

First Parish Congregational Church
United Church of Christ – East Derry, New Hampshire
February 2024 Newsletter

“Friend, you enter this church not as a stranger, but as a guest of God. Come, then, with joy in your heart and thanks upon your lips and offer God today your love and your service.”

Adapted from a 12th Century Church in Hampshire, England

From the Pastor’s Desk

Dear Child of God,

2024 is off to a glorious start and God is already showing up in so many ways! Winter arrived in full force the very first weekend of January with 17 inches of snow Sunday morning! AND we were able to worship “together” remotely. What a gift! A couple weeks later in January we held our Annual Meeting with so many people – me included! – joining on line! Again, what a gift! We successfully made updates to the By-Laws, passed a lean budget – with almost a dozen families stepping up with designated donations to pay the line of credit on the Meetinghouse (what a gift!) and adopted a provisional Vision statement.

Now, we look ahead. It is possible that you, like me, grew up in the protestant tradition and never made much of Lent. It was always something that our Catholic friends did. We heard the words: lent, Ash Wednesday, imposition of ashes, no-meat-Fridays, giving-up-something, alms-giving, fasting, and more. Growing up Methodist, I never received ashes, nor did I ever experience a Tenebrae (Shadow) Service. We went from waving palms and shouts of “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday to Easter morning “hallelujah”! And then the Protestant churches realized that there was something quite sacred about this period called Lent. Lent lasts for 40 days (don’t count Sunday!), representing the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness after he was baptized prior to beginning his ministry. Of course, there are also other examples of “forty” in sacred scripture. It’s an important number to the ancients.

Many Protestants began to implement some aspects of Lent into our traditions. Here, at First Parish, we talk about the 6 weeks of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends with Palm/Passion Sunday. We generally offer programs during Lent that ask more time and more energy of you. Lent ends with Holy Week where our services have particular focus: Palm Sunday, which ends with acknowledging the Passion (agony and death of Jesus); Maundy Thursday, when we experience the shadows in a Tenebrae Service; midday Ecumenical Good Friday Services, when we coordinate with several

churches in Derry, going from church to church; an outdoor sunrise service Easter morning (usually at Broadview Farm) along with a regular Easter morning worship service.

Our plan for 2024 is as follows: Lent arrives early this year. Ash Wednesday is February 14th. We will have a traditional Ash Wednesday Service with Communion and Imposition of Ashes at 7pm. In preparation for Ash Wednesday, we will come together the day before to celebrate “Shrove Tuesday”, known as Fat Tuesday. It’s a pancake supper on Tuesday night. Mark your calendar and join us! Historically, they add pancakes the night before Lent began so that they could use up all the butter and eggs before those six weeks of fasting began. For us, we will give thanks for community as we indulge in pancakes together.

Historically, there are three themes during Lent: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. These are wonderful sacred traditions that are highly valued. And I asked myself (which means I prayed about it, wondering with God) what the underpinning of these three traditions might be. Spirit clarified with me that this historic trinity of Lenten behaviors is rooted in three habits that God asks of all of God’s children.

1. The goal of prayer is connection to the Divine. Connecting to the Divine is a worldview. Of course, we “connect” when we offer a simple prayer. For example, “Dear God, please be with me and those I love today. Give me strength through any trials and help me through difficulties. Amen.” We also connect with the Divine when we acknowledge the goodness in those around us or the beauty in the natural world. I worked with a physical therapist once who was convinced that every person needed to spend 30 minutes in nature every single day. “It would change the world” he said with conviction. One last aspect of connecting to the Divine, is by acknowledging your own Christ light. Look in the mirror and make eye contact with that soul looking back at you. Thank them for doing their best. Thank God for them. If you aren’t ready to look that person in the eyes yet, place your hand on your heart and breathe in gratefully.
2. The goal of fasting is Mindfulness. Historically, we thinking of fasting as abstinence from certain food for a designated period of time. There is more to it. Fasting is paying attention: paying attention to what we do, what we eat, what we say. Some people fast from bad behavior, like swearing, during Lent. Some people fast from unhealthy habits, like too much alcohol. And some people choose to add a good habit or behavior – rather than eliminating a bad one. For example, one might choose to start a gratitude journal, writing down three things every day for which one is grateful. All of these are actually examples of mindfulness; paying attention with intention.

3. The goal of almsgiving is Generosity. Back in the day when the religious institution needed money, there were not the plethora of not-for-profit organizations that there are today. In Biblical times, faithful believers were expected to give one-tenth of whatever they had to God. How does all of that translate in today's world? When you normally leave a tip of 15%, how about leaving a tip of 25% during Lent? If you honestly appreciate a service worker in your life, a postal worker or delivery driver or auto repair shop, what about giving them a gift card to say thanks? Look for ways to be generous. There are many options available. Be creative!

Let's go into Lent and 2024 with a focus on these three life-giving functions: connecting to the Divine, Mindfulness and Generosity. And may God be praised!

Pastor Deborah

Christian Education and Faith Formation

SUNDAY SCHOOL (CCEP Children's Christian Education Program)

Sunday School Calendar

February 25 - No Sunday School for winter break

March 24 - Horton Sunday/Palm Sunday with children singing an offering song

March 31 - No Sunday School as it is Easter

April 21 - No Sunday School for spring break

May 26 - No Sunday School for Memorial Day Weekend

June 2 - Last Day for this school year Sunday School

June 9 - Celebration Sunday where we have a luncheon after service

This month we are learning about Faith. We are starting with the stories in Mark with the sick women and the father of the sick daughter. These two people had faith in Jesus. They didn't know what would happen but they had faith that Jesus would help them. What does Faith truly mean to us? We will be discussing this with the young disciples.

Also, as we are heading into Lent this month, we are preparing for Palm Sunday. We will be practicing a song to sing for the congregation on Palm Sunday, March 24.

VACATION CHURCH CAMP

Save the Date: July 22-26 from 9-Noon

We have a theme! Camp Firelight is the theme. Ms. Steph and Ms. Chris Cox are co leaders this year. If you would like to help that week or help with prepping for the event please let either of us know. Thank you in advance. We look forward to a “camp”tastic week.

FEBRUARY EVENTS FOR FAMILIES:

Fat Tuesday is February 13 and church is having a pancake dinner. We would love for you all to come. We are looking for helpful children who would love to be servers for this event. If you want to help out please let Ms. Steph or Jo Worthen know.

SoulCollage® with Liz is open to all who can use scissors. This is an event to use your right brain with no mistakes that can be made. There is supper at 6 with crafting starting at 6:30. Join all 4 weeks or just one. Tuesdays during Lent: Feb 20 & 27 and March 5 & 12.

Prepared to Serve is an annual United Church of Christ (UCC) event that is held at Pembroke Academy. It is Saturday Feb 24. New this year, there are youth blocks. These include hearing from other UCC youth about church along with social matters and learn about Horton Center as well. It looks like this will be of interest for junior high and high school youth. It is an all day event from 8-4 which includes breakfast and lunch. If interested, check out the site <https://nhcucc.regfox.com/prepared-to-serve-2024>

CE BOARD:

We are excited to welcome Kelly Ploof, Sue Lindemann, Elieen Cox and Holly Gorgol to the board. We are happy to have a full board for 2024.

Our meeting this month is Thursday Feb 8 at 7pm. All are invited to share ideas or know more about Christian Ed.

Thank you for all your support in the past and in this coming year!

Sincerely, Anne-Marie Merrill, chairperson, Paula Robinson, Chris Cox, Holly Gorgol, Elieen Cox, Kelly Ploof, and Sue Lindemann, along with CE Director Steph Berg

Debbie Gline Allen ~ Ecclesiastical Council

What IS an Ecclesiastical Council?

You may have seen an announcement for my Ecclesiastical Council on February 4th at 3:00 p.m. at First Parish Church. You may have noticed that Pastor Deborah and the Deacons are all excited about this. You may be wondering, “What’s all the fuss about?”

An Ecclesiastical Council is defined in the United Church of Christ *Manual On Ministry* as, “...a gathering of delegates on behalf of an Association to decide, on behalf of the United Church of Christ, for or against the ordination of a Member in Discernment...following the affirmative recommendation of a Committee On Ministry.” (<https://www.ucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ManualonMinistry-2018.pdf>, p. 33)

A few definitions are needed here:

- An Association is made up of a group of UCC congregations in a specific geographical area (for us it resembles Rockingham County) that support each other and their ministers.
- A Committee On Ministry is a group of about 8 people, half lay members and half clergy, whose purpose is to support the Association’s congregations, its ordained ministers, and those seeking ordination.
- A Member In Discernment is someone who comes to the Committee On Ministry to be accepted as a candidate for ordination, and then complete a preparation process for the ministry.

I have been working with the Rockingham Association on becoming an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ for the past few years. This process has been in covenant with First Parish Church, as it is the church of my membership, working most closely with Pastor Deborah, and a sub-group of the Deacons – Sue Brown, Rachel Cobban, and Brian Williams. I also have been working with the NH Conference UCC Unified Member In Discernment Mentoring Team and an advisor who helped me to develop a learning plan and prepare me for this “final exam.”

On February 4th, delegates, clergy, and representatives from all 22 churches in the Rockingham Association will come to First Parish Church to hear me present my spiritual autobiography, my understanding of my call to ordained ministry, my understanding of the theology and beliefs of the United Church of Christ, as well as those about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and the Christian Church. This will take about 20 minutes, after which anyone in attendance may ask me questions about my presentation, which should also take about 20 minutes. Then they will ask

me and all visitors (those who aren't voting delegates) to leave the room while there is some deliberation and discussion, followed by a vote. Finally, all of the visitors and I are invited back into the room to hear the results of the vote. If the vote is in the affirmative, I will be able to proceed with a service of ordination.

All of you are invited to come!

You may find it interesting from a number of different viewpoints – learning what I believe about my ministry in the Church, seeing the United Church of Christ in action, welcoming our siblings from area UCC congregations, and perhaps other “churchy” things you may not have been aware of before.

I hope you will join me in this time of sharing and learning together.

At the request of the First Parish Congregational Church, UCC located at 47 East Derry Rd., East Derry, NH 03041 the Rockingham Association invites you and your lay delegates the opportunity to attend a hybrid gathering for the Ecclesiastical Council of Debbie Gline Allen to Christian Ministry in the United Church of Christ.

Sunday, February 4th, 2024 at 3:00 P.M.

Use this link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84111615767> to join the Zoom Meeting

In preparation for the EC, read Debbie's presentation

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HRAeS7-AdSbp0GVARFjYhZtj5Rln3xWh/view>

Safe Church

The Safe Church Committee is preparing protocols that were identified during the NH Homeland Security Emergency Management Exercise that was held at First Parish in December. A range of situations were covered to help us identify the work we need to do to be as prepared as possible for unexpected adverse events. Some of these protocols will include: dealing with emergency health problems, accidents, human threats & other issues. Anyone interested in joining our group or finding out more information may contact a Safe Church Committee member. Thank You, Jo Worthen, Ken Williams, Christie Lombardi, Tom Wood, Paula Robinson, Julie Greenfield, Chris Cox, Terrance Brand & James Hayden

SoulCollage®

Lent 2024: Join us on Tuesday Evenings
SoulCollage® as an Exploration of the Themes of Lent

Image, imagination, and creativity are languages of the soul. SoulCollage® is a powerful, yet simple, technique that draws from all three. This year Pastor Deborah is inviting everyone to broaden and modernize their understanding of the three traditional tenets of Lent (prayer, fasting and almsgiving) and ponder in our hearts our connection to the Divine, Mindfulness and Generosity.

Join me from 6:30 to 8:00pm on four Tuesday evenings during Lent: February 20, 27, March 5 and 12 as we use the right-brain sacred practice (SoulCollage®) to inform our Spirituality.

I am a SoulCollage® Facilitator. Some of you have experienced my workshops. Some have not. This is a “no experience necessary” activity where you can participate as much or as little as you choose. You are invited to gather and to participate to your comfort level.

I will provide everything you need: a wide selection of images from magazines, glue sticks, scissors, and other supplies. You just need to come with an open mind and an open heart. Images inform us all. Imagination is inside each one of us. Creativity is never judged in SoulCollage®. This will be a safe space. You will receive instructions and I will be available to help guide you. We will spend four weeks together choosing images, creating SoulCollage® cards, and sharing at a deeper soul level within our faith community. And of course, you may bring a friend or loved one.

There is no cost for this experience. Please just come. Join us on February 20 for our first gathering.

A simple supper will take place from 6-6:30. Details will be made available as they develop. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely, Liz Greenberg lizgreenberg26@gmail.com

The Church Calendar

We keep our public Google calendar up to date with all church events, meetings and all groups that are using our building. Check out our calendar on our website <http://www.fpc-ucc.org> or by clicking https://calendar.google.com/calendar/embed?src=fpc-ucc.org_6s1980fengv0fdl7h843u246lc%40group.calendar.google.com&ctz=America%2FNew_York

Annual Meeting: Brief Summary and Thank You

Just a quick note to thank everyone who participated in the Annual Meeting on Sunday, 1/28/24 either in person or online. We managed to accomplish everything that we had on the agenda. While minutes from the meeting will be available soon, here's a quick summary of what we accomplished as a congregation and some further information:

1. We celebrated a great 2023, which included being selected by the Derry-Londonderry Chamber of Commerce as NonProfit of the Year.
2. We adopted a budget after 17 people/giving units made new contributions totalling \$23,870 toward the 2024 mortgage payment of \$30,000, cutting our projected budget deficit from \$34,000 to \$10,000!! We have 6 pledges of \$2500 covering one month each of the mortgage payments, 2 pledges of \$1800 each covering 3 weeks, 2 pledges of \$1200 each covering 2 weeks, 4 pledges of \$600 each covering 1 week, plus 3 additional pledges covering a couple days each.
3. We adopted a Vision statement that takes a strong and clear stance on the type of church we strive to be: "To live our faith by being a compassionate, accepting, and generous presence in the community; a church where all people find purpose and belonging."
4. We elected a set of officers and members of the church's Boards and committees.
5. We approved several modifications to the church's By Laws.
6. We heard encouraging news about progress on the Meeting House and the likelihood of getting back into the sanctuary by our target date of Christmas this year.

Several people said that they were considering pledging a contribution toward the 2024 mortgage payment but needed a bit more time to think about it and to consult with other decision makers in their family. If you would like to make such a pledge, please send that information and the amount you'll pledge to our newly elected Financial Secretary, Reni Harnden. When making payments on that pledge, all such contributions should say clearly in the memo section of their check "For mortgage payment" so that Reni can correctly attribute your contribution to the right account.

Finally, special thanks to Paul Lindemann and Suzanne Finocchiaro for their many hours pulling the slides and reports together for the meeting. And to the people who arranged, prepared, or served the impromptu lunch.

Randy Brown
Moderator

Electronic Giving

We now have electronic giving available for anyone who would like to offer a paperless gift to the church. God Bless You!



First Parish

@First-Parish · 7 friends

We accept Venmo. Please note **where** you want the contribution to go. **General fund** (we need all the help we can to get to close the books in the black); **Mission – which one?** Or **Meetinghouse** or some other fund. Make sure you pick the right Venmo account – see our account picture on the left.

We can also process your credit card at <https://square.link/u/g98jLXqb>

First Parish Church's Identity Statements:

The United Church of Christ is guided by covenants rather than creeds. We don't tell you what you must believe. As an organization we discern how we see ourselves in God's Creation. We are then guided by various statements, which are voted upon by the entire congregation at a meeting called for that purpose. See below our Mission Statement, Our Open & Affirming Statement and our brand new Vision Statement.

Mission Statement

(Background: First Parish worked with nationally known consultant Alice Mann to discern who we were as a church. The result was the Mission Statement. Over the past decade leaders have looked at this statement to see if it still fits. It does and so it stands.)

"We are a community of faith built upon a firm foundation of worship, prayer, and education. In affirming diversity, we are dedicated to welcoming all people who seek the Word of God, Christian fellowship, and service to others. In partnership with Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, we reach out to the ever-widening community through active and loving ministry." (Adopted April 2000)

Open & Affirming Statement

(Background: In 2013, First Parish underwent a dedicated study with the goal of discerning whether we felt called to become Open & Affirming. The result of that process was a vote to be listed as Open & Affirming and the following statement.)

"We affirm Christ's call to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. We therefore pledge ourselves to be open to and affirming of all people of every age, race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, socioeconomic status, family configuration, or cultural background. All who affirm the love of Christ in their lives are welcome into this community and to share fully in its life and ministry. We rejoice in the worth, gifts, and dignity of every person as a child of God." (Adopted January 2014)

Vision Statement

(Background: In 2023, the Council recognized that although we had a Mission Statement that we liked, we lacked a Vision Statement. The following is the result of this process.)

"To live our faith by being a compassionate, accepting, and generous presence in the community: a church where all people find purpose and belonging." (Adopted January 2024)



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**First Parish
Congregational Church, UCC**

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Office Hours

Generally, our office is open

Monday through Friday 9am-3pm

Please call ahead to make sure we
are in the office

Online

www.fpc-ucc.org

facebook.com/fpcucc

Senior Pastor and Teacher

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