



Grace Notes

The Newsletter of First Congregational Church

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The Pastoral Perspective

As I write this on Wednesday, November 4, I am struck yet again by how our faith can help us navigate the shoals and rapids of life. Like you, I presume, I am awaiting the final results from the election. And while I can check my phone for alerts, look at any number of websites, or tune in to the TV news, that will not cause the results to come any faster. My impatience will not change anything.

Scripture tells us that there are some things beyond our control. Of critical interest to the early church was when Jesus would return. People tried to discern patterns in the text and seek out hidden meanings, despite Jesus' admonitions that this knowledge was not for people to know. They (and we) would simply have to wait and, as they did that, lead faithful lives of service and Christian love.

Now, in writing this I am in no way trying to draw an equivalence between waiting for the return of Christ and expecting the final tallies from an electoral contest. But I do think there are some lessons that are transferrable from the former to the latter. We need to wait, but wisely. We need to live as if Jesus were going to return any minute now, not setting every care aside but turning our eyes to living in a such a manner to prepare ourselves to be held to account. So, rather than stew about those returns not coming in fast enough, we can focus on how we will live our lives and to pay attention to what we do know, now, in this moment.

If any one thing is clear from this year's election, it is that we are a polarized nation, with very different views of reality. This is not a healthy situation. While I am not going to counsel that we all simply just get along, we need to recognize our common humanity, that we all have one creator God and that his Son, Jesus, came to share the Gospel with all of us—even with those people with whom we disagree, those we dislike. As Christians, we are called to show the world what life in the Kingdom of God will be like, and I cannot imagine that it is meant to be marked by recrimination and fighting, name-calling and even anathematizing.

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SUNDAY SERVICE



Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service

Tuesday, November 24
7:00 pm

All will receive a Zoom invitation link by email. Please join us!

All are welcome to share this inclusive, ecumenical worship service online, joining friends from across the Upper Valley to faithfully observe Thanksgiving.

Let us give thanks together as a community!

Neighbors in Need

Special UCC Mission Offering Continues

Neighbors in Need supports ministries of justice and compassion across the US. Two-thirds of the collection is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries for local and national initiatives, service projects, and advocacy efforts. The remainder goes to the Council for American Indian Ministries, sustaining a tradition of aiding Native American populations.

This year, NIN is focused on serving our immigrant neighbors and their communities.

Please contribute as you are able, either by mail to the church or at www.ucc.org/nin.

THE CHRISTMAS FUND

The UCC's Christmas Fund, also known as the Fund for the Veterans of the Cross, offers compassionate, grateful support for retired clergy and their families with pension, healthcare, and emergency assistance.

Please consider a contribution as you are able.

Please note that Church Council has extended the suspension of indoor worship and other on-site events at FCC until at least January 10, following an abundance of caution regarding COVID-19. Council is continuously assessing circumstances in our area.

Stewardship Sunday is November 22 By the Grace of God

"For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land... Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.'" —Deuteronomy 8:7,17

Deuteronomy 8 tells us of the reminder given to the children of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land: Don't let wealth go to your head, and remember that it is by God's grace that you have prospered. This is a call to Thanksgiving, but also to humility. This is a time to be mindful of all that we've received from the Lord.

Look for stewardship materials in the mail soon, and plan to join us for worship (via Zoom!) on November 22, as we dedicate our 2021 pledges.

No matter the size of your commitment, we are grateful for YOUR support of our church's mission and ministry in 2021.

Sunday Worship Online

Zoom Services—Sundays at 10:00 am

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

The Zoom link is emailed early each 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, 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 and other resources are posted on our website and sent out with the Sunday morning email. We also post the text or recording of Rev. Steve Silver's sermon.

COMMITTEE NOTES

CHURCH COUNCIL

This fall Council has very carefully considered the question of our **re-opening**. Given local increases in covid cases and ongoing uncertainty of large public gatherings, it seems advisable to continue suspending services and other events through Advent and Christmas. Amidst general agreement, some suggested that we be clear about the timeline in order to manage expectations, without offering interim dates for reconsideration. Steve Silver added that committing to remote worship through Advent offers the flexibility of being creative, rather than having to wonder whether our familiar practices will be possible.

Nan Parsons has devised alternative plans for the **Children's Community Corner's** upcoming year, in lieu of in-person use of downstairs space. In an effort to keep the children physically connected to their space at FCC, she arranged to send small table-top fountains to everyone's homes. Nan will be trying to keep families involved despite COVID-19 restrictions, connecting by way of occasional Zoom meetings a half-hour prior to worship, in a loosely structured, broadly themed format. Chip Silver and Kailyn Rappaport will occasionally co-teach remote sessions; the older children would like to use some ideas from Marcia Corkins' time with the group. The kids will be focusing this year on Bible literacy and research skills.

The **Diaconate** has engaged in a hard but fruitful discussion about FCC's involvement with outside organizations and causes. While all

agreed that we should offer diverse opportunities for our congregation to get involved in larger social and political causes, it is problematic to take a public position without the approval of the congregation.

The **Mission and Social Action Committee** has considered how best to structure its membership and activity. This is a vital area of our ministry, important to everyone in the congregation, but it often is a challenge to determine who will do what. It is also uncertain how FCC will move forward from the pending dissolution of UVIP. The primary option offered by UVIP, joining the Granite State Organizing Project, does not seem to suit our wishes.

The **Board of Governors** got two estimates, from DR Key and TRJF, for the Parsonage sewer-line repair and replacement. DR Key has an established reputation in Lebanon and can do the work this fall, rather than waiting until the spring, and they would restore above-ground landscaping. Council approved this plan, to be funded by Dole Trust capital funds.

Treasurer Terry Ellison has noted no concerns on either the income or expense side of our budget through the third quarter. Stewardship has reached about \$65,000 toward our \$80,000 goal; contributions to the Open Door Ministry are only about half our 2020 goal, a drop resulting primarily from the suspension of in-person services. Terry has spoken with Valerie Nevel about various income and accounting questions, such as the designation of our annual Waldo Trust money.

Committee Meetings

The following regular meetings will happen remotely via Zoom teleconferences:

Diaconate 11/9 and 12/14, 7:00

Council 11/17 and 12/15, 7:00

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

For the **Trustees**, Valerie Nevel is watching the troubling economic outlook and its implications on our investments, trying to ensure that FCC will be prepared for any future hardship. She plans to have an online meeting with our United Church Fund advisors to discuss investment performance and market outlook. Valerie also asked whether we should bolster the MSA account balance with one large distribution of Dole Trust mission funds, rather than making transfers one-at-a-time as approved by Council. She noted that the Dole balance is now quite healthy and could be used more generously for mission purposes such as our Open Door Ministry.

Discussion considered our patterns of funding food and gas cards and other assistance, as well as a variety of mission-related contributions to Listen, Epilogos, UV Gear, and other organizations. Steve Silver noted that the terms of the Dole Trust don't explicitly prescribe spending a third on mission and two thirds on capital items, as we've traditionally thought. All agreed on the importance of funding as many mission purposes as possible, whether from Dole or

COMMITTEE NOTES

the general treasury. The Finance Committee will take up this issue and clarify Dole Trust policies.

Terry Ellison raised a related question about the state of our **escrow funds**, which reside in a discrete Mascoma Bank account. Many years ago, FCC's financial leadership recommended making annual contributions to this fund to be held in escrow for various needs, such as building repairs, organ maintenance, and pastor sabbatical expenses. Those allotments have not been made for several years, even though we continue to account for them in our annual budgets, and all agreed that we should resume this plan for unexpected expenses. The Finance Committee will determine the appropriate allocations and make recommendations for 2021.

Jon Scott noted for **Stewardship** that our annual fall pledge appeal would have to consider our circumstances, as suspension of in-person worship will likely continue for some time. While we have to move forward with our usual planning, Jon recognized that we need an approach that suits the uncertainty around covid-19 and related economic distress.

For the **Music Committee**, Brian Clancy reported that Ernie Drown is settling in well, having renovated the music office downstairs and gotten accustomed to our weekly recording routines. Ernie is looking forward to doing more in coming weeks, particularly in trying to reach out to the choir. His hire seems to be an excellent fit so far. Brian also confirmed that no public concerts would be held at FCC this fall, but a couple performers have arranged

to make recordings in our Sanctuary, a limited and safe building use that helps maintain our connections to the musical community.

Speaking as Church Administrator, Brian raised the question of whether we might again host the bi-monthly **WIC clinics**, as that program has tentatively considered resuming in-person operations. It seems that the program's staff would be responsible about health and safety protocols and pose minimal risk to our church community, but having numerous families pass through our building does entail some unpredictability. With the congregation still absent from the building, the primary risk would be to church staff.

In his **pastor's report** Steve Silver observed the benefits of offering adult-education options on Zoom, which allows more participants and easier scheduling than in the past. In worship and other areas, we will continue some online offerings even after we reopen. Steve has been in touch with the new interim pastor at West Lebanon Congregational and the new pastor at Lebanon United

Methodist, and the First Baptist congregation will finally return to their building sometime after the new year. And all are invited to join the annual meeting of the Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association, to be held on Zoom on November 8.

Steve worked with the family of longtime FCC member Laura Place to accommodate her funeral in our sanctuary on October 10, with firm attendance limits and precautions for COVID in place. While we were glad to offer the service and all went smoothly that day, it did bring some logistical complexity, suggesting the challenges of returning to in-person worship. He thanked the Deacons and congregation for our successful outdoor services, inviting feedback, should we offer those again.

Steve again expressed his gratitude to the congregation for being so supportive and collaborative during our ongoing shutdown. He offered encouragement as we head deeper into the fall and winter, which may well pose challenges as we continue to deal with the coronavirus and its myriad consequences.



GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF IT. Repairing a root-clogged sewer line at the Parsonage required the heavy equipment of local firm DR Key, which upgraded the old clay pipe with new PVC line.

COMMITTEE NOTES

DIACONATE

In September the Deacons talked about FCC's role in outside projects in which the lead organization—e.g., the Graham Ministry or Black Lives Matter—may advocate issues that go beyond positions formally taken by our congregation. It was suggested that wider congregational discussion take place around issue advocacy that is congregation-initiated. The Deacons recognized that general information on such organizations and initiatives could be provided without indicating any institutional endorsement from FCC.

Surveying congregational concerns, the Deacons expressed support for Harriet Oman, Larry Doyle, and Jim Oronte, all of whom continue to deal with various health issues.

Longtime member Ardell Mansfield has now moved from her home to Harvest Hill at APD. The Deacons also thanked Nan Parsons and her crew for sustaining the Children's Community Corner.

The Deacons also welcomed Ernie Drown to FCC's staff, with some introduction from Steve about Ernie's background and experience. Ernie looks forward to getting to

know the congregation and invited comments. Several have expressed interest in having more music for Zoom services, possibly requiring better equipment.

While three outdoor services this fall have gone well, the Diaconate discussed our ability to welcome walk-ins and the limitations of cold weather. Laura Place's memorial service drew about 65 attendees but highlighted our capacity limits and the participants' inability to interact socially. It was agreed these services should remain a rare exception until the spring of 2021.

Black Lives Matter Vigils in the Upper Valley

All are encouraged to participate in one or more of these weekly **Black Lives Matter** vigils for racial justice. FCC's Church Council and the Mission and Social Action Committee have affirmed this as a relatively easy but visible and important way for all members of our congregation to offer our Christian witness to the many tragedies of systemic racism and join in demanding significant cultural change. Bring your own signs promoting racial justice, awareness, and action—and spread the word among your friends and social networks.

HANOVER—Mondays, 5:00-5:30
Hanover/Dartmouth Green

LEBANON—Tuesdays, 5:00-5:30
Colburn Park, opposite Opera House

MERIDEN—Wednesdays, 5:00-6:00
Corner of Route 120 and Main Street

CANAAN—Thursdays, 5:00-5:30
Downtown sidewalks (NOT on the Green)

PLAINFIELD—Fridays, 5:00-6:00
Near the Town Library

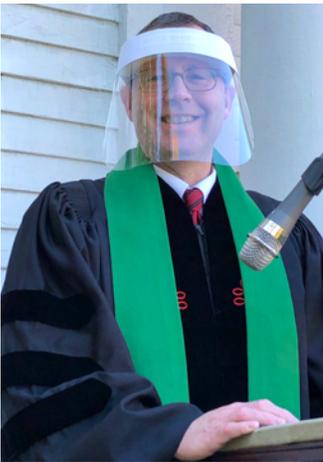
The **Pastoral Perspective**, *continued from Page 1*

Instead, we are called to love one another, to serve the least among us, to witness to the saving power and grace of Jesus, to tend to the ties that bind us into one community. If we do these things, we will find ourselves looking at our lives with a different perspective, one that is concerned with building up, and sharing, and making possible renewed life for all of God's people, whoever and wherever they might be.

Yours faithfully,

Steve

THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION



JUST A BIT CHILLY. Outdoor services on September 20 and October 11 both drew around forty hearty congregants, all bundled up in blankets, hats, and winter clothes. Cellist Ben Kulp was a very welcome guest.



MUSIC AT THE MEETINGHOUSE

Welcome, Ernie Drown!

We're delighted to welcome Ernie Drown to our ministry team as Organist and Choir Director. A superb, highly regarded musician who has practiced his craft in myriad Upper Valley ensembles and organizations, Ernie brings to our congregation decades of experience, musicianship, knowledge, and devotion. Welcome to FCC!

Hello, everyone! It is good to be on "the team" here. Steve and Brian have been most helpful, and I'm busy sorting decades of music and stuff in my new office. Here's a short bio, for those of you who don't know it already:

I was raised in the UCC in Barre, VT, where I sang in the choirs and had my first experience on the organ. The minister there, Ernest Seely, was a titan, a powerful man I greatly admired, and a strong influence on the direction my life would take. I majored in music in college and took the academic degree (MTS) in seminary. After marrying Beth Hilgartner—now 40 years on!—we returned to Barre, where I was the director at the public library and organist at the local Episcopal and Baptist churches. I migrated to Bethany Church in Montpelier, and then to both St. Thomas Episcopal and our sister UCC church in Hanover, where I served for twenty years. Retirement didn't suit me, so... Here I am, happy to be "on the bench" again.

I am looking forward to getting to know all of you and working with the choir. I'd enjoy input from anyone about what you've liked (or disliked) about the music here. My email is music@fccleb.org.



MAKING HIMSELF AT HOME. Ernie Drown is getting comfortable at the organ bench in our Sanctuary, and it helps to have familiar friends like Leslie Stroud visit to collaborate on some special worship music. Below, Ernie relaxes in his new office at FCC, freshly painted and well stocked with his diverse personal library.



Thank You, Susan Sorensen!

At the end of September, Susan Sorensen finished her faithful service as our (long-term!) interim organist during this most unusual year at FCC. As her friend Ernie Drown takes up his post here, Susan has returned full-time to her personal skin-care business—but she will no doubt be back at FCC to substitute again in the future!

Dear Steve, Brian, and FCC Friends,

Thank you so much for the beautiful flowers, kind words, and warm welcome you gave me all those months ago. I have very much enjoyed my time with all of you. Thank you for the opportunity to serve this community, and for your support!

*With Gratitude,
Susan*

OUR LOCAL AND GLOBAL MISSION

Operation Christmas Child is Happening Online

National Collection Week: November 16-23

We are again participating in OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD, an annual gift campaign organized by Samaritan's Purse, which ships shoeboxes of supplies and toys to children worldwide. Gloria and Phil Hammond have managed our collection at FCC in recent years; this year we invite you to build shoeboxes online before national collection week, November 16-23.



For more information about this year's virtual operation, and to build a box online, please visit www.samaritanspurse.org/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child/. Thank you!

THANK YOU!



Community Services

Many thanks to all who gave so generously to FCC's donation to Listen Community Services for their **Holiday Basket Program**. The economic challenges of the pandemic have increased demand for this program, but health precautions preclude fulfilling gift requests directly, as we usually do with our Giving Tree of clothing and gift cards.

Listen is doing the shopping this year and hoped to receive \$900 from FCC—but **our congregation contributed a total of \$1350**, which will enable Listen to serve more families on their waiting list. Thanks to all of you for giving in the true spirit of Christmas!

A Word from Epilogos to FCC's Children

Dear Young Parishioners,

You have done a wonderful thing helping children in El Salvador. With the help of your donation, two high-school students and one middle-school student will be able to go to school. I am sure it is hard to imagine not having enough money to go to school, but let me explain why. These children have to buy a uniform, shoes, books, and their own school supplies. Their families do not have the money for all this.

So, on behalf of the children of San José Villanueva, thank you for raising all of this money!

Muchas gracias,

Terry Phillips

Vice President, Epilogos Charities Inc.

CONNECTING OUR CONGREGATION

GET HELP, GIVE HELP! If you need some assistance with groceries, errands, or other tasks in these isolated times, volunteers from our congregation can lend a hand.

FELLOWSHIP THROUGH FOOD! Would you enjoy a meal provided by a church friend? Or maybe you'd enjoy cooking for someone in need? Either way, please let us know.

If you are in need, or you would like to volunteer your help, we invite you to contact either the church office or Rev. Steve Silver directly. Thanks!

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



Ecumenical
Thanksgiving
Service

Tuesday, November 24, 7:00 pm
Remote Worship on Zoom
All Are Welcome!

Stewardship Sunday

November 22

By the Grace of God

Deuteronomy 8:7-18

Look for stewardship materials in the mail soon!

ADVENT BEGINS NOVEMBER 29 *Prepare to Celebrate the Season of Christ's Birth!*

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Ernie Drown, 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