

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



January 2026 THE STEEPLE NEWSLETTER

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

From our Pastor



As we step into a new year, there is a holy sense of possibility in the air. New beginnings have a way of waking us up—inviting us to breathe deeply, to release what has been heavy, and to lean into what God is already stirring among us. The turning of the calendar does not magically erase our challenges, but it does remind us of something deeply true: God is not finished with us yet. Grace is still unfolding. Hope is still rising. Love is still on the move.

Lately, as I've been reading *Love Wins* by Rob Bell, I've been reminded that God's love is not fragile or limited. God's love is bold, expansive, and relentlessly committed to life. Love wins not because it avoids struggle, but because it refuses to give up on people, on communities, or on the future God dreams for us. That conviction feels especially alive as I look around our church and our wider community. There is energy here. There is curiosity. There is a growing sense that something meaningful is happening. And that we get to be part of it together.

You can feel it in the way people show up, linger, and connect. You can see it in shared meals, open doors, thoughtful conversations, and the courage to try new things. Our ministry is not just something we do inside these walls; it something that spills outward into neighborhoods, friendships, and everyday moments where love takes root. What excites me most is not simply what we have planned, but who we are becoming: a community grounded in compassion, honest faith, and a deep trust that God meets us exactly where we are.

As we move forward into this new year, my hope is that we continue to lean into love with confidence and joy. That we remain open to transformation—personally and collectively. That we choose generosity over fear, curiosity over certainty, and grace over judgement. New beginnings are not about starting from scratch; they are about continuing the journey with renewed purpose and shared hope.

Thank you for being part of this community—for your presence, your commitment, and your willingness to walk together into what comes next. I truly believe the best is not behind us. There is more love to discover, more joy to share, and more ministry to live into—**together**. May this year be filled with courage, connection, and the deep assurance that love truly does win.

Peace and love,
Pastor Andy E.

JANUARY CHURCH MEETINGS

Adult Forum	- Sundays, 8:15 a.m.
Choir	- Thursdays, 6 p.m.
Music	- TBA
Council	- Monday, Jan 5, 6:30 p.m.
Deacons	- Sunday, Jan 11, 11:30 a.m.
Christian Ed	- Sunday, Jan 11, 11:30 a.m.
Trustees	- Thursday, Jan 15, 7 p.m.
Missions	- Sunday, Jan 18, 11:30 a.m.
ANNUAL MEETING	- Sunday, January 25, 11 a.m.

Our meetings are hybrid, in person AND Zoom. All FCC Zoom events (meetings and worship) use the same meeting number and password. Contact the secretary in the church office (T-W-Th) for Zoom instructions.

From the Moderator

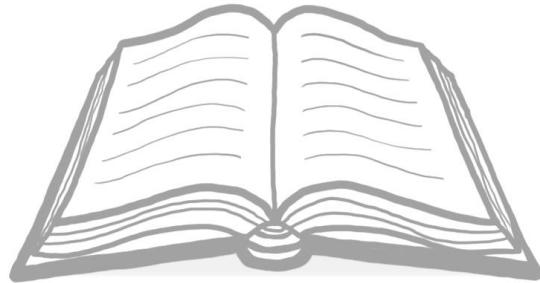
ANNUAL MEETING SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2026

According to Article 13 of the church By-Laws, Annual Meeting takes place after morning worship on the 4th Sunday of January. We need everyone who can to attend the meeting to ensure we have a quorum to review the year and pass the budget. See you there!

Sue Fuller, Moderator

If you chair a committee or board, please submit your report of 2025 activities to Joyce in the church office **before Tuesday, January 13, 2026.** (Gold stars awarded to early birds!)

Committee reports will be compiled in the 2025 Annual Report to be available on Sunday, January 18, 2026.



JANUARY LECTIONARY READINGS

JAN 1 – NEW YEAR'S DAY

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13
Psalm 8
Revelation 21:1-6a
Matthew 25:31-46

JAN 4 – 2ND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Jeremiah 31:7-14
Psalm 147:12-20
Ephesians 1:3-14
John 1:(1-9), 10-18

JAN 6 – EPIPHANY

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

JAN 11 – 1ST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

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

JAN 18 – 2ND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

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

JAN 25 – 3RD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

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

DEACONS

January Deacon: Steve Merchant

From the weekly newsletters of Paul Nickerson: His thoughts seem to go along with how we are looking at things at First Church these days.

Embracing the Christmas Message

As we come to the celebration of Jesus' birth, it is helpful to remember and embrace that His Message over and over again was to "fear not". In a time when there is so much fear and apprehension in this world (much as it was 2,000 years ago), this message of embracing our call to follow Jesus and trust His Presence is very relevant.

Walter Brueggemann, an amazing Old Testament scholar, spoke of the consequences of living in fear or living in trust. He said:

"The truth is that frightened people will never turn the world, because they use too much energy on protection of self. It is the vocation of the baptized, the known and the named and unafraid, to make the world whole:

- *The unafraid are open to the neighbor, while the frightened are defending themselves from the neighbor,*
- *The unafraid are generous in community, while the frightened, in their anxiety, must keep and store and accumulate, to make themselves safe,*
- *The unafraid are committed to justice for the weak and poor, while the frightened see them only as threats,*
- *The unafraid pray in the morning, care through the day, and rejoice at night in thanks and praise, while the frightened are endlessly restless and dissatisfied.*

So dear people, each of you: Do not fear! I have called you by name; you are mine!"

(From A Way Other than Our Own)

My friends, that is my Christmas wish for you individually and for your churches that we can

come out of this Christmas with a renewed sense of courage to trust Jesus and lead lives that reflect faith and not fear.

Does Your Budget Align with Your Purpose?

This is the season that many churches are working on their 2026 budget. When your leadership has compiled a rough draft, I invite you to compare that document with the purpose of your church.

When comparing the "numbers" with your purpose, here are some reflection questions to ponder:

- Does the budget reflect what is most important in your church? For example, if "making disciples" is your primary purpose for being a church, how much of the budget reflects this emphasis?
- Is there a disproportional amount of the budget focused on an item that doesn't align with the purpose? Some churches have a huge expense of an old building or major debt. Does this need to be addressed in 2026?
- Are pledges keeping up with expenses? Perhaps there needs to be a capital campaign, a second-mile stewardship effort, or a re-using of some of the building to generate more income.
- Are there events/activities that used to be effective but have run their course and should be eliminated or at least have a "sabbatical" for 2026?
- In some cases, does there need to be a radical shift in the next year, such as selling the building, sharing ministry with another congregation, coming under the wing of a larger church, etc.?

However your budget discussion goes, I would encourage you to share with the congregation a visual picture of the budget (such as a pie chart, or series of images). Finance needs a line-item budget, but this tool is not inspiring for the congregation. People give generously to an exciting vision, a church that is making a difference, and a budget that reflects your primary purpose as a church. ♦

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 January:

Bonnie & Tim Carter
Juanita Higgins
Alice King
Mark Remick
Sue & Ken Farkas
Mark Berry
Leah Remick
Evan Bedard
Andy & Amber Elliott



The Welcome Table served 4,986 meals in 2025. Thank you to the chefs, sous chefs, dish-washing, serving, and clean-up crews that make this community feeding ministry possible.



SEATS OPEN: MEET & EAT A NEW WAY TO GATHER

We're excited to introduce a new monthly gathering we're calling *Seats Open: Meet & Eat*. Once a month, we'll meet from 6-8 p.m. at a different restaurant. **This month it takes place at Pat's Pizza in Ellsworth, on Friday evening, January 23, 2026.** We will share a meal, conversation, and the simple joy of being together. No agenda. No program. Just open seats, good food, and meaningful connection.

Throughout scripture and throughout the life of the church, some of the most powerful moments happen around tables. Stories are shared, laughter flows, relationships deepen, and community is formed one conversation at a time. *Seats Open: Meet & Eat* is an invitation to return to that holy simplicity—to commune with one another in a way that feels natural, relaxed, and welcoming.

This gathering is for everyone. Come as you are. Come after work. Come hungry. Come curious. And especially, **bring a friend**. This is a wonderful, low-pressure way to introduce someone to the heart of our church community. You don't need to be a long-time member or know anyone well to belong at the table. If there's an open seat, it's meant for you.

As we look ahead, I am excited about how these shared meals can strengthen relationships within our church and extend our welcome beyond our walls. I believe community grows when we make space for one another. And sometimes that space looks like pizza, conversation, and a couple of hours set aside to simply be together.

So, pull up a chair. Order your favorite slice. Let's gather around the table and see what unfolds. **Seats are open—and I cannot wait to share the table with you. See you on the 23rd.**

Peace & love,
Pastor Andy



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Pastor Andy Elliott's office hours are <u>usually</u> Mondays & Thursdays from 5-9 p.m. Except when they are not! It changes from week to week around church meetings. We print the current week's office hours in each Sunday's bulletin.				1 OFFICE CLOSED	2 OFFICE CLOSED	3
4 White 8:15 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service Luncheon	5 OFFICE CLOSED 5 pm Andy office 6:30 pm Council	6 6 pm Boy Scouts	7 2-3:30 pm Welcome Table take-out 5 pm Andy office	8 9 am Bulletin deadline 4 pm Chess Club 6 pm Choir	9 OFFICE CLOSED	10
11 White 8:15 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service 11:30 am Christian Ed & Deacons	12 OFFICE CLOSED 5 pm Andy office	13 9 am ANNUAL REPORTS DUE 6 pm Boy Scouts	14 9 am Steeple deadline 2-3:30 pm Welcome Table take-out 5 pm Andy office	15 9 am Bulletin deadline 4 pm Chess Club 5 pm Andy office 6 pm Choir 7 pm Trustees	16 OFFICE CLOSED	17
18 Green 8:15 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service 11:30 am Missions	19 OFFICE CLOSED 5 pm Andy office	20 6 pm Boy Scouts	21 2-3:30 pm Welcome Table take-out	22 9 am Bulletin deadline 4 pm Chess Club 5 pm Andy office 6 pm Choir	23 OFFICE CLOSED 6 pm Seats Open at Pat's Pizza	24
25 Green 8:15 am Adult Forum 10 am Worship Service ANNUAL MEETING	26 OFFICE CLOSED 5 pm Andy office	27 6 pm Boy Scouts	28 9 am Bulletin deadline	29 9 am Bulletin deadline 4 pm Chess Club 5 pm Andy office 6 pm Choir	30 OFFICE CLOSED	31

A New Year's Prayer

**Lord, You make all things new
 You bring hope alive in our hearts
 And cause our Spirits to be born again
 Thank you for this new year
 For all the potential it holds.
 Come and kindle in us
 A mighty flame
 So that in our time, many will see the wonders of God
 And live forever to praise Your glorious name.**

- Author Unknown

Sunday Worship Service 10 a.m.

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

Andy Elliott, Pastor
Joyce B. Cornwell, Secretary
Lynn Hall, Organist
Nancy Sargent, Choir Director
Sue Fuller, Moderator 610-1626
Tom MacDonald, Vice Moderator
Myrna Vallette, Clerk
Ken Farkas, Treasurer
Mike Fuller, Asst Treasurer
Jennifer Ashmore, Bookkeeper

Sidney Emerson & Lynn Hall,
Financial Secretaries
Troy Tainter, Building Maintenance Director
Katharine Schrader, Deacons 266-2541
Ginny Davis, Missions
Bonnie Carter, Music & Christian Education
Council Members at Large:
Susan Bedard
Rhyne Robidoux



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.