monthly frequency of Zoom meetings has seemed appropriate, given that the children have been online so much for school. She and the Rev. Steve Silver will discuss plans for this year's Children's Sunday, which will once again involve in-person worship.

The **Mission and Social Action Committee** seeks to become more actively involved in the community,

beyond financial donations. Kathy Beckett notes that that goal drives a new initiative to provide monthly dinners for Hartford Dismas House, a residence for recently incarcerated men and women now in transition. Corrine Erskine has lined up teams of volunteers starting in April. A related initiative is the "Letter by Letter" project, in which volunteers correspond in either informational or personal messages with people in VT and NH prisons. Rev. Silver supports these projects as chances to live out the scriptural call to visit and care for prisoners.

Kathy also noted the virtual open-house presentations by SHARe, which seeks five host families for new asylees in the Upper Valley. She commended recent advocacy by Laurel Stavis and others against HB266, an anti-sanctuary bill just proposed in the NH House. On another front, MSA has become involved with the local Energy Advocacy Council, a group that is examining several alternative-energy initiatives in the Upper Valley.

Rev. Silver adds that the UV Senior Center has appealed for help with its weekday meal preparation and

Celebrate Children's Sunday on June 13!

After a challenging year, the **Children's Community Corner** and its adult volunteers are excited to lead worship and mark the end of the school year in June. We'll lift up our congregation's kids and what they have learned this year, and we very much hope you'll join us to share this special moment in our church's communal life.

If you're interested in participating or have questions, please contact Nan Parsons (nlp3721@yahoo.com/603-863-8354).

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom:

Diaconate 5/10 and 6/14, 7:00

Council 5/18 and 6/15, 7:00

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

COMMITTEE NOTES

delivery program. The center's roster of volunteers has decreased during the pandemic, and they are in need of drivers in particular. We are also hosting a vaccine clinic in April and May for local underserved groups, run by Listen and DHMC.

Steve thanked the Diaconate and many others who helped with a full schedule for Holy Week, including two in-person outdoor services on Easter morning. Looking ahead to use of our Sanctuary and **reopening plans** generally, church leadership agrees that despite good progress in vaccinations, we will need to be safe

and fair in making church accessible again. We have to consider what we can do inside the building to ensure its safety now and going forward.

While recognizing a transition to new conditions, with precautions likely to remain in place for some time, Steve affirmed the symbolic appeal of returning to in-person worship on Pentecost, May 23. He invites input from the congregation regarding vaccination status and comfort level with reopening, for which we hope to conduct a survey.

Considering the prospect of a small student recital in the Sanctuary in

June, Council agreed that such an event poses minimal risk to our congregation, even if we are back to worshipping in person by then.

Looking ahead to the return of outside groups more generally, the question of cleaning and sanitation came up, and it was suggested that users of church space sign a waiver accepting continued risk of illness.

In his **pastor's report** Rev. Silver also noted that the spring meeting of the Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association would take place on Zoom on May 16, which everyone is welcome to attend. He has agreed

Pre-Opening Spring Clean-Up!

Saturday, May 22, 9:00 am (Rain Date: June 5)

Please join the Board of Governors in this seasonal effort to tidy up the church yard—especially important this spring, as we prepare to resume using the church after over a year's closure. We'll rake, trim hedges, and generally pick up around the grounds.

Bring gloves, a rake, gardening tools, and anything else that might be useful (such as a truck!). Help out with this important work!



FCC Outing Club Returns in June!

Having been dormant during our pandemic closure, FCC's Outing Club hopes to return in June with a new excursion for everyone! Guided as always by Ron Bailey, our in-house park ranger, we'll enjoy an easy-to-moderate hike on one of our excellent local trails, along with a picnic lunch. Look for more details in May, and plan to join the trip!

All members of our congregation and friends are invited to share this experience of exploring God's creation. Grow deeper by walking farther!

COMMITTEE NOTES

to continue serving for another year as treasurer of the Congregational Library, and he'll be joining the investment committee of United Church Funds. Lastly, he confirmed that he'll be on vacation for a week in mid-June (with Rev. Jo Shelnutt substituting), then again at some point later in the summer.

Lastly, Council's ad-hoc **committee to review FCC's bylaws** has begun its work. Co-chaired by Amy Driscoll and Jon Scott, the group includes Warren Belding, Brian Clancy, Terry Ellison, Linda Jacobs, Barb Jones, Tom Milligan, Valerie Nevel, Barb Teeter, and Steve Silver (*ex officio*). Its charge is to examine and revise the bylaws to reflect our current needs, practices, and membership.

Taking a fresh look at governance and committee structure, the group began with an inventory of the church's essential functions, looking at how those should be delegated among volunteers and paid staff.

There is a collective interest in simplifying and making our church operations transparent. Aside from committee structure and needs, the review will also include institutional provisions that lie outside of the committee structure.

DIACONATE

In their March and April meetings the Deacons and Rev. Steve Silver discussed our possible return to the Sanctuary for **in-person worship**. Zoom services have continued, including during Holy Week, which Diaconate readers helped lead. Two outdoor services on Easter morning were both well-received.

The Deacons agreed that a survey of the congregation about reopening would be useful, prior to a potential return to in-person worship on Pentecost Sunday, May 23. Even if we return to the Sanctuary, however, all agree that precautions such as

distancing and mask use (including for singing) should be required, and there will be no familiar coffee hour. To ventilate the Sanctuary, the balcony fan and windows in the Parish Hall and kitchen will assist air flow. A Zoom option will still be offered for anyone who is unable or unwilling to worship in person.

There is interest in another **online book study group** on Zoom, and Steve welcomed any suggestions for what to read. If there is enough participation, the group might split into separate discussions led by volunteers.

The Deacons also considered a still-tentative request from a small **Muslim prayer group** to use the Parish Hall for Friday prayers at some future date (covid permitting). The Diaconate supports this request as an expression of our generally welcoming approach to our community, and as a gesture of interfaith support.

The Pastoral Perspective, *continued from Page 1*

and then make our own case. And if people ignore us, then we need to redouble our efforts to do the right thing, not shout even louder.

Those in the early Church did not have a marketing plan or spiffy logo. They did not try to be clever, doing new things with spelling or images. They preached Christ crucified and tried to live as followers of Jesus would. Sometimes they succeeded, sometimes they failed. But the message spread, people were intrigued, and Christians have bumbled along for some 2,000 years.

The weather is what it is, beyond our control. Our behavior, though, is a different matter. Our faith can give us life, and it may bloom anew, just like a spring flower. But we will need to nurture it, tend to it, not take it for granted, not assume that Christianity is "normal" in our world. It's not. Instead, it is a precious gift, which we are blessed to have received. Like any good gift, our joy will be increased when we share it with others.

Yours faithfully,

Steve

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION

GOOD FRIDAY TO EASTER OUTDOORS.

Into the desolate emptiness of Good Friday came the glimmer of sunlight and lilies on Easter morning. The ecumenical sunrise service and our festive 10:00 worship both happened outside in the chilly morning air, warmed only by the Resurrected Son.



OUR MISSION NEAR AND FAR

Thank You!

from the

**Children's
Community
Corner**

This year's LENTEN LUNCH BAG OFFERING brought in \$1198—breaking last year's record amount! The total collection will be split between helping the families who find refuge at WISE's safe house and awarding scholarships through Epilogos Charities to the schoolchildren of San Jose Villanueva, El Salvador. *Many thanks for your generosity!*

Do Your Part to Fill the Cart!

Greater Lebanon has been struggling with rising poverty and food insecurity for some time, and these challenges have only increased amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

We'll soon resume collecting items in our cart at church, but local need is more urgent than ever.

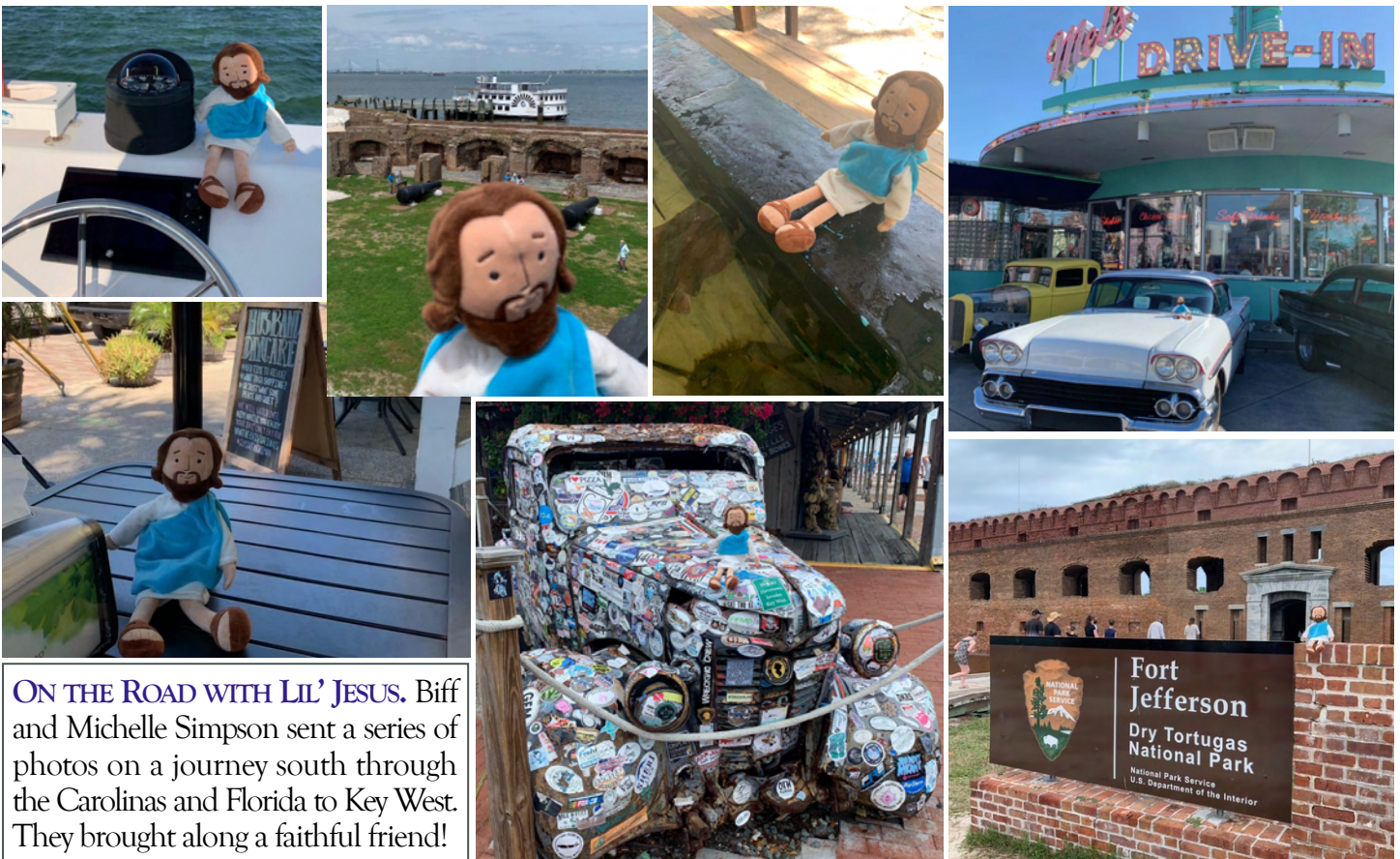
Listen's food pantry on Hanover Street accepts donations of non-perishable items, with to-go meals served in WRJ all week. The Haven appreciates food donations as well as financial contributions for its assistance programs.

In lieu of filling our cart, please consider a direct donation (online or by mail) to Listen, the Haven, the UV Humane Society, or another organization.

**One Great
HOUR
OF SHARING**

THANKS FOR SHARING!

We are grateful to report that our congregation contributed **\$2,160** this spring to One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS)—**our most generous participation ever, and \$450 more than our previous record.** With this total, we support worldwide initiatives in healthcare, education, agriculture, refugee assistance, and emergency relief. OGHS is perhaps the most vital UCC mission campaign of the year, we are proud to support it so faithfully. *Many thanks!*



ON THE ROAD WITH LIL' JESUS. Biff and Michelle Simpson sent a series of photos on a journey south through the Carolinas and Florida to Key West. They brought along a faithful friend!

Introducing SHARe:

Supporting and Helping Asylees and Refugees

SHARe is a new, local nonprofit dedicated to bringing asylum seekers to the Upper Valley and providing them with host families and support services—taking over work begun by UVIP, which our congregation has supported for several years now. If you'd like to learn more about SHARe's plans and ways to volunteer, just visit an Open House, email sharevtnh@gmail.com, or contact Kathy Beckett (beckettkathleen7@gmail.com/860-392-9306).

All are welcome to join a Virtual Open House on Zoom, either May 7 or 20 ([Sign-up Here!](#))

Please join the local effort to welcome immigrants and refugees into our community.



Support Our Friends at Bike & Build!

Bike & Build has again made the difficult but necessary decision to cancel all its cross-country routes advocating for affordable-housing

reform nationwide. So, sadly, FCC won't host another energetic group of young adults on the Northern Route until next June. However, despite its cancellation of rides, B&B's grant-making foundation and other operations continue! **Find out more at bikeandbuild.org.**

Along their routes, Bike & Build riders join repair and construction projects with local chapters of **Habitat for Humanity** (www.uvhabitat.org) and organizations such as **COVER Home Repair** in WRJ (www.coverhomerepair.org).

We'll miss our spirited biker-builders again this year! Please consider supporting this incredible program and the work of Bike & Build's local partners, COVER Home Repair and Upper Valley Habitat.

Thank You, Volunteers!



Dismas of Vermont



HARTFORD DISMAS HOUSE

is part of a network that helps recently incarcerated women and men return and readjust to new life outside of prison. Located on Maple Street in Hartford, the house offers its residents a safe environment while they develop skills, relationships, and daily habits to support their transition, "reconciling prisoners to society, and society to prisoners."

FCC will be providing meals for residents at Dismas House on the fourth Thursday each month from April through October.

Many thanks to those who have offered to work together on these meals:

April 22—Corrine Erskine, Barb Laro

May 27—Larry Doyle, Deb and Jon Scott

June 24—Linda Jacobs, Dawn Troutman

July 22—Nicole Mason, Erin Smith

August 26—Lola Baldwin, Brian Clancy, Wendell Smith

September 23—Ron Bailey, Kathy Beckett

October 28—Corrine Erskine, Barb Laro

If you'd like to help out on one of these dates and share a meal at Dismas House, please contact the office or Corrine Erskine (603-448-3919/cerskine@yahoo.com).

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

We're Returning to Our Sanctuary!
Pentecost Sunday, May 23

*In-Person and Zoom Worship at 10:00 am—**Wear Red!***
Mask use and physical distancing required; no coffee hour.

Let Us Gather Again for Worship Together!

Blanket Sunday
Mother's Day, May 9

Shelter Sunday
Father's Day, June 20

Children's Sunday is June 13

Celebrate Our
Children's Community Corner!

Spring Clean-Up

Saturday, May 22, 9:00 am

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