

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



November 2024 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

Most of us are familiar with the Gospel story of James and John, in which they approach Jesus on the sly and demand, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” (Mark 10:35-45). It is a case of misplaced ambition. They want to hop on the glory train and they seek to jockey for a place in Jesus’ cabinet in the coming kingdom. However, Jesus redirects their energy and talks to them of the way of the cross, of humble service. It is easy to want to demonize James and John. One wants to say to them, “Who do you think you are?” Even the other ten disciples become angry with them.

Give them credit, though. One thing you cannot deny is that James and John have profound, sincere faith. They both absolutely believe that Jesus will reign. There’s no question. In spite of Jesus’s dire predictions, in spite of the storm clouds gathering on the horizon, they are so sure of Jesus’ final victory that they sign up to go with him. Now this is not unreasonable, since they have been his chief assistants from the start. Along with Peter, they are among Jesus’ closest friends, the ones he takes with him when he leaves the others at home. They had learned to step forward. And that’s a good thing.

Perhaps the greater sin is not misplaced ambition, but complacency and lack of ambition altogether. Imagine a church without any ambition, without any initiative, without any resourcefulness, content to just drift along. What happens? Where ambition is entirely absent, mediocrity takes hold, the status quo hardens, and committees debate endlessly about methodology and procedure. Priorities get inverted and what is of least concern somehow becomes the greatest concern. What do you think would happen if a church spent the majority of its time helping people grow in their faith? As church growth coach Paul Nickerson writes, “People who are excited about being a follower of Jesus generally give more of their time and resources, they regularly invite others, and they focus on **servicing** rather than their own personal needs and tastes. (Please read Paul’s full article on page 3.)

In what ways has God gifted you? How can you unleash those gifts in service to Christ? How can we better share our story and God’s story with one another?

That in all things God may be glorified,

Keith

NOVEMBER CHURCH MEETINGS

- Adult Forum** – Sundays, 8:15 a.m.
Busy Bodies – Mondays, 10:30 a.m.
Choir – Thursdays, 6 p.m.
Music – TBA
Search Comm – TBA
- ★ **QUARTERLY CONGREGATIONAL MEETING** ★
– Sunday, Nov 3 after worship
- Finance** – Friday, Nov 8, 10 a.m.
Deacons – Sunday, Nov 10, 11:30 a.m.
Christian Ed – Sunday, Nov 10, 11:30 a.m.
Trustees – Thursday, Nov 21, 7 p.m.
Missions – Sunday, Nov 24, 11:30 a.m.
Council – Monday, Nov 24, 6:30 p.m.

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 contact the secretary in the church office (T-W-Th) for Zoom instructions.

QUARTERLY ★ CONGREGATIONAL ★ MEETING November 3, 2024

After worship at 11 a.m.
a luncheon will follow.

MASKING is OPTIONAL
in the church building.



Please maintain physical distance and respect the space of those who wish to continue to wear a mask.



DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME ends in the wee hours of November 3. When you go to bed on Saturday night November 2nd, set your clock backward one hour. Enjoy an extra hour of sleep or linger over coffee and breakfast. See you in church!

NOVEMBER LECTIONARY READINGS

NOV 1 – ALL SAINTS DAY

Isaiah 25:6-9 & Psalm 24
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44



NOV 3 – 24TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Ruth 1:1-18 & Psalm 146 OR
Deuteronomy 6:1-9 & Psalm 119:1-8
Hebrews 9:11-14
Mark 12:28-34

NOV 10 – 25TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17 & Psalm 127 OR
1 Kings 17:8-16 & Psalm 146
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44

NOV 17 – 26TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

1 Samuel 1:4-20 & 1 Samuel 2:1-10 OR
Daniel 12:1-3 & Psalm 16
Hebrews 10:11-14, (15-18), 19-25
Mark 13:1-8

NOV 24 – REIGN OF CHRIST

2 Samuel 23:1-7 & Psalm 132:1-12, (13-18) OR
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, & Psalm 93
Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37

NOV 28 – THANKSGIVING DAY

Joel 2:21-27 & Psalm 126
1 Timothy 2:1-7
Matthew 6:25-33



DEACONS

Nov 3 – Rev. Cassandra McDonald,
Communion (DST ends)
Nov 10 – Rev. Keith Bowie
Nov 17 – Rev. Keith Bowie
Nov 24 – Steve Merchant, Harvest Table

November Deacon: Steve Merchant

(The following is from Rev. Paul Nickerson's October 17, 2024, weekly newsletter.)

In listening to many churches (a great privilege and honor I have being a Coach), I hear a lot of energy being spent on:

- Trying to hold on to the current congregation.
- Worrying about and spending a lot of time on raising money.
- Wanting to reach new people but frustrated about how to do it.
- Managing what feels like an inevitable decline.

But the piece I don't hear much about is how churches are helping each member take their next step in faith, use their gifts and bless others.

Is this true for your church? Take a look at your church calendar and see how much time is spent in actually growing disciples? The irony is that if we spent more time helping people grow in their faith, we could better address a lot of the issues confronting congregations today. People who are excited about being a follower of Jesus give more of their time and resources, regularly invite others, and focus on serving rather than on their personal needs and tastes.

Growing disciples is the engine that propels everything we do as a Christian church. Having a discipleship process that helps every member take their next step in faith is central to who we are as a church. This is where we need to spend more of our time and let everything else flow out of that transformation. (continued top of next column)

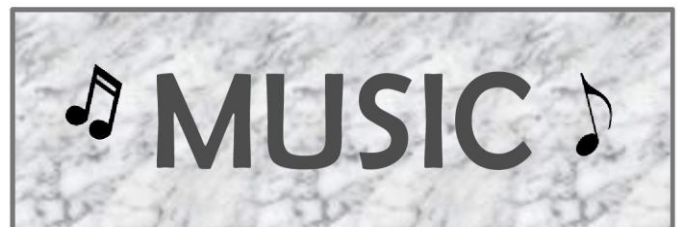
If your church calendar is focused on a lot of other issues, is it time to pivot and provide groups, resources and practical teaching on how we grow every member to look more and more like Jesus. A Body of growing believers who trust God with their lives, is a powerful force that makes a difference.

Is your discipleship engine firing on all cylinders?

Prayer Calendar names

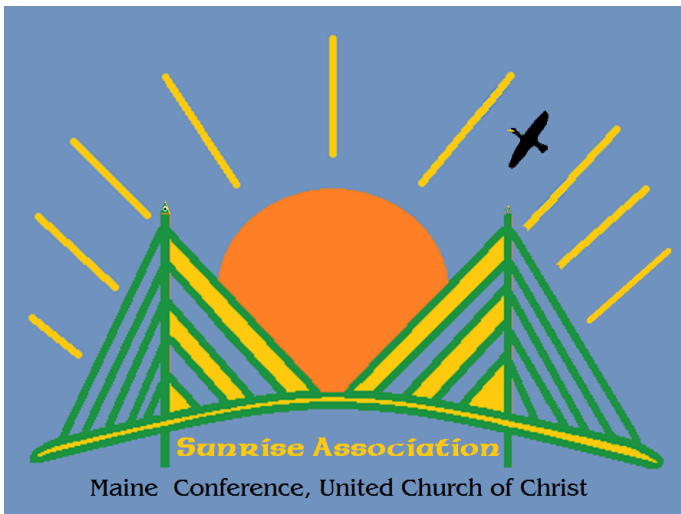
As we attempt to pray for our entire church family over the course of a year, the Deacons ask that you please include these names in your daily prayers during November:

Julie & Bill Bromley
Cathi Goebel
Roberta Keep
Steve Merchant
Margaret Smith
Julianna Wood
Christina Allen
Kassidy Robidoux
Robert Wullen Jr
Evan Lacey
David & Linda Ballard



♪ The McIntyres will sing during morning worship on November 17.

The church nursery is temporarily closed. Speak with Troy Tainter if you have any questions.



SUNRISE ASSOCIATION FALL MEETING
Saturday, November 2
8:30 a.m.-noon

The meeting will take place at the
Monroe Community Church, UCC
23 W. Main St., Monroe, ME



Our Stewardship Sunday is November 10. That's when we will dedicate our promised giving cards and what they represent. Between now and then we will be thinking about and deciding what our giving will be in the year ahead. Soon we will see the Church budget to know what it costs to be and do all that we are and do together as the church family. One thing it makes clear is that it costs a lot: an average of \$1,250 each month. Because we are a small church family together, it will take every one of us giving all we can to meet the need.

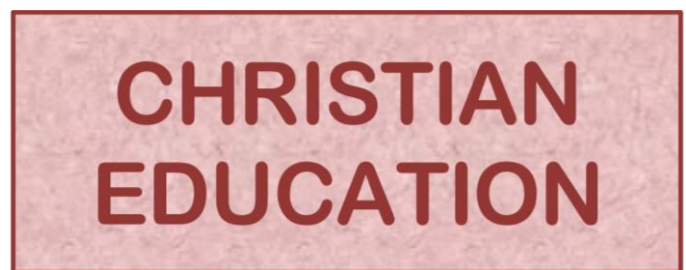
That's a big challenge. Let's think prayerfully about what we can give. Is it enough to express my thankfulness to God for the blessings in my life, and the importance of all that our Church is to me? Our giving will keep our church alive if we all give all that we can.

Let's **IMAGINE TOGETHER** the possibilities.

John Lacey, Stewardship Committee



Friends in Action offers many services to seniors in Hancock County. They have an urgent need for additional volunteers to drive seniors to things like medical appointments, grocery shopping and important errands. Providing one ride a week can make a huge difference for someone. If you are interested, please contact Volunteer Services Director McKayla Hairston at 207-664-6016. There are FIA Volunteer Application Forms in the church office.



Pastor Keith will lead a book study on Wednesdays November 6, 13, & 20, 6:30-7:30 p.m., on **The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness** by Simon Wiesenthal. As Christians, we are commanded by Jesus to forgive "seventy times seven," but this book explores the nature of forgiveness itself, and if there are some acts that are simply unforgivable for humans to forgive. Please let Rev. Bowie or church secretary Joyce Cornwell know if you plan to attend so that enough books can be ordered.

BUSY BODIES

Members of Busy Bodies are working on projects for the church and for the Christmas Fair on December 7.

Join the Busy Bodies on Mondays from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m! Bring a bag lunch.



FEEDBACK FROM THE ONA COMMITTEE



The Open and Affirming (ONA) Committee held three presentations and discussion sessions in August and September, with a total of 18 people in attendance. That represents just 25 percent of our membership. We have also received comments from a few members and friends of the church. The committee is eager to fulfill our charge to learn, inform, and discern what open and affirming means, and our goal is to have conversations with 100% of our members.

Please let us know your thoughts, questions, or concerns. Communicate with us in any way that is most comfortable for you—in person, by phone or email, or anonymous notes left at the office or in the offering basket. Our phone numbers and email addresses are in the new Church directory available in the church office.

The ONA Committee would now like to share some of the comments and questions we have received. Our responses are our own, and we hope they will encourage more discussion!

"I think our current statement is inclusive enough. Why change it?"

It is not broad enough to clearly send the message to marginalized communities who also need to be seen and named by our faith community. Studies have shown that many members of the LGBTQ+ community have learned the hard way that "all are welcome" does not mean them.

"Why do we need to be designated 'Open and Affirming'?"

The United Church of Christ, as well as many other denominations, believes that making a public declaration of being Open and Affirming sends a clear message that the congregation is, indeed, inclusive and welcoming. However, we cannot accomplish that goal unless each individual member truly understands what Open and Affirming means—and what it does not mean.

"Why are we concentrating on gender, sexual orientation and gender identity? Why not talk about being inclusive of everyone (despite age, race, mental illness, physical disability, appearance, etc.)?"

While the ONA Committee has been focusing initially on the LGBTQ+ community in our presentations, we strongly agree that ONA extends to everyone. To publicly declare our congregation Open and Affirming means that we believe all persons are entitled to be treated with decency and respect—truly equals because we are all made by God and loved by God. We want to state clearly, not just to the LGBTQ+ community, that no one needs to be afraid of judgment or exclusion from our church because of who they are. All persons who live respectfully and responsibly, and who want to join us in following Christ, are welcome.

"I don't want to have a rainbow flag in front of our church!"

Our congregation may simply display the statement that we are an Open and Affirming Church. Any other expressions about ONA, such as rainbow flags, is up to each individual congregation.

"I know some people who have said they won't come to our church because we are not open and affirming."

Yes, we have heard those statements. How might we reach out to those folks to get their thoughts on this subject?

"I always welcome everyone, why do we need to talk about this?"

Unless we talk about it, we cannot assume that everyone in our congregation shares that same understanding of what it means to be welcoming and inclusive.

(continued next page)

"The Bible says it's a sin.... "

The Old Testament includes many strict laws that were no longer applicable when Jesus gave us a new covenant to love God, and to love one another.

The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

"Being gay is unnatural...a mental disorder. 'They' try to convert 'us' to be gay...."

Concepts of mental disorders have changed dramatically as society has changed. According to an article in Psychology Today (June 24, 2024): "Today, the standard of psychotherapy in the U.S. and Europe is gay affirmative psychotherapy, which encourages gay people to accept their sexual orientation." As Christians, we just say "that is how God made us." It is important to remember that each one of us desires to be recognized and validated as a whole person.

The LGBTQ+ community is not interested in recruiting—they seek acceptance.

"We don't like change."

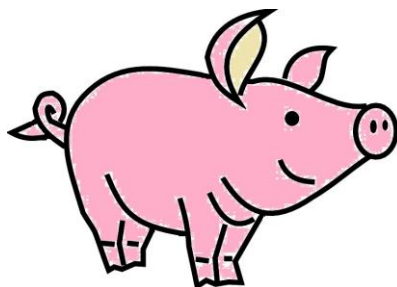
When we change, we grow.

The ONA Committee: John Lacey, Stephen Merchant, Mary T. Turner, Myrna Vallette, Chris Wilson, and Rev. Keith Bowie

Ham Supper

Saturday, November 16, 2024

Serving 5:00 to 6:30 pm



Baked ham, mashed potatoes, glazed carrots, green beans, salad, rolls, homemade pies, and beverages (coffee, tea, lemonade)

\$10 per person

\$25 per family (2 adults, 2 children)

Great food ~ Great company ~ Great fun

**We need volunteers to set up, cook, serve, wash dishes, and bake pies.
Please contact Ruth Tainter immediately about the ways you can help.**

(This is the make-up date for the March 2024 meal that we cancelled because of bad weather.)

Sunday Worship Service 10 a.m.

**Church office hours:
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.**

*Our purpose,
First Congregational Church, UCC, Ellsworth, Maine:
To embrace the life, ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ
In meaningful and dynamic ways through
creative worship,
supportive fellowship,
compassionate outreach, and
stimulating Christian education for all ages;
To be a faithful community which, led by the Holy Spirit,
expresses hospitality,
nurtures spiritual growth, and
promotes a deep sense of belonging;
To strive to build on commonalities while seeking to
understand, accept, and
celebrate our differences;
To stand as a beacon of hope in a hurting and troubled world by
sharing the Good News of the Gospel, and
practicing God's love as embodied by Jesus Christ.
*We welcome all to walk with us on the journey of faith.**

As adopted by the Congregation at its Annual Meeting – January 22, 2012



First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

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facebook.com/fccellsworth/

Our street address is 2 Church Street, but that is not our mailing address. The Post Office no longer automatically gives us our mail with the street address. You must use the Post Office Box number.