

**THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
OF ELLSWORTH, MAINE
FOUNDED 1812**



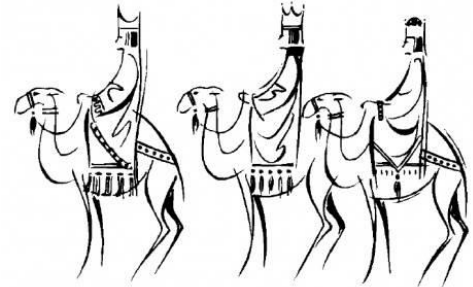
JANUARY 2023 - THE STEEPLE NEWSLETTER

First Congregational Church, PO Box 12, 2 Church Street, Ellsworth, Maine 04605 207-667-8321 ellsworthucc.org

From Rev. Keith Bowie, Transitional Minister

Because it is the first month of the year, January is a popular time for New Year's resolutions. New Year's is a time to start over, to start fresh, and to set out on another direction in our lives. I am told that most of the advertisements for diet programs and diet aids take place in early January. There are more advertisements for dieting in the first two weeks of January than in the rest of the year combined! It appears for many people that the beginning of a new year is the time to turn over a new leaf, to lose those extra pounds, and to begin a new lifestyle.

Matthew says that the magi "went home by another way." Did those magi make the equivalent of a New Year's resolution? I wonder what happened to the magi after they left the manger at Bethlehem? After worshiping before the baby Jesus, offering their gifts, how were they changed? They surely could not have been the people who they formerly were. Undoubtedly these magi who had found the baby Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah would not have gone home the same way, even if the angel had not warned them. I believe there was no way to go back home as they had been. They had seen God Incarnate, they had seen the fulfillment of their expectations. This baby changed their lives! So there was no way for the wise men to get home except by another way.



What New Year's resolutions might we make here, in this season of new beginnings? How might we respond to the demanding, transforming love that encounters us at the manger? What one "new thing" can each of us offer the Christ child as our gift to him in 2023? How might it change us if we worshiped with bent knees and humbled spirits?

Keith

Rev. Keith Bowie



MASKING is OPTIONAL
in the church building.

The Re-Opening Committee suggests you maintain physical distance and respect the space of those who wish to continue to wear a mask.

JANUARY CHURCH MEETINGS

- Adult Forum** – Sundays, 8:30 a.m.
 - Busy Bodies** – Mondays, 10:30 a.m.
 - Choir** – Tuesdays, 6 p.m.
 - Profile Comm** – Tuesdays, 6 p.m. on Zoom
 - Music** – TBA
 - Council** – Monday, Jan 2, 6 :30 p.m.
Monday, Jan 30, 6 :30 p.m.
 - Deacons** – Sunday, Jan 8, 11:30 a.m.
 - Missions** – Thursday, Jan 12, TBA
 - Christian Ed** – Sunday, Jan 15, 11:30 a.m.
 - Trustees** – Thursday, Jan 19, 7 p.m.
- ANNUAL MEETING – Sunday, Jan 29**

Our meetings are hybrid, in person AND Zoom, so that you may participate in the way you are comfortable. **All FCC Zoom events (meetings and worship) use the same meeting number and password.** Please call the church office (T-W-Th) for Zoom instructions.

ANNUAL MEETING SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 2023

We will hear reports from Officers and Committees, elect Officers, consider a 2023 Budget, and transact any other necessary business. Following the meeting there will be a light lunch provided. This meeting will be hybrid—in person and on Zoom.

If you chair a committee or board, please submit your report of 2022 activities to Joyce in the church office before January 17, 2023. (Gold stars awarded to early birds!)



JANUARY LECTIONARY READINGS

JANUARY 1 – 1ST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Isaiah 63:7-9
Psalm 148
Hebrews 2:10-18
Matthew 2:13-23

JANUARY 6 – EPIPHANY

Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
Ephesians 3:1-12
Matthew 2:1-12

JANUARY 8 – BAPTISM OF CHRIST

Isaiah 42:1-9
Psalm 29
Acts 10:34-43
Matthew 3:13-17

JANUARY 15 – 2ND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Isaiah 49:1-7
Psalm 40:1-11
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-42

JANUARY 22 – 3RD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Isaiah 9:1-4
Psalm 27:1, 4-9
1 Corinthians 1:10-18
Matthew 4:12-23

JANUARY 29 – 4TH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Micah 6:1-8
Psalm 15
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Matthew 5:1-12

CHURCH SUPPERS

start up again Saturday, February 18, 2023. We need volunteers to set up, cook, serve, wash dishes, and bake pies. Please contact Ruth Tainter immediately about the ways you can help.

From the Moderator

There are few things in life that I am certain of. I am, however, certain that God loves all of us. No exceptions. We are called as faithful Disciples of Jesus to do the same. Love everyone, without exception. There is nothing easy or practical about this love calling, but it is clearly what we are called to do.

The other thing of which I am certain is that few people like or tolerate well any kind of change. Many, even most of us, are far more comfortable with our idealized understandings of how things used to be, always were, and sure ought to be now. Where in any of that mindset is there any room for considering the ongoing revelation of God's self to humanity? How are we to make room for all that God might be calling us to do now? Are we even willing to consider that God might be calling us in a new and different direction?

It seems at least as likely as not that more than a few of us may not be at all comfortable with the idea of the revelation of God's self to humanity being an ongoing thing. Given that God loves us, why is it difficult to imagine that as our relationship with God deepens our insights might, or even will, change as we become more attuned to that which God offers?

Of course, becoming open to the winds of the spirit is, at times, difficult, and the conversations that are held in a faithful congregation in response to those urgings of the spirit can be, and frequently are challenging and even disruptive. They can also be, and frequently are, sources of great joy and growth. Provided, of course that we are willing to have them.

A few weeks ago, Rev. Lacey (Dad to me) asked for volunteers to learn about what the words "open" and "affirming" mean. There have been none to date. In fact, there is a group of folks who are determined to ensure that no such conversations take place.

IF we were to decide that there is no need, or that we have no interest, nor do we feel called to explore any of that, after faithful and prayerful conversation and a well discerned process, then so be it. To refuse to engage in conversation

about it is a vote of no confidence in ourselves as a Church family, called and gathered in this place and at this time in history.

When I first became Moderator, I was reluctant to encourage any conversation around any of this because I was deeply concerned about the chaos that I was certain would ensue. I failed to place my confidence in the love that I have always known flourished in our congregation and in the God who loves us. I was wrong and I offer my apologies and ask for your forgiveness. I had failed you miserably.

In the intervening years it has become the norm for people who do not fit neatly into a particular box to be persecuted. Over the last several years, the hate that has been levied against those who are not heterosexual has escalated to the point of endangering the lives of these children of God. It has become, in some circles, quite fashionable.

To be clear: Jesus says absolutely NOTHING about homosexuality. Jesus, in telling the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) does have a clear message around loving our neighbors. Please remember that the Samaritans were despised by the Jews of that time. Jesus chose the Samaritan to be the "hero" in this parable for a reason. If Jesus were preaching today, might he make the "hero" gay? Why? Or why not?

Also consider these words of Paul from Galatians 3:27-28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female (or by logical extension gay or straight?) for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

If indeed we are to be one in Christ Jesus, we have some thinking to do. Part of the purpose of being gathered as a congregation is to enrich our understandings of what it means to love by offering ourselves, one to another and to the community that surrounds us.

The simple truth is that living out the love commandment is the impossible possibility. (Reinhold Niebuhr, early 20th century American theologian). All that makes the living out of that commandment even feasible is our recognition of the ultimate love and authority of God.

My question to all of you is this: Are we ready to challenge ourselves in attempting to discern what love might mean in all of this and

(article concludes on the next page →)

what God may be calling us to? This question has been the elephant in the room for too long. Let's answer it. ♦

DEACONS

- Jan 1** - Laity service
Jan 8 - Communion, Rev. Keith Bowie
Jan 15 - Rev. Keith Bowie
Jan 22 - Rev. Keith Bowie
Jan 29 - Rev. Keith Bowie

January Deacon: Cindy Sargent

Here we are in a **NEW YEAR!** So much promise, So many unknowns in our personal lives. So many unknowns within our church. But at the same time, this can mean so many new ideas that we can build upon to re-incarnate our church and how we **BRAND** ourselves. This is hard, but let us **PRAY DAILY** for help to move through a transformation of our Spiritual Guides from our Lord and step out of the old and take a step in faith toward meaningful growth and change that will be involved to re-energize our church and family.

Prayer Calendar names

In January, please include these names in your daily prayers:

- Bonnie & Tim Carter
- Juanita Higgins
- Alice King
- Mark Remick
- Mary Jane (MJ) Smith
- Ken & Sue Farkas
- Mark Berry
- Nancy Johnston
- Leah Remick
- Evan Bedard

TWO PRAYERS FOR THE NEW YEAR

May God make your year a happy one!
Not by shielding us from all sorrows and pain,
But by strengthening us to bear it, as it comes;
Not by making our path easy,
But by making us sturdy to travel any path;
Not by taking hardships from us,
But by taking fear from our heart;
Not by granting us unbroken sunshine,
But by keeping our face bright, even in the shadows;
Not by making our life always pleasant,
But by showing us when people and their causes need us most, and by making us anxious to be there to help.
God's love, peace, hope and joy to us for the year ahead.

- Author Unknown; Adapted by Debra Mooney

As the dawn breaks on a new year, let us give thanks for all we hold dear: our health, our family and our friends.

Let us release our grudges, our anger and our pains, for these are nothing but binding chains. Let us live each day in the most loving ways, the God-conscious way. Let us serve all who are in need, regardless of race, color or creed.

Let us lead the world from darkness to light, from falsehood to truth and from wrong to right.

Let us remember that we are all one, embracing all, discriminating against none.

We pray that we live lives that inspire and fill the world with peace, prosperity and love.

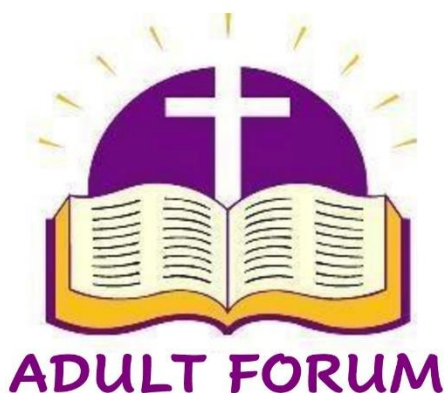
- Rev. Marcy Sheremetta

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Rev. Bowie finished the book study on Martin Luther using a video from The Great Courses series for a recap. This Wednesday evening group start up again in January—look for the exact date in the bulletin. At the first meeting we will select a book to study. (Hint: Rev. Bowie is currently reading C.S. Lewis books, so that is one direction in which we are leaning.)

If you have Christian books on your shelves that you would like to donate/share with others, please consider stocking the Little Libraries in town. There is a place online to help you find locations. Let's spread the Good News! This would be a good way to share old copies of the Daily Bread devotionals.

Question: should we make up Adult Greeting Bags for new people who come to our church? Other church do this and we already have Children's Bags. Items to include might be the Daily Bread, paper/pencil, hard candy, tissues ...what do you think?



Adult Forum continues to be well attended. New Guideposts are ready for 2023. Along with this book, the group would like to study prophecies that have come true. All are welcome to attend. The group meets Sunday mornings at 8:30 in the Parlor.



Maine's most vulnerable children need your prayers.

A Family for ME is a partnership between the Department of Health and Human Services and Spurwink Services. Our objective is to increase awareness about the urgent need for foster and adoptive families in Maine. We do this by working in coordination with various organizations to educate, provide literature and ask for assistance in disseminating information.

A Family for ME has a strong, successful history of collaborating with many different faith-based groups, and we are asking you to assist if you are able.

Please visit our website, www.afamilyformemaine.org for information and to view a digital display of Maine's Heart Gallery.

Feel free to reach out to me with any questions, or if you are interested in participating. I believe that the ongoing support of our faith communities is critical to finding safe, welcoming, and affirming homes for Maine children in out of home care.

Patricia Tate
207-810-6010
139 State Street Suite 1 Bangor, Me 04401
ptate@spurwink.org

Pray for Maine's Children



Maine's most vulnerable children in foster care need your prayers.

All Maine children deserve to be safe, happy, and have a place to call home.

- Teens often have the hardest time getting placed with foster families.

A Family for ME thanks you for your prayers. For more information on how to become a foster parent or how to support foster families contact us at

AFamilyforMEMaine.org
1.844.893.6311

A Family for ME



... *"where the river flows, life will flourish"*¹

... *"Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it."*²

Fall 2022

Dear Ones,

Our lovely Maine is a land of flowing waters. One need not travel far throughout our beautiful state before we find ourselves crossing a river or a stream. It is these waters that connect us geographically while our Maine Conference connects us in faith and mission, merging us into one...guided by the Holy Spirit.

Our 2022 Annual Conference theme was *"where the river flows, life will flourish"*. We are living out this theme every day throughout our local churches, associations and at our Conference hub in Augusta. Here are a just a few highlights from the past several months. In July there were several opportunities to meet Rev. Marisa Laviola, who was our candidate for settled Conference Minister. The Maine Conference Board of Directors approved Rev. Estelle Margaronis as our Conference Disaster Relief Coordinator. The Social Action Committee and Anti-Racism Team provided workshops on the issue of Tribal Sovereignty in Maine and crafted a Resolution which was presented and approved at the 2022 Annual Conference.

In August we held several budget hearings in preparation for our annual meeting and we learned of Rev. Ron Baard, Dean of the Maine School of Ministry (MESOM) plans to retired in August. We said goodbye to both he and Rev. Jonna Jenson via zoom by the end of September and we welcomed Marisa as our settled Conference Minister. In October we elected three new board members: Bill Bliss (Neighborhood UCC, Bath, Midcoast -clergy), Paula Hatfield (Rangeley, Living Water - laity) and Gary Bagley (Hammond Street, Bangor, Katahdin - clergy).

Beginning in January, Rev. Dr. Malcolm Himshcoot will begin as the new acting dead of the Maine School of Ministry (MESOM). Stay tuned to see new course offerings for 2023.

Our Conference ministers, Marisa and Alexis are getting to know each other and shifting their portfolios in an effort to tap into their respective gifts and talents so they can best serve you. Reach out to them...get to know them...you will be glad you did.

Meanwhile, a subcommittee of the Board of Directors is working diligently to establish ways to insure financial sustainability for our Conference. These efforts are necessary to ensure funding for Pilgrim Lodge, MESOM, MID Scholarships, Church Search and Call, pastoral and laity support and training opportunities, and other Conference wide initiatives. Your financial support of Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM) help to make all these things possible. Thank you...thank you...thank you! We are truly blessed!

Blessings to you all!

Most Sincerely,

Kathy Woodside

Maine Conference UCC Board Member

¹ Ezekiel 47:9-19, *The Message Bible, NIV & The Message Parallel Bible*, Large Print; Xondrevan; Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546; Pg. 1811.

²A River Runs Through I; Norman Maclean;_University of Chicago Press; 1st edition, 1989.

JANUARY 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 New Year's Day White 8:30 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service	2 OFFICE CLOSED 6:30 pm Council	3 6 pm Choir 6:30 pm Profile Comm	4 2:30-4 pm Welcome Table take-out	5 9 am Bulletin deadline	6 Epiphany OFFICE CLOSED	7
8 White 8:30 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service, Communion & luncheon 11:30 am Deacons	9 OFFICE CLOSED 10:30 am Busy Bodies activities	10 6 pm Choir 6:30 pm Profile Comm	11 2:30-4 pm Welcome Table take-out	12 9 am Bulletin Deadline TBA Missions	13 OFFICE CLOSED	14 4 pm Wedding
15 Green 8:30 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service 11:30 Christian Ed	16 OFFICE CLOSED Annual Reports deadline 10:30 am Busy Bodies activities	17 6 pm Choir 6:30 pm Profile Comm	18 2:30-4 pm Welcome Table take-out	19 9 am Bulletin Deadline 7 pm Trustees	20 OFFICE CLOSED	21
22 Green 8:30 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service	23 OFFICE CLOSED 10:30 am Busy Bodies activities	24 9 am Steeple deadline 6 pm Choir 6:30 pm Profile Comm	25 2:30-4 pm Welcome Table take-out	26 9 am Bulletin deadline	27 OFFICE CLOSED	28
29 Green 8:30 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service ANNUAL MEETING	30 OFFICE CLOSED 10:30 am Busy Bodies activities 6:30 pm Council	31 6 pm Choir 6:30 pm Profile Comm	<i>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! - 2 Corinthians 5:17</i>			



*Dear Members of First Congregational Church of Ellsworth,
 Thank you all for thinking of us during this festive season!
 You may have heard that Helen's spinal stenosis condition
 worsened and she had to be transferred to Horizons Rehab
 Center, also in Brunswick, last April. Her rehab has been
 going very slowly, interrupted by frequent UTIs. Being
 separated after 60 years of marriage is rather tough.
 Irv began radiation oncology treatment for prostate
 cancer. Treatment will last 5½ weeks, every day except
 weekends, so we both are having our struggles and ask for
 your prayers.*

*All the best and our love,
 Irv & Helen Hodgkin*