

# First Parish Congregational Church

## United Church of Christ – East Derry, New Hampshire



**2026 - 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 12<sup>th</sup> Century Church in Hampshire, England

### The Pastor's Page

What a season of joy and gratitude we have been living! The light and music of Christmas still linger among us in the laughter shared, the generosity shown, and the deep sense of community that continues to grow. I am especially thankful for the gift of everyone's time and care at our Annual Meeting. Your presence, your voices, and your faithfulness are a true reflection of who we are as a church: engaged, hopeful, and committed to walking together.

I also want to celebrate the beautiful connections forming among us. Our Coffee and Conversation group and Lunch Bunch have become such life-giving spaces full of stories, listening, prayer, and joy. These simple gatherings are holy ground, where relationships are deepened and God's love is shared around tables and coffee cups. Thank you to all who show up, invite others, and make these moments possible.

Now, even as the glow of Christmas warms our hearts, we find ourselves gently turning toward the season of Lent. This is not a leaving joy behind, but a carrying it with us into reflection, into prayer, into deeper awareness of God's grace at work in our lives and in the world. I look forward to walking this next season with you, trusting that the same God who met us in song and celebration will meet us again in quiet, honesty, and hope.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Carrie



#### **Lenten Dinners.**

February 25<sup>th</sup>, St. Lukes United Methodist Church

March 4<sup>th</sup>, Journey Church

March 11<sup>th</sup>, First Parish Church

March 18<sup>th</sup>, TBA

## The Pastor's Page – *Continued*



On Tuesday February 10<sup>th</sup> at 10:00am in Currier we will guide a relaxed and uplifting conversations. No preparation needed—just come as you are! Bring your questions, your wonderings. Whether you love deep conversation, gentle reflection, or simply being together with others, you'll feel right at home.

This is a wonderful way to connect with others in a warm and welcoming space, share fellowship and maybe a few laughs! Start your day grounded in God's presence. Everyone is welcome—longtime members, newcomers, and friends. Let's journey together with open hearts, warm mugs, and good conversation. We can't wait to see you there!



You're invited to join us for **Lunch Bunch** on Thursday February 26 at 11:30 a.m. in Currier Hall. Bring your own lunch and enjoy a relaxed time of conversation and connection. Coffee and treats will be provided. All are welcome, come as you are and stay as long as you're able!

### All-Church Play Date During February Vacation

Looking for a fun way to connect during February vacation? Families are warmly invited to an All-Church Play Date on Tuesday, February 24, from 10:00–11:30am in Currier Hall.

This relaxed, come-as-you-are morning is open to children of all ages and their caregivers. We'll have a variety of toys and games simple, screen-free fun that encourages creativity, laughter, and time together across generations.

A light snack and juice will be provided, making it easy to settle in and enjoy the morning. Whether you have toddlers, big kids, or a mix of ages, this is a great chance to gather, play, and build community during February vacation.

We hope you'll join us for a joyful morning of connection and fun!



## Deacons

After checking in with family members and bragging about our beautiful snowfall I found out that our granddaughter Lucy just down the road in Hudson had been battling the flu all weekend. I had a little gift that didn't get wrapped at Christmas, so I set out to deliver it to her to brighten her day. As I drove from Derry to Hudson, I couldn't help but be in awe of the beauty of the snow on the trees. I had to say a little prayer to our God for the gift of my eyesight, the joy in my heart, and the time I had to enjoy the sights of a New England January storm. I also thanked Him for the safety and warmth all my family and friends shared with me on Facebook. I pray that your family and friends are safe and warm as well.

Our January meeting was held via Zoom, which in thinking about it was probably a good idea considering those that have had recent surgeries, and the spread of the flu virus among the ones we hold dear.

At our meeting we worked on the details of worship, how to get more church families involved and how to spread responsibility to all the Deacons on our board. Please speak to a Deacon if there is something you would like to volunteer to do during our worship services.

We did a quick review of our Christmas services, things seemed to go well, and they were very well attended.

From Pastor Carrie's report:

1. **Baptism:** Feb. 8.
2. **Jazz service** Feb.15, and a pancake breakfast after worship. Watch for more details!
3. **New members** Feb.22 including Pastor Carrie.

4. **Ash Wednesday** Feb.18: 7:30-9:00 am. Drive Thru Ashes - Pastor Carrie will give ashes to people in their cars in the parking lot. There will be an 11:00 AM worship service followed by a soup and bread lunch in Currier Hall.



5. **Dinners during Lent:** On February 25, March 4, 11, 18, & 25, there will be dinner at 4 different churches in Derry from 5:30-6:00. Please see the cover page for the list of churches. We will host dinner here at FPC on March 11<sup>th</sup>. Please speak to a Deacon if you are willing to help.

6. **Food Collection:** On March 1, the Mission Board will be collecting food that will benefit The Upper Room.

7. **Kids Play Date:** Feb. 24 there will be a kids play date from 10-11:30. Moms, Dads, even Grandparents are welcome.

Blessings, warmth and love, be yours, Diane M. Breeden, Rachel Cobban, Jo Worthen, Tom Wood, Beth Hunter, Sharon Cann, Deb-Ellen Brown, Kathy Alger and James Hayden

## Christian Education and Faith Formation

### **CE Schedule**

Feb 1: Sunday School 11-Noon

Feb 3: CE Board Meeting hybrid at 6:30pm

Feb 8: Sunday School 11-Noon

Feb 15: Intergenerational Sunday School in Currier Hall with pancake breakfast

Feb 22: No Sunday School due to School Vacation

March 1: Sunday School 11-Noon

### **Sunday School Recap**

This has been a great start to 2026. More children have been able to attend Sunday School. New curriculums were set forth as well. We had switched from the Narrative Lectionary to the Revised Common Lectionary which created a need for a new curriculum. The elementary class, PreK thru 4<sup>th</sup> grade, has been enjoying seeing a science experiment related to the Gospel reading along with crafts and games going with the theme. Themes have been Light as Jesus is the light of the world, Water as Jesus was baptized and Follow Me as Jesus starts gathering his disciples. We head into February with a theme of Blessings from the Beatitudes.

The curriculum for the youth, 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, has been reformed. Literally it is called Reform. It is a curriculum that gets them asking questions about our faith that they may never have thought about before. It has led to great discussions between the teachers and youth. It has been a huge hit all around. February we will finish the Bible theme and head into a new theme.

Please check out the weekly eblast for themes to share with your Sunday School participants and get them excited for Sunday. Also, check out the First Parish Church Facebook page to get a preview of an experiment that goes with the theme. Share the excitement of the fun to be had at Sunday School.

We invite all children from PreK to 8<sup>th</sup> grade to attend. We leave for Sunday School at the last hymn of service and go until noon. We start with a snack all together before splitting into two classes. CE Director Steph Berg runs the elementary group with the help from Heather Paradzick and Sue Lindemann, Anne-Marie Merrill, Chris Cox and Holly Gorgol rotate teaching the youth class. Reni Harnden and Paula Robinson are available to be substitutes if needed as there is always a minimum of two teachers with each group.

### **What is the CE BOARD about?**

Christian Education Board or CE Board for short is to provide faith-based education for the church especially for children through youth. CE Board works hand and hand with the Christian Education Director to provide Sunday School curriculum, Vacation Church Camp in July, Advent Workshop in December and possibly other activities throughout the year. It is a collaborative group. The CE Board assists the pastor with adult formation, as well. Don't let three 3 year terms scare you away. Terms are not contracts. You can be on the board for only 6 months to see if it is a good fit for you. We love to have a parent or two on the Board to get feedback about what they would like to see or give feedback from what their children are saying.

If faith-based education is important to you and you would like to have an input, we would recommend attending a board meeting to check it out. We have two open spots on the Board that we would love to have filled. We meet monthly on the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30pm. Furthermore, you don't have to be a Sunday School teacher to be on the Board.

### **February 15 Intergenerational Coffee Hour/Sunday School**

On February 15 we will be having an intergenerational coffee hour/Sunday School. We invite you to come to Currier Hall after service for a yummy Shrove Sunday (instead of Tuesday) Pancake Breakfast. There will be a fun Mardi Gras photo area with props for you to take fun group photos. There will be activities that go with Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday for all ages around the room. Feel free to go to the activities that interest you. This is a time for all age groups to enjoy together.

## Christian Education - *continued*

### **Offering Horton Center Scholarship**

Horton Center is an outdoor UCC summer camp on top of Pine Mountain. It is a camp that helps connect you to God and his creation. It has fun filled weeks and weekends for all ages. Some of our members have been volunteer Counselors and a small group of our children have experienced the wonders of this camp. It is that time of year when summer planning is happening. CE Board would like to offer scholarships for 4 people who would love to go experience what Horton Center is about. One scholarship has been claimed. 3 are left. If you are interested in attending any time this summer, and need financial assistance, please write a letter to the CE Board.

### **Vacation Church Camp**

Save the dates: July 20-24. It is going to be a wintery blast to cool us off this summer. We are heading to Snowball Mountain with the attitude of “I can do all things through God who strengthens me”, Philippians 4:13. We will find our strength in God through our snowy winter sports adventure. Registration will open next month for those entering kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade for the 2026-2027 school year. In addition, we are looking for volunteers to help with stations and being consulars for our campers. Junior helpers, entering 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, are welcome to help that week as well. Please talk to Chris Cox or CE Director Steph Berg if interested in helping.

Submitted by CE Director Steph Berg

CE Board: Anne-Marie Merrill (Chairperson), Chris Cox, Sue Lindemann, Holly Gorgol, Eileen Cox along with friend of the board Paula Robinson.

## Ministry of Care

What is the Ministry of Care?

“Carry each other’s burdens and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ” Galatians 6:2



You may have heard of the Ministry of Care here at FPC and do not know what it is and what we do.

The Ministry of Care (MOC) seeks to identify any needs of our congregation, so that we may offer help and support in their time of need. So that is our mission. What does it mean? Have you ever been in the hospital, have you lost a loved one or maybe you just had a baby. Whatever you are going through we would like to help. That’s where MOC comes in. We will send cards of condolence, get well cards and cards of encouragement or congratulations. We may call you to see if you would like us to provide a meal or help in other ways. We want to help carry your burdens or celebrate with you. When the Pastor or someone in our congregation hears of a need, they contact MOC and we will take it from there. We are aware of prayer requests made during worship and often respond to them. If you would like to part of this ministry or if you or someone you know has a need, please contact the Pastor or Beth Hunter 603-505-0702

Karen Wilson, Wendy Williams, Anne Englehardt, Sue Brown, Mary LaFrance, Beth Hunter



## Shawl Ministry



The Shawl Ministry needs help! Do you knit or crochet? Could you help us by making shawls for those who need a hug from the church? All work can be done at your leisure, from your home or favorite vacation spot.

Since 2004, we have been providing shawls in times of sorrow and joy. Shawls have been given to church members, friends, and our high school graduates. If you would like information about the background of Shawl Ministries visit their website <https://www.shawlministry.com/>.

For more information here at First Parish church, talk to Barbara Williams or email her at [bbwtextiles@gmail.com](mailto:bbwtextiles@gmail.com)

## Missions

Mission has a number of initiatives to roll out in February that we would like to announce now. They are below:

On February 15<sup>th</sup> the collection boxes for One Great Hour of Sharing will be given out. The children will receive theirs first during the Children's message. They will be collected on March 15<sup>th</sup> during the One Great Hour of Sharing offering.



Secondly, we will be collecting nonperishables for various organizations in the Derry area. A list will be forthcoming where we will ask congregants to bring in these foods on Communion Sunday, March 1. We will then donate these items to Upper Room this time and to another organization later in the year.



Thirdly, Mission Board members will make up bags of food that can be given to families in need of meals. We would ask for contributions of the reusable bags for the items to be stored in. Pastor Carrie will keep these bags when people come into the office to look for meals during this time when we know there are those with food insecurity.

We thank you in advance for your assistance in these initiatives.

Cynthia Gray, Karen Wilson, Marge Palmer, Beth Nelson, Anne Englehardt, Sue Brown.

## COUNCIL CORNER

### COUNCIL CORNER FOR JANUARY 2026

Council met on Wednesday, January 21, as scheduled, to focus on the budget for the upcoming Annual meeting. The Council discussed the following issues:

- **Building rehab.** Update received from Paul Lindemann. Noted that an Assessment and suggested preservation plan are expected from our consultant in late February. Patching of roof and replacement of ceiling fans in the sanctuary will be done soon.
- **Safe church.** Anyone wishing to put up a poster in the church needs to have it cleared first by the church office. This is a long-standing policy that was recently violated with a poster about what to do if approached by ICE agents. Safe Church will discuss whether posting such notice is a good idea and what it should look like and will make a recommendation to Council. Also noted that we need to enforce the rule that the sanctuary balcony area is off limits for anyone but the tech team.
- **Budget.** Council recommended that we: not assume pulpit supply could be filled by volunteers without specific commitments; not increase the Music director's compensation without additional resources, given the deficit budget; Investigate ways to replace losses in rental income from the YMCA and Contra Dance group; not rely on the small surplus for 2025 to cover some of the budget shortfall for 2026.
- **Church Policies.** Discussed whether wearing clothing to church services that has potentially divisive political messages should be discouraged. Matter referred to Pastor Carrie and Randy for further consideration.
- **Treasurer's Report.** Made special payment of \$34,000 to reduce the principal on our mortgage. This may reduce our annual mortgage payments by \$3000 in 2026 and subsequent years, depending on how the bank accounts for such payments. Noted that operating income was \$9000, even after covering unexpected costs.
- **Deacons.** The Board members will take turns attending Safe Church each month. The Board is concerned that the Sunday School room floor is only washed once a month by the contracted cleaners, but it is used throughout the week by Scouts. The Board will ask the Facilities Committee to institute weekly mopping. The Board has begun receiving scholarship requests from students hoping to attend Horton Center. Mission Board will be asked if it will offer scholarships as it did in 2025.
- **Facilities.** Repair work on the front entrance is still underway. The next upcoming project is the installation of fire sensors in the Sanctuary. Bids are being sought from cleaning companies for our cleaning contract.
- **New Hampshire UCC Happenings** - Registration for the February 28 Prepared to Serve conference has opened. A new UCC in Raymond has joined the New Hampshire Conference. Registration for Horton Center has opened. Programs are available for both children and adults. Registration for Star Island has opened; FPC has a group that attends over Labor Day Weekend.
- **Other issues.** The Office Manager recently received a call from the Atkinson UCC asking if First Parish had an Open & Affirming Team. We do not, but Ms. Harnden will contact Atkinson to ask what participating in the team entails and how they would like to collaborate.

Randy Brown, Moderator

## ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARY

First Parish held its annual meeting on Sunday, January 25. Forty-six (46) members were present in person, and eighteen (18) were present via Zoom, for a total of sixty-four (64) attendees eligible to vote. This is slightly over one-third of our 179 members, well over the 10 percent required for a quorum.

### **2025 Highlights**

The Moderator for Council noted that we had much to celebrate:

- Successful and smooth transitions from Pastor Deborah Roof (retired in May 2025) to Pastor Robert Fellows (Bridge Pastor for May-November) to Pastor Carrie Burnap, who was called in November 2025.
- Return to worship in the Sanctuary on April 6, after nine years of rehabilitation work.
- Inspiring worship services and creative CE program
- Increased Sunday attendance; lots of children!
- Strong, stable staff for office, music, building use
- Supported 8 local charitable organizations
- Served over 1200 free spaghetti suppers
- Prepared and served monthly meals for 20 homeless families
- Hosted several well-attended, fun community events
- Had a strong financial year, ending 2025 with a \$9,000 surplus.

### **Motions to approve Minutes from 2025 meeting and Board/Committee Reports**

Motions were made and approved unanimously (after noting a typo to be corrected in minutes).

### **Recognizing Staff**

Gifts of appreciation were given to our staff for their hard work and many valuable contributions: Pastor Carrie Burnap, Debi Wood (Office Manager), Stephanie Berg (Christian Education Director), James Hayden (Building Liaison), and Sandy Olson (Music Director).

### **2026 Budget**

The Moderator presented the draft 2026 budget, with a deficit of about \$63,000. Pledges up to the time of the meeting totaled \$205,000 vs. a budgeted pledge amount of \$215,000. He reported that prior to the meeting, two anonymous donations were received: \$4,000 to pay down the mortgage principal, and \$3,000 to increase the Music Director's role and salary. Several modifications to the budget were made during the meeting:

- Requested special pledges to cover the annual mortgage payments: \$29,000. Several (18) members made pledges towards the mortgage during the discussion, totaling \$32,750.
- Assumed Plate giving is equal to 2025 actual: increase of \$9,000 over initial budget
- Assumed late pledges will arrive via new members, late pledging, or increases to current pledges: \$9,000. Two members then increased their pledges toward the operating budget (\$1000).
- Incorporated the expected mortgage payment reduction for 2026 arising from paying \$40,000 toward the principal earlier this month: \$3,000.

A motion was made to increase the role and salary of the music director by up to \$10,000 if additional funding became available to cover those costs. Two other pledges to support an increase to the Music Director role were made then (\$2250), in addition to the \$3000 pledge provided for this purpose before the meeting (see above). Motion passed 38-11.

A motion was made to adopt the modified budget with all of these changes. Motion passed 55-4.



Options for addressing the remaining deficit were discussed and include: opening a volunteer-run thrift shop on-site to generate revenue; asking organizers of Trivia Night and Santa's Breakfast if some of the proceeds from those events could be devoted to the operating budget; asking pastors in the congregation to volunteer their time for Pulpit Supply; and seeking additional organizations to rent church facilities.

### **Electing Persons to Serve as Officers and Members of Council, Boards and Committees**

Beth Hunter (Nominating Committee) presented the following individuals for election, and current vacancies:

- Eileen Page, Church Clerk (T1, Y1)
- Jo Worthen, Council Member at Large (Y1)
- Kathy Alger, Music Committee (T1, Y1)
- Christian Education Committee: two (2) vacancies
- Facilities Committee: one (1) vacancy
- Nominating Committee one (1) vacancy
- Music Committee: one (1) vacancy
- Board of Deacons: one (1) vacancy
- Safe Church representative to attend Christian Education Committee meetings

Joannie Krohn volunteered to serve on the Nominating Committee. Rachel Cobban nominated Karen Wilson to the Board of Deacons. Ms. Wilson accepted the nomination.

The slate of nominees was elected by the congregation. The Moderator also thanked the Pastoral Search Committee for their work this year, as well as all volunteers, officers, boards, committees, and the digital ministry team.

### **Vote Record**

<b>Motion</b>	<b>In Favor</b>	<b>Opposed</b>	<b>No Vote / Abstain</b>
To approve the minutes of the 2025 Annual Meeting.	64	0	0
To accept the reports of Officers, Boards, and Committees of First Parish Church, with revision discussed.	64	0	0
To increase the budget for Music Director by \$3,000, with a provision that it could be increased by up to \$10,000 if money was donated throughout the year.	38	11	15
To approve the budget with a deficit of \$8,500.	55	4	5
To adopt the slate of board members as presented.	64	0	0

### **Discussing Future Meetinghouse Rehabilitation Needs and Potential**

Paul Lindemann reported that an architect is currently working on a plan that will outline recommended projects, sequence, and cost for ongoing Meetinghouse work. The plan is expected to be presented to the congregation in March. There is currently \$150,000 available for rehabilitation work.



*Monday 9-2:30*  
*Tuesday 9-2:30*  
*Wednesday 9-2:30*  
*Thursday 9-2:30*  
*Friday 9-12*



## 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](https://calendar.google.com/calendar/embed?src=fpc-ucc.org_6s1980fengv0fdl7h843u246lc%40group.calendar.google.com&ctz=America%2FNew_York)

## Electronic Giving



First Parish

@First-Parish • 7 friends

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



## **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 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)



**First Parish  
Congregational Church, UCC**

(603) 434-0628

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E. Derry, NH 03041

**Office Hours**

Generally, our office is open

Monday through Friday 9am-2:30pm

Please call ahead to make sure we are in the office

**Online**

[www.fpc-ucc.org](http://www.fpc-ucc.org)

[facebook.com/fpcucc](https://facebook.com/fpcucc)

**Pastor**

Reverend Carrie Burnap

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**Office Manager**

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