

March 2026



THE BEACON



First Church Congregational United Church of Christ

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Worship on Sundays at 10:00 AM



Minister's Message ***Rev. Dr. Ann Rogers-Brigham***

We enter March days fully into the season of Lent. Perhaps you've set some goals for yourself in achieving your objective to stay "present" in the season! It is not easy these days when work, family, leisure activities and even church duties have us busier than ever. We also take our eyes off our spiritual life goals when daily news moves us to be consumed with worry, even fear, for the unknowns unfolding in our local communities, our country and our wider world.

How do we slow down and find "fallow time" for quiet, non-directed, unscheduled moments to take care of our relationship to God, growing in close companionship to God? How do we responsibly attend to daily duties of work, family, leisure, church but not give away the "fallow time" we need for refreshment and renewal? Do we need to literally get away from home to do this, or can we make a corner in our homes, our daily schedules, to let "fallow time" be at the center of our Lenten practice this year?

Dwight H. Judy is a retired ordained United Methodist pastor and professor emeritus of spiritual formation at Garrett Theological Seminary. He is still an active Spiritual Director and offers wisdom for how to address life issues, spiritual practices, relationship with God, discernment of life transitions, and

relationship issues when life seems to have no “stopping” points. What attracts me to his writing and approach to life is his teaching about “fallow time” and its importance. He says, “whatever engages our minds and beings in what we call work must have its fallow side—its fertile, non-directed, receptive side.”

Especially, during this Lenten season, we may be able to allow ourselves a “fallow time,” a true Sabbath rest. What might that look like for you? Carving out time and space for rest and renewal may be the greatest gift you can give yourself for good health and well-being. Why is it so hard? Maybe it is just getting into a rhythm and giving oneself permission to observe the “sabbath” or “fallow time” we yearn for.

I’m glad we can all look forward to being together every Sunday morning for worship in our beautiful, sacred space of our First Church sanctuary. Recently, we’ve opened our sanctuary space on Sunday after service and on Wed. From 1-3 p.m. during Lent for invitation to sit and meditate or find the “fallow time.” Even with my long “to do” list as your interim pastor, I remind myself about being intentional to slow down and find my corner of quiet for listening and praying and inviting the Spirit into my daily routine.

I continue to be grateful that you have built into my call agreement a space to take a day or two off each week and really find time for myself. Ultimately, I am the one who must establish the rhythm and wisely stay with my goal to be “off” and ready to come back to duties with vigor and commitment to you, a loving, generous congregation in my watch care.

Maybe, my message to you in March is to encourage you to find your “fallow” time and for me to be recommitted to find mine. We can do this alone and we do it together. The Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 4:13-14: “...*This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*”

Clearly, our Lenten call is to follow Jesus with all we are and all we are meant to be. Paul heard and wrote about his call long ago and his words are still with us, encouraging us to keep the goal before us of following Christ in good company, with one another. We can help each other to keep on track! We do this by commitment to the “fallow time” that may be alone time or may be worship time in community. For many years, I turned to the writing of Richard Foster, Quaker theologian, pastor, author, and teacher, to help me. Maybe you know his many books and have gleaned skills from his teaching.

I had, literally, on my bedside table for many years, the book Foster wrote in 1978, *Celebration of Discipline*. Foster, in this classic writing, examines the inward disciplines of prayer, fasting, meditation and study in the Christian life, the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service, and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Yes, the book covers many disciplines that can help one navigate the spiritual journey, facilitating growth toward balance of the inward and outward experience of being a follower of Christ. Some of the disciplines are about the individual journey and some are about what we do in community. He calls these “corporate disciplines.”

Each year at this time, I think about the disciplines Foster outlined in his book and my need to review how they are part of my spiritual life and “our” spiritual life as a congregation. How can we be committed to the spiritual disciplines that keep us close to God, the ones that are easy, and the ones that may challenge us? How can we work on these together as a church?

I’ll close this message with an encouragement to take advantage of the invitation this season of Lent for intentional practice of spiritual disciplines. And don’t hesitate to share what you are reading, thinking, imagining, becoming! Whatever has been helpful to you may be helpful to others.

May we journey together and encourage one another to prepare our hearts for Easter joy, Christ alive and resurrected, living, guiding and celebrating all we are meant to be in God's love.

Grace and peace,
Rev. Dr. Ann Rogers Brigham



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Inspiration for the Lenten Journey

Quotes from Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*

"The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."

"If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change."

"Love, not anger, brought Jesus to the cross. Golgotha came as a result of God's great desire to forgive, not his reluctance. Jesus knew that by his vicarious suffering he could actually absorb all the evil of humanity and so heal it, forgive it, redeem it."

"A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain... This is the way it is with the Spiritual Disciplines - they are a way of sowing to the Spirit... By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done."

"To pray is to change. All who have walked with God have viewed prayer as the main business of their lives."

"We who have turned our lives over to Christ need to know how very much he longs to eat with us, to commune with us. He desires a perpetual Eucharistic feast in the inner sanctuary of the heart."

"May God give you – and me- the courage, the wisdom, the strength always to hold the kingdom of God as the number one priority of our lives. To do so is to live in simplicity."



Sunday Worship

10:00 AM

We hope you will join us!

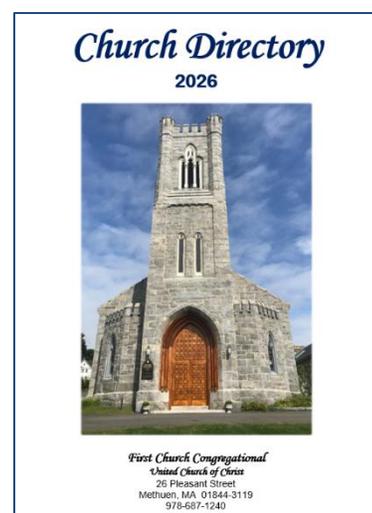
We like to see you in the congregation on Sunday mornings, but for those who cannot attend in person, worship will be broadcast each Sunday, at 10:00 AM, on YouTube Live (www.youtube.com/@firstchurchcongregationalm1729). An Order of Worship will be emailed out by the Friday before the service.

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The **2026 First Church Directory** is in the process of being updated. A copy of the directory will be available for review after church in the Parish Hall during coffee hour. Please take a minute and verify your information, especially your email address and telephone number. We appreciate your assistance!

We are also discussing a new pictorial directory. More information to come!

Thanks,
Pat King
Diaconate Chair



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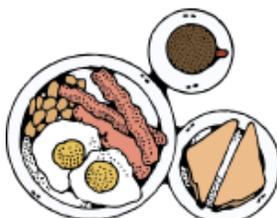
A Meal (Breakfast) with Ann

2ND Wednesdays at 8:00 AM

at Ellie's Farmhouse Restaurant, 436 Broadway, Methuen

Looking for great conversations with friends from First Church? Join Rev. Ann and friends at Ellie's Farmhouse, 436 Broadway in Methuen, for delicious breakfast and informal conversation! Breakfast with Ann will resume on Wednesday, March 11th, at 8:00 AM.

If you have never joined us, we extend a special welcome to you. No reservation needed. Join us, even if you are not a breakfast eater, for this fellowship opportunity. We'd love to see you!



2026 Lent/Holy Week/Easter

First Church Congregational
United Church of Christ



Sunday, March 22nd:

10:00 AM – *Youth Lenten Play* ~ The youth of our congregation will present the play, “I Saw Him” by Emily Pardue.

Sunday, March 29th:

10:00 AM – *Palm Sunday* ~ Music Cantata, Children/Youth are invited to join a “Palm Parade” in the Sanctuary.

Thursday, April 2nd:

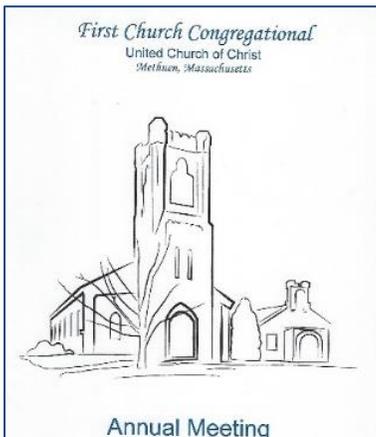
7:00 PM – *Maundy Thursday* ~ The Sacrament of Communion and the Reading of Passion with Music Responses.

Sunday, April 5th:

10:00 AM – *Easter Sunday* ~ A Joyous Celebration of Resurrection with a Service of Word and Sacrament

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Annual Reports are Due



All Committees should submit their annual report to the Church Office **no later than Wednesday, April 1st.** If it is not received, it may not be included in the 2025-26 Annual Report.

Please contact Roberta at 978-687-1240, if there is any issue. You can submit your report electronically to firstchurch.roberta@gmail.com.

The Annual Meeting date is in May and will be announced soon.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Making End of Life Decisions

A Lenten Series at First Church Congregational, Methuen

Sundays, March 1st, 8th, and 15th

following the 10:00 AM Worship Service, during Coffee Hour

Why a series on Making End of Life Decisions? We make time to speak about this subject that sometimes is hard to talk about. We hope it is helpful to make time, with others, to speak around our tables in order to gain new insights and find new resources.

Rev. Frederick Buechner helps us voice the “blessing” of having these talks together: *“I recognize that even in the valley of the shadow of my own tangled thoughts there is something holy and unutterable seeking to restore my soul... I always stop and touch the coarse gray bark of one particular tree with my hand or cheek, which I suppose is a way of blessing it for being so strong and beautiful. Who knows how long it has been standing there wearing its foliage like a crown even though a part of it is dying? Because of that quality of sheer endurance one morning, I found myself touching it not to bless it, but to ask its blessing, so that I myself might move toward old age and death with something like its stunning grace and courage.”*

~ from *The Longing for Home* by Frederick Buechner



- **Sunday, March 1st** – Mike Boutin, Leader – ***Conversations Around Grief, Death & Dying***
 - Mike Boutin, our Minister of Music, will be leading our first session of the series. Mike did hospice work during the AIDS epidemic, taught death and dying to nursing students at Rivier College, and now works as Asst Dean for Faculty and Student Success at the MGH Institute of Health Professions, where he focuses on the development of soft skills in future clinicians, including empathy, team skills, difficult conversations. He is a certified Executive Coach. We hope you'll join us for this very special opportunity for conversation and learning.
- **Sunday, March 8th** – Scott Sanborn, Leader – ***Financial Planning***
 - Scott Sanborn is a Wealth Management Advisor with the Northwestern Mutual Wealth Management Company who specializes in comprehensive financial planning. As a part of his work, he spends time with each client to determine what type of estate plan they currently have in place and whether they should consider modifying or updating their plans to ensure that it fits their desires and that they and their descendants are well prepared for the future to reduce risks and tax impacts.
- **Sunday, March 15th** – Steve Boyko & Rev. Ann Rogers Brigham, Leaders – ***Making Final Decisions***
 - Attorney Steve Boyko will help us talk about legal documents, such as a will, advance directive, healthcare proxy, power of attorney and revocable trust.
 - Rev. Ann Rogers-Brigham will approach the subject of worship at the time of death and funeral planning.

Thank you to Jennifer Borislow for the book, *If Had Only Known*. The books are given to us as a gift.

From the Chair of the Church Board...

Ahh... Spring is close! Of course, as I write this, there is over a foot of snow on the ground, it's still rather cold, and that darn groundhog says we'll have even more winter. However, according to meteorologists you can mark your calendar for March 20th, which is as arbitrary as the rodent in Punxsutawney. Regardless, there is always a lot of energy at First Church. I know that many of our church committees are working on these special elements, events, and programs as well for celebration of our savior's birth, so it will be a wonderful season ahead!

As always, we have plenty more going on, including:

- Lent is here! Ash Wednesday service was February 18th, and a beautiful service was had to kick off the season. I know the Diaconate, led by Rev. Ann, and choir music, led by Mike, will create several wonderful services. There will be a Cantata, children's play, and more. This is always a deeply spiritual time for me, and I pray you experience it as well.
- The search process for our next settled pastor is continuing. We will be bringing in a candidate this month to see if there is a good fit, so stay tuned. The committee is meeting virtually and physically, and they are working at a rapid pace to build our future. If you would like to see the final profile, it will be available in the office after worship.
- Our annual George Washington Birthday Dinner was February 21st, and it was a spectacular time of fellowship! I would like to personally thank Carol Sanborn, Marilyn Peck, Pat King, and everyone who helped out with making the event so special. You all make this event shine!
- Our Outreach group is hard at work with numerous efforts. I sincerely thank you all for time, talent, and treasure given for those less fortunate. Last month, the Souper Bowl of Caring wrapped up which gathered cans of soup and monetary donations for those in critical need of food security. This month, the diaper drive will kick off to collect desperately needed supplies for area children. More is being planned and there are a ton of other ways to give for the upcoming season, so please read further to find out how you can help. Between all these focused projects and our continuing food pantry, helping so many in our community, there are numerous ways to make an impact.
- Chapel school is having a great year! The teachers and children are busy in the classrooms and playground, and it is wonderful to hear the joy throughout the church. However, enrollment is still active for the 2025-2026 school year, so if there is a family that may need our services, I invite you to connect them with Gina or Roberta. Tours are happening regularly.
- The finance committee is getting close to finalizing next year's budget. If there is something you may be interested in pursuing or helping out with, please contact Scott Sanborn. He would love to talk about options, funding, or grants to help our church grow.
- Our Membership Development & Communications team is hard at work planning fun events throughout the coming year. They are investigating lots of activities and fellowship times, so stay tuned. If you're interested in their work or helping out, please reach out to Carol Sanborn for more information.
- ...and so much more!

So, if you're looking for some way to help our church and our community, there's plenty of options. Also, there's always the prayer shawl ministry, other outreach projects, singing or ringing in one of our outstanding choirs, or just joining the walking group to help yourself. There are so many

new opportunities available through our historic congregation, so feel free to seek out what you would like and help our neighbors & neighborhood at the same time.

As always, all are welcome to chat anytime with me. I love to hear your ideas and suggestions. We also have a lot of other activities and missions scheduled, so I would love your input. I know you all work so hard to make our church a blessing to our families and neighbors, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Let's keep the energy and drive rolling, continuing to seek God, care for each other, and improve our community.

God bless!!!

Josh Ferry



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News from the Search Committee



The Search Committee has had a busy few months. We have screened six pastor profiles and invited three candidates to interview with us. One dropped out for personal reasons. The interview team interviewed the remaining two candidates by ZOOM and invited one candidate to meet with additional members of the Search Committee for a second ZOOM interview.

The committee recently met with the candidate for an in-person third round interview and a tour of the church and the parsonage.

We will be meeting as a committee in the next few weeks to discuss next steps.

Our committee members are Steve Boyko, Christine Bane, Lori Bennett, Mike Boutin, Jen Dockham, Stacey Murray, Sue Newton, Sue Riedel, Carol Silva, John Silva, Becky Smith and Josh Ferry (ex-officio).

Please speak to any one of us if you have any questions about the search process.

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The Church Board is looking to find someone to manage and coordinate hall rentals requests. The coordinator would receive a portion of the rental fee as composition for their time. If interested, see Josh Ferry for more information.

Musical Musings

How did we get to Lent already? It feels like yesterday that I was toasting the New Year and singing Christmas carols....

Lent is one of my favorite seasons of the church year. I love the opportunity to slow down, to reflect, to fast from some things and habits that don't support my growth in the life of faith, and I love the music, especially the music of Taizé. Taizé is a little town in the south of France where an ecumenical community of monks is known for it's easy to sing, repetitive and contemplative music, much of which was written by one monk, Jacques Berthier. In Taizé, during the summer, thousands of young people converge on the Taizé community as they backpack across Europe: they sit on the floor of the church, with candles everywhere, many with guitars, and cellos, and flutes and oboes: making music that is repeated for long periods of time in many different languages, mostly from memory. It's a haunting experience.

Here's a short clip with Rick Steves, the travel guru about Taizé: <https://youtu.be/QN5mXIGFTnA>

I hope you've marked your calendars for our upcoming Palm Sunday Cantata, our Maundy Thursday service, and of course, Easter Sunday. Our Cantata on Palm Sunday will focus on music of Palm Sunday and the first part of Matthew's Passion from the Last Supper through Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Then on Maundy Thursday, we will focus on the Eucharist, and the crucifixion and entombment of Jesus. We will be joined by cello, oboe, flute, choir, small schola, soloists, and trumpet on Easter Sunday. It will be a glorious week of music and meditation and worship. Please plan to be there in person: your physical presence, if you can, helps to encourage our choir and musicians and adds to the quality of the celebration.

Peace and all good things,

Mike Boutin





Special Worship Opportunities in March

- **March 1st – Second Sunday of Lent, Communion**

- Lessons: Psalm 121; John 3:1-17

- **March 8th – Third Sunday of Lent**

- Lessons: Psalm 95; John 4:5-42

- **March 15th – Fourth Sunday of Lent**

- Lessons: John 9:1-41

- **March 22nd – Fifth Sunday of Lent, Youth Present the Lenten Play “I Saw Him”**

The youth of our congregation will present (for the sermon time in worship) the play, “I Saw Him” by Emily Pardue. The characters of the play will speak from places in and around Jerusalem who saw Jesus during his final hours, before his death. It is a moving way for us to walk with Jesus in his suffering and be aware of the people and places who were with him during those last days of his life. Thank you for supporting our youth with your presence during this service.

- Lessons: John 11:1-45

- **March 29th – Palm/Passion Sunday, Sixth Sunday of Lent, Music Cantata**

- Lessons: Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 36:14-25, 57-75

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Christian Education

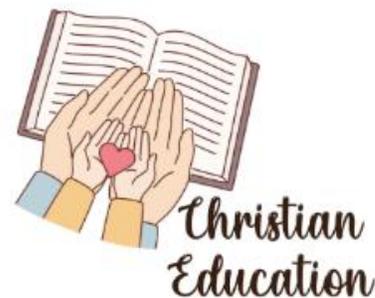
Our Sunday morning lessons have been going well with lots of conversations. We will continue using the stories of the Bible curriculum, adding in a few educational lessons during the Lenten season.

In May we hope to do a Heifer Session with lessons from Heifer International, and the CE Committee and our SS children will run a coffee hour in May to raise money to buy a “Heifer” this year.

Thank you everyone for your support for our youth,
Lori Bennett and Sarah Pavlevkov

Sunday School Lessons for March through Easter Sunday:

- March 1st – **Noah’s Ark**
- March 8th – **Abraham and Sarah’s Visitors**
- March 15th – **The Ten Commandments**
- March 22nd – **Serve and Follow**
- March 29th – **Holy Week**
- April 5th – **Easter Sunday** – No Sunday School



Stewardship Ministry Team...

The Stewardship Ministry Team is grateful for the generosity of all of our pledgers for this year. Our pledges of support will allow us to **Live Our Vision Together**. We can also fulfill our vision by leading or serving on one of the committees of the church. All of these teams working together help us live our mission to “Seek God, Care for Each Other, and Improve our Community.”

The Nominating Sub-Committee of the Stewardship Team is beginning its task of seeking members to fill the following positions on our Board for the 2026/2027 church year:

Chair of Membership Development and Communication: The team is responsible for developing and maintain communications with the membership and community of First Church to encourage participation in the various activities that are offered. They also run our AV system to broadcast our Sunday worship service.

Chair of Trustees: Lead the team in overseeing the care and maintenance of the church and the use of the facility for activities other than worship and ensuring that the property conforms to various building and use codes.

Member at Large: Represents the voice of the Congregation at large at Board meetings.

These teams as well as our Diaconate, Finance, Outreach, Christian Education, and Stewardship Teams are also all in need of additional members. As we seek a new settled minister, it is important that we fill each position on our Board and fully staff each committee. If you are able to serve the church on any of these teams or would like additional information about the team, please speak with a member of the stewardship team or chairperson of the team (listed in the Sunday bulletin). It takes all of us **together** to **Live Our Vision**.

Stewardship Ministry Team:

Kathy Romano – Chairperson

Rev. Ann Rogers-Brigham, Irene Maggio, Marilyn Peck, Robyn Slaney

Living the Vision Together



Seeking God



Caring for Each Other



Improving Our Community

Your Pledge Makes It All Happen

2026 “Pampered with Luvs” Diaper Drive



What: The Outreach Ministry Team invites you to participate in our **2026 “Pampered with Luvs” Diaper Drive**. You can help us out by donating diapers and wipes, or by making a monetary donation to help purchase them.

Who: First Church Congregational in Methuen will be holding the diaper drive in partnership with Communities Together, Inc., a collaborative group of churches in the Merrimack Valley. The diaper collection will be distributed to various social agencies, including Lazarus House, Bread and Roses, Neighbors in Need, and others.

Why: The need for diapers in Methuen and surrounding communities is great, as evidenced by the following facts:

- Families spend \$75-\$80 a month on average to diaper one child, or 8% of a full-time minimum wage salary.
- Though diapers are essential for babies, they are not systematically covered by safety-net policies. Neither WIC nor food stamps cover diapers.

Where and When: Diapers, Pull-ups and wipes, as well as monetary donations, may be dropped off before/after church (before 10:00 AM and after 11:00 AM) at **First Church Congregational Methuen**, at 26 Pleasant Street, on the following Sundays:

- Sunday, March 1st
- Sunday, March 8th
- Sunday, March 15th
- Sunday, March 22nd

Notes: Checks should be made payable to **First Church Congregational**, with **Diaper Drive** on the memo line. Mail to 26 Pleasant St., Methuen, MA 01844 no later than Friday, March 20th.

Thank you!

The Outreach Ministry Team



The 2026 Ray Benedix Souper Bowl Challenge

Thanks to the generosity of First Church members and friends, we collected a total of **539 cans of soup** and received **\$1255** in monetary donations during our month-long Souper Bowl of Caring. Although we didn't quite reach our goal of 750 cans of soup, we far exceeded our monetary goal of \$750 and will be able to purchase more soup with these funds. A special thanks to Gina Colarusso, Roberta Jurovich, and the children and parents of **The Chapel School** for collecting **116** cans of soup in the Chapel Souper Bowl Train! The soup will be distributed at the Neighbors in Need Food Pantry held here at First Church every Tuesday evening. It is one of 6 Neighbors in Need weekly food pantries held weekly in the Greater Lawrence area to alleviate food insecurity.

The members of the First Church Outreach Team wish to thank all of you who supported us in this project. In addition to helping families in need, you helped us to honor the memory of Raymond Benedix again this year with your generous participation in the Souper Bowl of Caring. Ray led this project for many years here at First Church with great spirit and caring. Thans to all!



Walking Group for Fitness and Fellowship

Tuesdays in March

The Tuesday walking group will continue to walk at **The Loop** through the month of March, as weather permits. We are hoping for less snow and warmer temperatures. We will meet at **10:00 AM in front of the AMC Theater** on the following Tuesdays in March: 3/3, 3/10, 3/17, 3/24 and 3/31. We hope you can join us for exercise and conversation!



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Don't Forget!!



Sunday, March 8th

Change your clocks and batteries.

First Day of Spring is March 20th!!

Prayer Shawl Ministry

The Prayer Shawl Ministry meets year-round and always welcomes anyone who wishes to be part of this ministry. Knitting or crocheting experience is not a prerequisite to becoming a member. Come for the fellowship and someone will be glad to help you if needed. Please contact Bobbi Barlow for more information.

We invite you to join us on **Wednesdays from 1:00 - 3:00 PM**,
in the parlor of First Church Congregational.



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*“God puts rainbows in the clouds so
that each of us - in the dreariest and
most dreaded moments - can see a
possibility of hope.”*

~ Maya Angelou



Bobbi Barlow
5/22/19

The Chapel School



Valentine's Day was celebrated at Chapel recently. I love watching the children enjoy passing out to their Valentines to classmates. The treats that were sent were endless.

What does LOVE mean here at The Chapel School?

We treat each child with love. We respect every family no matter how easy or hard it is. No matter what the situation. We have fun while learning. We emphasize kindness and always encourage "please and thank you". We love what we do here and love every child like they were our own. We bring out the best in each child and provide a loving and supportive environment to learn and grow in. Showing love will never fail you.

We are already starting our registration for the new school year. We have been able to tour many families that are interested in our amazing program. We are looking to have another full enrollment year.

New England weather is always changing which makes predicting snow amounts even harder. Even the best weather forecast can change frequently. When we call a snow day, we try our best to make sure we are making the safest decision for the children we care for.

We are excited to have brought back our fundraiser again this year. We are working with MCM Fundraising and their Butter Braid Pastry & Classic Cookie Dough. Thank you to all who participated and we hope you enjoyed your sweet treats!

Gina Colarusso

Director



Order online (3/2/25 - 3/16/25) at
<http://my.mcmfundraising.com/signup/D84M>

or Scan QR code below



PLEASE HELP SHARE THE WORD!!



The Chapel School

Where a Lifetime of Learning Begins

Register Now for our 2026-27 School Year



- **For Children 2.9 - 5 Years Old**
 - 2, 3 or 5 Day Preschool Programs
 - Customizable Days to Fit your Needs
- **Half Day Classes (8:30 - 11:30 AM)**
 - Lunch Bunch (until 2:00 PM)
 - Extended Day (7:30 AM - 4:00 PM)

Fun Learning Environment!

- **School Year Program** (September - June)
 - Affordable Rates
 - Non-Denominational
- **Over 60 Years in Methuen!**



Contact us for more information or to schedule a tour:

978-689-8414

chapelschoolmethuen@gmail.com



www.chapelschoolmethuen.com



Located at:

*First Church Congregational
26 Pleasant Street, Methuen*



Racial Justice Sunday

February 8th

It truly meant a great deal to me to be with you and the First Church congregation on Sunday. I am deeply grateful for the warm welcome, the openness of your community, and the spirit in which the invitation was extended. Sharing in Racial Justice Sunday with your congregation was both humbling and meaningful. I felt the sincerity in the room, a willingness to listen, reflect, and lean into faithful conversations that are not always easy, but are always necessary.

Thank you as well for sending along the flyer from the Muslim community in Silicon Valley. What a beautiful example of intentional relationship-building and interfaith friendship. It would be nice to see more of those opportunities here in New England. They are powerful reminders that justice and compassion grow strongest through connection.

Please extend my gratitude again to the congregation for their presence, their thoughtful engagement, and their hospitality. I look forward to continuing the relationship and hope our paths cross again soon.

Grace and peace to you always my dear friend.

~ Eddie Najeeullah

Children's Moment



Guest Speaker for the Message

Takeaways from Racial Justice Sunday:

1. **Justice Requires Participation**

Justice is not something we observe from a distance. It is something we “enter into.” Faith calls us not just to belief, but to action.

2. **Responsibility Over Guilt**

Racial Justice Sunday is not about carrying guilt. It is about carrying responsibility:

- Responsibility to tell the truth
- Responsibility to listen
- Responsibility to act with love

3. **Listening as a Spiritual Practice**

Growth begins with listening, especially to experiences different from our own. Courage often looks like staying in conversations longer than is comfortable.

4. **God Shows No Partiality**

If every person bears the image of God, then dignity, justice, and compassion cannot be selective. Faith challenges any system that assigns greater worth to some over others.

5. **Love Over Fear**

“God has not given us a spirit of fear...”

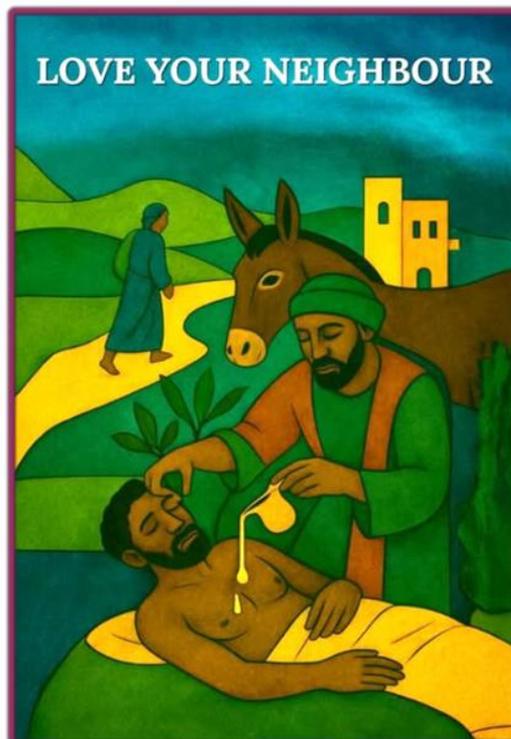
Faith invites us to move beyond silence and discomfort toward courage, compassion, and meaningful dialogue.

6. **Justice Is Ongoing Work**

The church does not observe Racial Justice Sunday because it has all the answers, but because it believes faith should move us toward a more just world today, not someday.

7. **Justice Begins with Participation, Not Perfection**

No one has to get everything right. What matters is willingness, open hearts, open dialogue, and consistent engagement.



144th George Washington Birthday Dinner

A Success!!

February 21st was an amazing night at First Church Congregational as George and Martha Washington (Ryan D. and Nicole D.) welcomed our guests to the 144th George Washington Birthday Dinner. George enthusiastically told guests it was his birthday and several guests asked if we were going to sing "Happy Birthday" to him.

As guests entered the Parish Hall there were two large bouquets of red, white and blue balloons and on the stage a large arch of the same color balloons. This festive atmosphere was created by Kerri B. Nineteen tables were decorated with blue tablecloths, red placemats and silverware wrapped by our Prayer Shawl Group. Centerpieces were a small flag on red and blue star plates, decorated with smaller stars.

Our hostess, Maureen W., took our guests tickets and gave them their table assignments. Lisa F. and Daniel P. escorted guests to their tables. Their wait staff greeted them, took their beverage order and invited them to go to the buffet table.

The buffet table offered fresh green salad, antipasto, baked haddock, green beans, butternut squash, macaroni & cheese, mashed potatoes, stuffing, gravy, vegan chili, and rolls & butter. These were served by Bobbi B., Cindy B., Christine B., Amy D., Don K., and Scott S. Josh F. expertly carved roast turkey and baked ham. Since this dinner is a buffet, guests were free to go back for seconds.

All this delicious food was prepared by our expert Chef Carol S. and her kitchen team of Josh F., Chris A., Sue R. Mike B., Lisa F. and Jo C. Our vegan chili was prepared by Bobbie B. Carol's team was assisted by Steve B. and Jason C., who ran the dishwasher, and Stacey M. and Pat W., who washed the pots and pans. One of the features of this dinner is we use real dishes and silverware, not plastic ones.

Our waitstaff consisted of youth as young as age 10 and adults as old as, well we'll not say. They were Judi B., Sarah P., Haleigh and Henry S., Teri P., Becky S., Shauna & Caroline C., Jo C., Alanaa H. and Nico J. Their bus person was Andrew P.

When guests finished their meal, their waitstaff cleared the table and invited them to have dessert of apple crisp, with or without whipped cream. Our beverage and dessert table was manned by Sheila D. and Kathy R.

George and Martha passed out our Ad Booklet. We are grateful for our advertisers and encourage you to patronize them. Our professional looking Ad Booklet was prepared by Pat K. and Roberta J. Barbara D. and Beverly M. sold tickets that night and reported we sold 216 tickets. We were thrilled about that given the cold, snowy, winter weather we had been having. Once we have tallied our ticket receipts and expenses, we'll let you know how much we made.

Allan B. was everywhere that night, helping out with a variety of things, including our chair lift, which was repaired just in time for the dinner. Marilyn P., our Front-of-the-House Coordinator, oversaw all aspects of the dinner not including food and the kitchen. Methuen Life attended as did a photographer from The Eagle Tribune. There will be an article and photographs in Methuen Life and photographs in The Eagle Tribune. Our own photographer, Ming L., took lots of pictures, some of which you will undoubtedly see in this issue of The Beacon.

Team Leaders, Carol S. and Marilyn P., want to thank all our volunteers who helped with a variety of tasks and without whom we could not host this dinner. Our Parish Hall was filled with our church family and their friends, as well as members of the surrounding communities. A special evening of fellowship and good food was enjoyed by everyone!

144th George Washington Birthday Dinner Planning Team

Allan Barlow, Bobbi Barlow, Josh Ferry, Lisa Yarid Ferry, Pat King, with Carol Sanborn and Marilyn Peck, Team Leaders



144th George Washington Birthday Dinner Fun Night!!!





2026 Easter Giving



If you would like to donate and/or order a plant for Easter, please use this form and return it to the church office by **Sunday, March 22nd**. Please note: We will need time to order the plants. All donations and orders received by this deadline will be listed in the "Easter Giving" bulletin pages.

Plant Order

All Easter plants at **\$18.00 per plant**, please indicate quantity below:

Easter Lily _____*
(white lily)

Tulip _____*

Mona Lisa Lily _____*
(pink & white lily)

Please print

Given in Loving Memory of _____

In Celebration/Honor of _____
(circle choice)

Given by _____

**After the Easter service, all plants will be delivered to a homebound member or friend of the church*

Donation

BUILDING MAINTENANCE _____ OPERATING EXPENSE _____

ORGAN RESTORATION _____ OUTREACH _____

OTHER _____

Please print

Given in Loving Memory of _____

In Celebration/Honor of _____
(circle choice)

Given by _____

Please make check payable to: *First Church Congregational* ("Easter Giving" in memo)

Thank you and Happy Easter!

Listening to Spring

by Macrina Wiederkehr

*How quietly the earth breathes forth new life.
How eagerly the sun bleeds forth the spring.
I am listening to seeds breaking open,
To roots growing strong beneath the ground,
To green shoots rising up from winter wombs.
I am listening to thorns blossoming,
To barren branches laughing out new growth,
To wildflowers dancing through the meadow.
I am listening to the forest filling up with song.
I am listening to the earth filling up with life.
I am listening to trees filling up with leaves.
I am listening to the sky with its many changing moods,
To flashes of lightning, peals of thunder,
To opening buds and greening grass.
I am listening to the breaking forth of light
In the vestibule of dawn.
I am listening to the freshness of the morning.
I am listening to the rain drops
Giving hope to thirsty gardens.
I am listening to the orchards
Pregnant with new life.
I am listening to the flowers
Bursting forth in rainbow colors.
I am listening to the brook,
To the song of happy waters.
I am listening to music
Rising up from all the earth.
I am listening to spring
Soaring in on wings of life.
I am listening to the sounds of spring.
I am listening to prayers
Pouring forth from feathered throats.
I am listening to prayers
Rising up from misty waters.
I am listening to prayers
Of a meadow crowned with dawn.
I am listening to the growing
In the garden of my heart.
I am listening to my heart
Singing songs of resurrection.
I am listening to the colors of life.
I am listening to winter
Handing over spring.
I am listening to the poetry of spring.
I am listening.*

Macrina Wiederkehr is a Benedictine Sister, Author, Spiritual Guide, Seeker of Truth, Lover of the Spiritual Journey.

What's the REACH Ministry?

Do you know of someone facing surgery, recovering from surgery or living with a long-term illness? Do you know someone who has recently lost their job or could use financial support? Do you know someone who suffers from depression or is often down in the dumps around the holidays?



Maybe this person is you?

If so, we can help. Our new **REACH** Ministry wants to make sure that members of our community have a place to turn for support in their time of need. The term **REACH** stands for -- **R**eliable, **E**ngaging, **A**ble, **C**aring and **H**earfelt support.

Contact Judi Boyko or Pat King for more information, or speak to our Pastor.

* * * * *

Would you like to make an electronic donation to the church?

Use your smart phone or tablet by scanning this QR code!



Or visit our website at www.firstchurchmethuen.com and click the **“Donate”** button.

Thank you for your support.

Happy Birthday!

- 01 Charlene Bunting
- 03 Thomas Savastano
- 06 Haleigh Sanborn, John Silva
- 10 Richard Dewhirst
- 12 Nicholas Jurovich
- 15 Dennis Michaud
- 17 Patrick Romano, Rebecca Smith
- 19 Kate Dockham
- 22 Abigail Boyko, Alexander Boyko
- 25 Carole Sanborn
- 28 Jessica Borislow
- 29 Emily Jurovich
- 31 Ray Valcourt



* * * * *



MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

- | | | |
|------|--------------------------|------------------|
| 3/4 | Larry & Robyn Sliney | Married 31 years |
| 3/6 | Patrick & Rebecca Wright | Married 21 years |
| 3/15 | Bill & Lori Bennett | Married 46 years |
| 3/28 | Stephen & Judi Boyko | Married 34 years |



March 2026



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Communion Diaper Drive Begins 8:30 AM Choir Rehearsal 11:15 AM Fellowship 11:30 AM End of Life Decisions Workshop 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM Silent Prayer & Reflection	2 6:30 PM Finance	3 10:00 AM Walking Group (The Loop) 4:30 PM Food Pantry	4 1:00 PM Prayer Shawl 1:00 – 3:00 PM Silent Prayer & Reflection 6:30 PM Church Board	5	6	7
8 8:30 AM Choir Rehearsal 11:15 AM Fellowship 11:30 AM End of Life Decisions Workshop 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM Silent Prayer & Reflection	9 4:00 PM Chapel Staff 6:30 PM Outreach	10 10:00 AM Walking Group (The Loop) 4:30 PM Food Pantry	11 8:00 AM Breakfast with Ann (Ellie's Farmhouse) 1:00 PM Prayer Shawl 1:00 – 3:00 PM Silent Prayer & Reflection 7:00 PM Disconate	12	13	14 10:00 AM Historical
15 8:30 AM Choir Rehearsal 11:15 AM Fellowship 11:30 AM End of Life Decisions Workshop 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM Silent Prayer & Reflection	16 1:00 PM Cook for Bread & Roses	17  10:00 AM Walking Group (The Loop) 4:30 PM Food Pantry 6:30 PM Cantata Rehearsal	18 April BEACON deadline 1:00 PM Prayer Shawl 1:00 – 3:00 PM Silent Prayer & Reflection	19	20	21
22 Diaper Drive Ends 8:30 AM Choir Rehearsal 11:15 AM Fellowship 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM Silent Prayer & Reflection	23 2:00 PM Stewardship	24 10:00 AM Walking Group (The Loop) 4:30 PM Food Pantry 6/30 PM Cantata Rehearsal	25 1:00 PM Prayer Shawl 1:00 – 3:00 PM Silent Prayer & Reflection	26	27	28
29 Palm Sunday Music Cantata 8:30 AM Choir Rehearsal 11:15 AM Fellowship 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM Silent Prayer & Reflection	30	31 10:00 AM Walking Group (The Loop) 4:30 PM Food Pantry			Worship Service Sundays at 10:00 AM <i>In-Person & on Facebook Live</i> www.youtube.com/firstchurchmethuen1729	

Dates and times are subject to change

First Church Congregational
United Church of Christ
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Methuen, MA 01844-3199

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