



# *The Epistle*

## February 2024

### *From the Pastor's Pen*

#### **A Lenten Prayer of Transformation**

“The Life-Giving Lattice of the Ordinary”

David Long-Higgins, Conference Minister,  
Heartland Conference UCC

This Lent, O Love,  
Has heaved a heaviness.  
It has shown shadows  
before unknown.

Wonder has turned  
Into worry  
At warp speed.

So slow me down.  
In the midst of  
This extraordinary time,  
Grant me the grace  
Of noticing  
Your continual arrival  
Revealed in the life-giving  
Lattice of the ordinary.

Let it be as light  
As the sun  
Falling on  
Whatever it will  
In the morning.

As Your light reveals  
The gift of the hidden,  
Let me also lightly,  
In word and silence,  
Tend the gift

Of this day  
And the holy intersections  
Which already await me.

Begin again,  
Your work and way  
Of love in me.  
Redraw the lines  
Of despair and drudgery  
With delight.

Yes, Love,  
Let it be so...

Lent begins with the starkness of Ash Wednesday. On Ash Wednesday we face our mortality and the limits of our earthborn existence. Ashes are smeared on our forehead as we hear the solemn words spoken: “You are dust and to dust you shall return.” It is not hard to make the connection with the words often said at the burial of the dead: “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

Ash Wednesday falls at a time when our cars, sidewalks, and windows are caked with the accumulated dirt and grime of winter, awaiting the cleansing rains of spring. As we turn to God for mercy, we ask God to wash away our sins and to create in us clean hearts. Like the earth tilting toward the sun, we return to the Lord, who is slow to anger and abounds in steadfast love.

The imposition of ashes indeed feels like an imposition, a stark warning that we will not live forever. It is a humbling reminder of our limits and finitude as human beings. Ashes do not just symbolize mortality, though; anciently, they also stood for cleansing and were used to enrich the soil for better growth. Thus, the ‘imposing’ imposition of ashes is also an invitation to embark on a profound spiritual journey that will lead us from death to the waters of rebirth and the new life of resurrection. Our Lenten pilgrimage is with our forebears in the faith, the Christian community today, and people around the world preparing to be baptized or to renew their baptismal vows at Easter.

#### **Ash Wednesday Options**

##### **Ashes to-Go**

Pick up personal Ash Wednesday kits after worship on February 10th and in the church on Ash Wednesday. Use these for a personal devotion any time on Ash Wednesday, February 14th.



##### **Labyrinth Walk**

1-6pm

Pastor Stacey will be present in the church so that the community can walk the labyrinth as a way of entering into Lent. Poetry and prayers will be available for this, along with small cups of ashes to be used for the imposition at the center of the labyrinth if you choose.



**JOYS AND CONCERNS**

For our members, family and friends hospitalized, ill and in need of prayers, may God bless and watch over you:

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| The family and friends of Dolores Tamulen & Doris Pierce | Jan Gordon<br>Dot                    |
| Mary Dunn  | Eleanor Brogan                       |
| Amelia Lavenski & her family                             | Lorna Ducharme                       |
| Roxxe and Chris  | Bryan Castle                         |
| Brian & June Coombs                                      | Sally Aalto's friend, Marge          |
| Charlie Snell  | The Lafferty family                  |
| Steve Collar   | Peter Rakowski                       |
| Sally Calhoun  | Amanda Arsenault                     |
| Shirley Saari  | Ellie Grace<br>(Peter's great niece) |
| Eddie Hannula  | Kiernan Wilson                       |
| Dee Smith  | Anne Heckman<br>(Beth's mom)         |
| Bob Anderson   |                                      |

**"Prayer List"**

**If you added somebody to the prayer list, please let us know when to remove their name.**

More information can always be shared privately with Pastor Stacey at [fccw.pastor@outlook.com](mailto:fccw.pastor@outlook.com) or at (603) 903-5621.



The Christmas wreaths are traditionally purchased by the Women's Fellowship from Gretchen Lafferty.

This year Gretchen generously donated all the wreaths in memory of her granddaughter, Elsie Maeve Lafferty, who passed away unexpectedly last April.

The family has started a Facebook page titled "Kindness for Elsie" on which you can share your acts of kindness, given or received, with Elsie's loved ones.

**A message from the  
Christian Outreach Committee**

Re: Giving Tree 2023

Thank you all for your response to our annual giving tree toy drive! This year we again used the ease of Amazon to our advantage and easily met the needs of children who could use a little extra joy this holiday season. The Christian Outreach Committee partnered with the Community Healthlink residential recovery homes, where children are going through the re-unification process with their mothers.

With your help we were able to fulfill all the requests from the Amazon Wish List and the gifts were delivered to the programs to be wrapped and then shared with the children Christmas morning. As always, we appreciate your assistance in meeting this need and making the holidays a little brighter for these kids!

With the sincerest of thanks, stay safe and God bless,  
The Christian Outreach Committee

Greetings,

I would like to thank Peter & Connor Rakowski for setting up Covenant Hall for Dolores Tamulen's memorial service.

Also to Anne Ring for delivering the beautiful Poinsettia's at Christmas time.

Thank you all!

In Faith,

Jim

December 31, 2023

The Westminster Food Pantry greatly appreciates your generous donations of \$242.00. It is through generosity of individuals, organizations, and loyal businesses that the pantry is able to continue to help families in our area.

On behalf of the pantry volunteers and families we serve, thank you for caring and helping.

Sincerely,  
*Mary Ann Murphy*  
On behalf of the volunteers of the WCFP

## **Settled Pastor Search Committee Update**

*The Search Committee met for an organizational and business meeting on January 16<sup>th</sup>. The following positions were voted: Ellen Holmes - Chair, Sue Christ – Vice Chair, and Karen Brighenti – Secretary. We have committed to preparing a monthly update for The Epistle as well as an update at a worship service once a month during announcements. Our social media platforms will also receive announcements.*

*The Committee will be reviewing the services and support available from the Conference with our Area Conference Minister at our next meeting. Taking the approved Church Profile, we will add photographs and any additional items to have our submission to the Conference ready for the end of January, but with a target of no later than mid-February.*

*The Committee spent time reviewing other pastoral searches, looking at their profiles and discussing additional opportunities to share our opening with a larger audience. We have work assignments for our next meeting, and are excited to get underway.*



**Thinking of hosting coffee hour?  
Available sign up dates!**

February 4	_____
February 11	<u>Boy Scouts Troop 33</u>
February 18	_____
February 25	<u>CE Committee</u>
March 3	_____
March 10	<u>Boy Scouts Troop 33</u>
March 17	_____
March 24	_____
March 31 (Easter)	_____
April 7	_____
April 14	<u>Boy Scouts Troop 3</u>
April 21	_____
April 28	_____
May 5	_____
May 12	<u>Boy Scouts Troop 3</u>
May 19	_____
May 26	_____

*From the Moderator*

*The next step in our Settled Pastor search is under way. On January 16<sup>th</sup>, the Search Committee (Karen Brighenti, Deenie Burgess, Sue Christ, John Fairbanks, Candi Hitchcock, Ellen Holmes, Lisa Roberts and Jessica Caouette began their work. They have reviewed the Church Profile, and are in the process of getting our three references from the Community. They've begun reviewing current UCC searches on-going, and working on the description of ministry which will be presented to the UCC and candidates. Their next meeting will include a conversation with our Area Conference Minister, Rev. Carol Steinbrecher. The first goal is to have the pastoral listing submitted no later than mid-February.*

*The Church Council meeting of January 14<sup>th</sup> included several topics. The primary was the adoption of the Church Profile. I want to personally thank the sub-committee members of Joanna Allen, Deenie Burgess, and Beth Heckman for the immense number of hours of research and review committed to update the draft. The Church Council found it to be a complete and accurate reflection of FCCW, and passed it unanimously.*

*The Council also approved the following appointments to unfilled positions: Ellen Holmes, Moderator (2025), Karen Brighenti, Vice Moderator (2025), and Carolyn Gray, Music Committee (2025).*

*The final area of business involved additional support for our Diaconate. They have acquired many additional responsibilities that have not been faced by prior members. Some we will find coverage for. An essential area of support is enlisting volunteers to participate in Laity services. The availability of Pulpit Supply ministers has been challenging to secure for those dates Pastor Stacey is not with us. I am asking you to consider volunteering to participate in the Laity-led services. You will not be left on your own, and will have the support of myself and others preparing the worship. There are ideas and supports in abundance available. Please consider connecting with a friend or two and perhaps taking a step out of your comfort zone for one hour. Many hands make the load lighter. It will be fun and so appreciated.*

*Activities upcoming for the Diaconate include ordering Tulips for Easter. With Easter occurring on March 31<sup>st</sup> this year, ordering will begin in February. Be looking for the ordering dates in the worship bulletins, Mail Chimp and the Epistle, and let's bring the beauty of season to our Sanctuary.*

*I can also share that the Yankee Street Fair will be returning on **Saturday, June 15<sup>th</sup>**. While it will be a smaller version of fairs past, it will be another sign to our Community that we are looking forward. Right now, the plans are for a yard sale (tied into the Townwide Yard Sale), tables with produce and bakery products, items to auction and food to eat onsite. The highlight will be shining a light on our Strawberry Shortcakes, a tribute to Irene Kamila and her family.*

*Please keep your eyes out for upcoming events with Women's Fellowship, Christian Outreach, Boy Scout Troop 33 and other Committees of the church. Share with your friends and family, and please try to attend!*

## The Women's Fellowship over the Holidays

In December, a group of women from our church met for lunch, and what an enjoyable time we shared. The conversation and the laughter are always so rich when we are together. In the photo, standing left to right are Karen Brighenti, Sharon Hayes, Cindy Brown, Ellen Holmes, Myrtle Walker, Mary Waight, Margaret Greenlee, Candi Hitchcock, Sammi Dawley, LeeAnn Gikis and Julie Gagnon. Seated are Shirley Lombard, Carol McGee and Margaret Ann Shick.

The Women's Fellowship has tried a few options for gathering this year. Among them has been meeting for lunch or dinner. We hope to see you at our next gathering. All are welcome.



### Women's Fellowship Memory Cafe Toolkit

#### Tip#2 Keep Your Home Tidy and Remove Clutter

Keeping our house neat is often the first thing that slips when we have other things going on. An untidy home makes it difficult to find or see things which can make you feel confused or distracted.

The tidier the room, the more focus you can put on the things you actually use because they will be easy to spot.

Put away or donate things that are not often used.

Keep rooms clutter free

The Diaconate is pleased to coordinate Easter tulips in our church for Easter Sunday, March 31. Please complete this form and return it to the church **no later than Thursday, March 14**, either in person or by mail:

First Congregational Church  
PO Box 477 138 Main Street  
Westminster, MA 01473

Questions? Contact Robert Hoyt or Lisa @ (978) 874-5790



I would like to order \_\_\_\_\_ Easter tulips at **\$11.00 each**  
Make checks payable to ***First Congregational Church***.

\_\_\_\_\_ Given in honor of

\_\_\_\_\_ Given in loving memory of

by (please **print** either your name or anonymous if don't wish your name **printed** in the bulletin) \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ I will take my tulips after the 9:30 am Worship Service on March 31.

\_\_\_\_\_ The church may have my tulips for distribution.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



On February 11<sup>th</sup> we will celebrate the scouts of troop 33 and any other scouts in our congregation.

Come wearing your uniform (if you choose).

### Spreading Valentine's Love

Join our CE Team and the young people of the church in making Valentine's of care and love for members and friends of our congregation who are on our prayer and visitation lists. After worship on February 4<sup>th</sup>, supplies will be available in the Fellowship Hall for you Valentine making enjoyment. This year we are hoping to make 35-40 cards through our combined efforts to spread joy and love.



## Confirmation Program Update



Four youth are committed to the Confirmation program this winter and spring and began meeting in late December.

This program has all of the core conversation/exploration components accustomed to in this congregation, though it is structured a bit differently, relying on some Conference resources to make the program more robust in response to our, and Pastor Stacey's, capacity to facilitate the program. Topics will include: understanding membership in the local church, the United Church of Christ and the diversity of faith expression through the denomination, the life and ministry of Jesus, the basics of faith traditions beyond Christianity, the differences between Christian faith traditions, personal relationships with God and Christ, understanding discernment in the church and in life, and more. It will include service learning, worship leadership, relationship building within this congregation, and connecting with faithful young people from UCC churches in the SNEUCC and the NH Conferences.

The structure will include the partnering of a young person with a mentor from this congregation. These pairings will be made by matching interests and personalities between adults and youth. Parents/guardians and youth will help in identifying who will be asked to serve in this capacity. Mentors and parents will be asked to assist in chaperoning components of the program outside of this church—a few in-person meetings with youth of the NH Conference (one of these meetings will be focused on worship leadership, another on service learning, and another on celebrating the journey these youth are embarking on together with an overnight in ME and a worship service on a boat). As well, a retreat with the Southern New England Conference will help connect our young people to this Conference's Outdoor Ministry Program and invite them to take a "deep dive" into their personal faith and relationship with God and Christ.

The end of the program will include a choice for the young person to be Confirmed as a member of this church, to affirm their Baptismal Vows, or to receive a blessing at this rite of passage in maturing in their faith. The Christian Ed team feels it is important that no matter the decision made by each young person with their families, they be celebrated and embraced for where they are on their spiritual journey.



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry Drive-Thru	2  Office closed	3
4 9:30 AM Intergenerational Worship 10:45 AM Confirmation (CE Wing)	5 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	6 8:00 AM Yoga (Zoom) 6:00 PM Boy Scouts (CH) 6:00 PM Diaconate (Parlor)	7 6:30 PM Boy Scouts (CH)	8 6:00 PM Scouts (CH) 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry Drive-Thru 7:00 PM Trustees (FH)	9  Office closed	10 9 am - 11 am - Boy Scouts (FH)
11 9:30 AM Worship 9:30 AM Church School (Sanctuary)  <b>Scout Sunday</b>	12 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	13 8:00 AM Yoga (Zoom) 7:30 PM CE (Parlor)	14 6:30 PM Boy Scouts (CH)  <b>Ash Wednesday</b>  <i>Valentine's Day</i>	15 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry Drive-Thru	16  Office closed	17
18 9:30 AM Lay Led Service 9:30 AM Church School (CE Wing)	19 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)  <i>Epistle Due</i>  President's Day	20 8:00 AM Yoga 5:30 PM Cub Scouts (CH)	21 6:30 PM Boy Scouts (CH)	22 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry Drive-Thru	23  Office closed	24
25 9:30 AM Lay Led Service 9:30 AM Church School (CE Wing)	26 8:00 AM Meditation (Zoom)	27 8:00 AM Yoga (Zoom) 6:00 PM GGM (CH)	28 6:30 PM Boy Scouts (CH)	29 6:30- 7:30 PM Food Pantry Drive-Thru		



Kim Norlien ©



## Christian Outreach



**First Congregational Church will be participating in  
"Souper" Bowl Sunday this year.**

We are asking everyone to bring cans of soup (please check the expiration dates) to church on Sunday, February 11th for our food pantry. This is a great way to participate and help fill our food cupboard with nourishing and warming soup. There is nothing like a nice cup of warm soup on a cold day. Good for the soul and good for the body. If you can't make it to church on Sunday February 11<sup>th</sup> you can drop off your donations at the side entrance of the church at any time. Thank you for participating in this very worthy cause.

The Outreach Committee



**The First Congregational Church  
of Westminster  
United Church of Christ  
138 Main Street • PO Box 477  
Westminster, MA 01473**

The Epistle

February 2024

Phone: 978-874-5790

Church office Email:

[fccw.westminster@gmail.com](mailto:fccw.westminster@gmail.com)

Visit our Website [www.westcong.org](http://www.westcong.org)

Don't Miss the  
**DEADLINE!**

**Monday  
February 19, 2024**

