

Steeple Minute

First Congregational Church of Littleton
189 Main Street, Littleton, NH 03561

March 1, 2025

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Healing the Heart: Church is Good For You!

Pew Research released a study today that showed that after decades of church attendance decline, Americans have stopped leaving church. Although there are many possible reasons for the slowing of the exodus from religious institutions, I was especially struck by the pandemic being one possible explanation. About a quarter of Americans reported that the pandemic had in fact strengthened their faith. “Religion was in their psychological tool kit for dealing with the hard times,” one commentator shared.

Religious institutions and the practices of faith often times do particularly well in challenging times. In times of massive disruption and dislocation as we’ve experienced this year, it is easy to feel helpless, overwhelmed and disempowered. Gathering with others as a community of faith fosters gratitude, strength and hope. The Gospel Messages ring out especially clear in times when we can be encouraged to turn inward to fear and anxiety and against one another. The familiar messages of “love one another”, “Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly” and “love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you” provide clear direction and values on how to live and be each day. The practices we do in going to church including singing together, reflecting on the meaning and purpose of our lives in community with others, sharing our joys and concerns in prayer and sharing our gifts to support the wider community, all help overcome isolation, nurture hope and promote more healthy living.

This past weekend I was recovering from the flu and took advantage of my couch time and tuned into the Camden Conference and this year’s topic, “Democracy Under Threat: A Global Perspective.” (You can find the talks from the conference on-line next week.) One of the many take-aways was encouragement from one of the speakers for faith communities to articulate our own “theology of democracy.” In a time when religious language and institutions are co-opted by anti-democratic politics, religion has a lot to say about the importance of democratic principles that undergird our spiritual life and practice.

In our Congregational tradition and as members of the United Church of Christ, we rely for our decision making on listening to diverse opinions within the community and discerning as a community the best path forward. We believe that in nurturing a community of trust, respect and care that we will discern as a community the Spirit’s presence and call. (Come to the Annual Meeting on Sunday, March 9 as one way to see this work in practice!)

We have a great deal to share of our everyday experience of and dependence on democratic practices and values that undergird our spiritual life as a community of faith. I’m curious if there might be interest in sparking a conversation with others to reflect on our own experiences and begin to articulate our own theology of democracy. Let me know if you’d like to take part! If you’d like to read more on this idea I recalled an excellent short book that might be a helpful resource, [Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit](#) by Quaker educator, Parker Palmer.

Somewhat a great season to come to church on-line or in-person and be renewed, empowered, and feel better! We all could use more of that today!

Gratefully,

Peter

First Congregational Church

March 2025



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 7:00 PM-AA-FH
2 9:00 AM – Adult Bible Class - Lenten Series 10:00 AM-Worship Service <i>Rev. Peter Ilgenfritz</i>	3 11:00 AM – Aging discussion grp. - LP 4:30 PM – Above the Notch sub-committee - LP 7:00 PM – AA - FH	4 5:30 PM – Compassion and Resilience Group - LP	5 ASH ** WEDNESDAY 8:30 AM – Bible Study & Prayer - Zoom 6:00 PM – Choir rehearsal- LP 7:00 PM-AA-FH	6 6:00 PM-AIAnon-LP 7 :00 PM-AA-FH	7 World Day of Prayer Pastor's Sabbath	8 7:00 PM-AA-FH
9 First Sunday in Lent 222ND ANNUAL MEETING 9:00 AM – Adult Bible Class - Lenten Series 10:00 AM-Worship Service 11:00 AM – Business Meeting-FH <i>Alice Muh</i>	10 7:00 PM – AA – FH	11 6:00 PM – SLLC BOD - Zoom Pastor Away	12 8:30 AM – Bible Study & Prayer - Zoom 1:00 PM – Finance - CR 6:00 PM – Choir rehearsal- LP 7:00 PM-AA-FH Pastor Away	13 6:00 PM-AIAnon-LP 7 :00 PM-AA-FH Pastor Away	14 Pastor Away	15 7:00 PM-AA-FH Pastor Away
16 Second Sunday in Lent 9:00 AM – Adult Bible Class - Lenten Series 10:00 AM-Worship Service <i>Mary Menzies</i>	17 11:00 AM – Aging discussion grp. - LP 7:00 PM – AA – FH Pastor Away	18 11:30 AM – Property-LP Pastor Away	19 8:30 AM – Bible Study & Prayer - Zoom 6:00 PM – Choir rehearsal- LP 7:00 PM – AA – FH Pastor Away	20 Noon – Council – FH/Zoom 6:00 PM-AIAnon-LP 7 :00 PM-AA-FH Pastor Away	21 Pastor Away	22 7:00 PM-AA-FH Pastor Away
23 Third Sunday in Lent 9:00 AM – Adult Bible Class – Lenten Series 10:00 AM-Worship Service <i>Amy Greene</i>	24 7:00 PM – AA – FH Pastor Away	25 5:30 PM – Compassion and Resilience Group - LP Pastor Away	26 8:30 AM – Bible Study & Prayer - Zoom 6:00 PM – Choir rehearsal- LP 7:00 PM – AA – FH	27 6:00 PM-AIAnon-LP 7 :00 PM-AA-FH	28 Pastor's Sabbath	29 7:00 PM-AA-FH
30 Fourth Sunday in Lent FODD COLLECTION SUNDAY <i>One Great Hour of Sharing Special Offering</i> 9:00 AM – Adult Bible Class – Lenten Series 10:00 AM-Worship Service <i>Rev. Peter Ilgenfritz</i>	31 11:00 AM – Aging discussion grp. - LP 7:00 PM – AA – FH	** An ecumenical Ash Wednesday Service is being held at All Saints Church at noon	Happy Birthday! Elizabeth Edney (6 th) Glenda Iles (9 th) Pam Nute (23 rd) Roberta Lavoie (25 th)	KEY: FH - Fellowship Hall LP - Ladies Parlor CR - Classroom		

Financial Report

January 31, 2025	YTD
Member support:	\$13,338
Scheduled w/d from trust funds	\$ 0
Other Income:	\$ 2,376
Total Income:	\$15,714
Total Expenses:	\$16,139
Net:	\$ 425

Wireless Guest Account
 SSID: FCC Guests
 Password: fcc189main

RESCHEDULED FROM FEBRUARY!

TO THE MEMBERS of the FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
 LITTLETON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

YOU ARE HEREBY CALLED TO ATTEND

THE 222nd ANNUAL MEETING

of the FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, U.C.C.

SUNDAY, March 9, 2025 AT 10:00 A.M.

If you are unable to come in person, join by Zoom!
 The link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87098610797?pwd=6hBBbZoWbh1XJRdVSI9na1X2jQOqE.1>

FYI: This Zoom link has been re-named to "Kitchen Table Church", but it IS the correct link to the Annual Meeting!!

DON'T FORGET TO SET YOUR CLOCK ONE HOUR AHEAD SATURDAY NIGHT!

Annual Reports are available at the back of the sanctuary



Special Offering March 30, 2025

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is a vital special mission offering of the United Church of Christ. It connects you to disaster relief, refugee assistance, and development efforts around the globe. When disasters strike, or when individuals are displaced due to violence or poverty, OGHS ensures immediate response and ongoing recovery.

Through your support, **OGHS** funds comprehensive development programs in areas such as healthcare, education, agriculture, food security, microfinancing, and women's empowerment. By partnering with Global Ministries and international response networks, OGHS maximizes its impact. Your contributions help meet urgent needs while addressing the root causes of vulnerability, ensuring long-term, sustainable solutions for affected communities.

From the Moderator

Alice Muh

Bob and I had the privilege of attending our nephew's wedding in the St. Jacob of Alaska Orthodox Church in Vermont this past weekend. What a unique experience. The Orthodox church traces its beginnings back to the first apostles and claims to be the oldest expression of Christian worship. From the St. Jacob of Alaska Orthodox church website: "It is believed by Orthodox Christians that their Church has preserved the tradition and continuity of the ancient Church."

I noticed things that were VERY different from how we worship, and yet there are many things that we have in common. At St. Jacob's the scripture is not read so much as it is sung. The prayers are sung. The whole liturgy is sung. There is much bowing, kissing of icons and the Holy Scripture, making the sign of the cross, standing through the whole service as a mark of respect.

The things that are similar are: there was a choir leading the singing, the lighting of candles, love of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, gathering of the faithful, celebrating a marriage, gathering afterward for food and conversation, loving and supporting each other. The scripture reading from the Gospel and from Corinthians were readings that we use. There was lay participation in the service. The congregation offered the Lord's Prayer, and, although sung, the words were the same. The tune was simple and easy to follow so I could join in with that Body of Christ. We were one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.

With the infinite variety of humankind throughout the ages, we have found many different expressions of worship but are still all part of the Body of Christ. Even in our First Congregational Church of Littleton, one may prefer the old hymns, one may prefer the new. One may want the liturgy to be the same each week, one may want to change it up. One may want to hear only an ordained minister preach the word, and one may celebrate the variety of voices in lay ministry. And everything in between. There is no wrong way or right way to 'do church'.

Yet, what do we most object to in church. Yes, that's right: change. But what is the only real constant in our culture and in our church? Change. We don't even speak the way we did 50 or 100 years ago, let alone 1611 when the King James Bible was published in 'the language of the people'. The language of our covenant in our by-laws uses antiquated forms of language that are not used today. Our understanding changes. Society changes. How we respond to our culture changes.

How do we be resilient in the faces of all these changes while still holding fast to our belief in all that Jesus teaches us? We modify language so that we can understand it. We adapt to changes in demographics. We adapt to changes in finances. We celebrate and cultivate our assets and let go of what no longer serves the community. We continue to serve the Lord in the best way we know how.

Amy Greene and I are taking the Ministry 21 class called Dynamic Church. The first session was about change and vision. The consensus of the class members was that change is hard, but necessary, and it helps to have a vision of what you need to change to as well as understanding what your assets are. Over the next couple of months, we will be learning more about new ways to think about our church's vision, culture, and structure.

This is all very exciting as we embark on a journey to right size our structure around a new vision of who we are as a church, using our new mission statement and our statement of inclusivity. I hope you have all had a chance to pray on these for the past few months as we try them on for size. They are the result of many months of big and small group work, focus groups, invitations to participate in the formation of these statements. We know not everyone will be happy with every word, but it gives a better sense of who God is calling us to be. The church council has appointed a small group (Dan Kiefer, chair, Mary Menzies, Tina Peabody, Amy Greene, and Alice Muh) who will be meeting to figure out how we live out these statements as a small church and from there develop new by-laws that will reflect that.

We will be asking you for your input because the key to organizational change is to get input and buy-in from the members. That's you. And the first step is to participate in the annual meeting on March 9. See you there!



Shining Lights Learning Center

Prayers for Nicole, Assistant Director! She broke her knee and had surgery on 2/26 (she is doing well).

Prayers also for the rest of the staff, many who are sick again, but working through it.

The children are glad for the warmer weather! They finally have gotten to go outside and play recently!



Save the Date!

Fundraising Dinner on Sunday,
May 18th
after the White Mountain
Voices Concert.

More details coming soon!

Do you have extra forks?

The church kitchen could use some extra forks. There are plenty of spoons and knives, but not enough forks to host a large event.

Thank you

Worship in March

Sunday, March 2 - Luke 9:28-45 Transfiguration - Communion Sunday

Deacon - Mary

Preachers - Emily LaFlam and Peter

Lent Begins:

Ecumenical Ash Wednesday Service, Wednesday, March 5, Noon.

A special Midday Ecumenical Service with our ecumenical church partners at All Saints Episcopal Church to mark the beginning of the season of Lent!

Sunday, March 9 - Luke 7:1-17 Raising the Widow's Son - **Annual Meeting**

Deacon - Lars

Worship Leaders: Lars/Dan

Preacher: Alice

Sunday March 16 - Luke 13:1-9, 31-35 Lament over Jerusalem

Deacon - Lars

Preacher: Mary

*Peter away

Sunday, March 23 - Luke 15:1-32 Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son

Worship Leader - Dan

Preacher: Amy

*Peter away

Sunday, March 30 - Luke 16: 19-31 Rich Man and Lazarus -

Little Free Pantry Monthly Special Offering

One Great Hour of Sharing Special Offering

Deacon - Mary

Preacher: Peter



Wednesday Mornings - 8:30-9:15am - Lenten Bible Study - on Zoom:

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89180619787?pwd=wDjbnm3daXY4nAQfE07DQuhAk4Pg2g.1>

An opportunity to gather to discuss the scripture readings from Luke.

Conversations on the Joys and Challenges of Aging!: Mondays at 11am March 3, 17, 31 in the Ladies Parlor:

Join us in March for a series of conversations on aging! Great conversation, laughs, and sharing the humbling journey of growing older!

Lenten Study Book – *The Diary of a Jesus Tag-Along* by Carol Asher

The season of Lent can be great time to commit to grow in our lives and faith with some particular spiritual practices. This year we are delighted to share with you, Carol Asher’s little book, *The Diary of A Jesus Tag-Along*, as she leads us in a series of first-person diary entries from one imagined follower of Jesus during the last weeks of his life and with the community that gathered in his name following the Resurrection. It’s a great way to place yourself in the story and through some simple questions in each chapter, reflect on your own life and faith. We have copies available to you thanks to the support of the Christian Education Ministry. Linda Warden is leading a book study on the book for the Sunday morning 9:00am Bible Study. Consider joining the group or read along at home and invite a friend to read along with you! Copies are available in the CE Mailbox or on Sunday mornings!

JOY!!

Amy Greene was accepted as a Member in Discernment by the Granite State Association of the New Hampshire Conference on Tuesday, February 25! **Mary Menzies** will be Amy’s church representative as she works with the Association committee to make a plan for courses and other studies she will take as part of her next steps toward ordination. Thank you Mary! And Congratulations Amy! So excited that we get to join you in this journey and share in your learning and growth in faith!



Judy Oleary (center) treated Dottie (left) and Pam (right) to the afternoon performance of Theater Up’s, *Vanya, Sonia, Masha and Spike!* Congratulations on your performance as Vanya, Peter!!



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Return Service Requested

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MARCH 2025



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A newsletter of the First
Congregational Church of
Littleton

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www.1stconglittleton.org

Church Staff

Rev. Peter Igenfritz, Pastor
Office Manager: Pam Nute
Organist & Choir Director: Dottie Morton
Sexton: Reg LaFlam

Officers

Moderator: Alice Muh
Vice Moderator: Dan Kiefer
Treasurer: Joyce Krill
Assistant Treasurer: Rachel Clark

Committee Chairs

Christian Education: Kim Smith
Deacons: Mary Menzies
Finance: Phil Krill
Mission: Linda Warden
Music: Tina Peabody
Personnel Relations: Tim Gould
Property Management: Laurie Boswell

Shining Lights Learning Center

Board Chair: Suzanne Schott
Director: Vanessa Neuroth

