Dear FCCH:

We are exploring the idea of pilgrimage as we journey through Lent. Often a pilgrimage begins with a prayer, a blessing. And so, I offer you this beautiful blessing from artist and author Jan Richardson, to give you strength for your Lenten journey. Love, Karla

Beloved is Where We Begin

If you would enter into the wilderness, do not begin without a blessing.

Do not leave without hearing who you are: Beloved, named by the One who has traveled this path before you.

Do not go without letting it echo in your ears, and if you find it is hard to let it into your heart, do not despair. That is what this journey is for.

I cannot promise this blessing will free you from danger, from fear, from hunger or thirst,

But I can tell you that on this path there will be help. I can tell you that on this way there will be rest.

I can tell you that you will know the strange graces that come to our aid only on a road such as this, that fly to meet us bearing comfort and strength, that come alongside us for no other cause than to lean themselves toward our ear and with their curious insistence whisper our name: Beloved. Beloved. Beloved.

—Jan Richardson from Circle of Grace

Beloved is Where We Begin

❤️
Dear First Congregational Members and Friends,

Our church building remains closed, and it probably looks like not much is going on. But that is deceptive, as there is a lot occurring behind the scenes. This month, I want to acknowledge some folks and highlight all the work that is happening. Ron Miller is in the office several days a week handling the finances. Sheryl Tellier does many, many jobs to support everyone, and sends out all sorts of communications to the congregation.

“Zoom” gets a constant workout: Council meetings; two book groups gather weekly; Service and Giving and the Human Relations Ministry meet regularly; and Ginger and DeDe hold virtual Sunday School for our kids. The Physical Resources Ministry folks continue to work on the building - recently Mindy Myers oversaw the back roof replacement.

A number of people worked to prepare all the materials for the annual meeting. And did I mention that Karla and Mark continue to create the wonderful worship videos every week? I also want to mention a couple of special-purpose committees. One is the Reconciliation and Renewal Team, which is laying groundwork to address the conflict situation. There is a report from that Team elsewhere in this issue.

Next, I’d like to focus on the Re-opening and Moving Forward Task Force. You haven’t heard from them for a while, mainly because there wasn’t anything to report. Now, there is good news on several fronts:

◊ While the COVID numbers are still much higher than they were back in the fall, they have started to trend downward.
◊ There are now two very effective, approved vaccines, and a number of our congregation members have been getting them.
◊ We are looking at a number of changes in the building that will make it safer for meetings - purifications systems on all five HVAC systems, hand sanitation stations, and changing air filters more frequently.

All of these are positive developments that can bring us closer to re-opening the building. To be clear, it will not be anytime soon - there are still other factors to consider. But I am encouraged, for the first time in a long time, that we can begin planning – and we are.

Be well, stay safe, and most especially, be kind.

Thanks for reading,

Phil Taylor, Moderator
At our annual congregation meeting, Moderator Phil Taylor announced the formation of the Reconciliation and Renewal Team (previously called the Reconciliation Leadership Team). The Center for Congregational Health (CCH) consultant’s report recommended such a team to lead the effort to bring healing to the church over the conflict situation.

Subsequently, an independent group of church members met and unanimously approved the option of a lay-led group. The team members are Ann Allen, Ed Argue, Dawn Kucera, Linda Laderach, Bob McLendon, Karla Miller, and Phil Taylor.

We’ve already met several times, and unanimously selected Bob to be the Chair. Dawn and Linda the co-Clerks/Recorders.

We first did an assessment of our knowledge of UCC policies related to the conflict situation, and of the situation itself — we all needed to be at the same level. We did this with in-depth discussions and by reviewing all the pertinent documents, including many from the concerned group.

Since then, we’ve developed a paper that summarizes the important policy points and how they play into the current situation. This will be released soon.

Early on, we decided that the current size of the team is sufficient. All congregation members will have ample and continuous opportunity to express their opinions and offer inputs.

The Team is committed to open, transparent, and frequent communication with the congregation - and we want to make it as easy as possible for you to contact us. So we’ve set up a dedicated email address, FCCRRTeam@gmail.com, which we’ll check daily. The whole team will carefully consider every mail. We’re also planning an open Zoom meeting soon.

Each of us takes our responsibility very seriously. We pledge to our fellow church members that we will proceed with open-minds, accountability, transparency, integrity, and prayer. Our goal is to promote reconciliation, renewal and forgiveness, by focusing on points of agreement and the things that unite us.

The Reconciliation & Renewal Team

Note: No Church Council Highlights reported in this issue as we didn’t have a February Council meeting. The next meeting will be held March 10 at 10 a.m.
Our February 11th devotion was about the parable of the talents. In summary, a master was leaving his home to travel. Before he left home, he entrusted 3 of his workers varying numbers of talents - one was given 5, another 2, and the third 1.

The master was away for a long time and upon returning he asked for an account of the talents they had been given. The first 2 workers had invested their talents and had doubled their value. The third worker was fearful of the master and buried his talent in the ground and returned the talent without any gain. Upon hearing the reports, the master praised the workers who had used their talents wisely and rebuked the third who had done nothing but bury his talent in the ground.

As a committee, we discussed ideas on how we could be good stewards of our talents from congregational giving. We recognized that each of us have been given different talents which include both our time as well as monetary blessings. We acknowledged that Spirit moves in mysterious ways and part of our mission should be to provide updates to you on where our collective talents are being invested.

Each member on the committee agreed to be responsible for one category where our budgeted dollars were allocated in 2020. These categories included Food Insecurity and Homelessness, Crisis Intervention, Education, Inclusivity, and Healthcare.

You will be receiving periodic updates on each of these categories and the agencies where money has been given. The first will be for Food Insecurity and Homelessness. Our intention is to give you insights into these agencies and clarity on how your pledges are made manifest in our community and world at large.

We appreciate your generosity and support of our food drives and other ways we encourage giving throughout the year. It is because of each of you that we have the opportunity to share our updates and hope that you find them helpful.

Our next Zoom meeting is March 11 at 10:00. All are welcome. Contact Linda Laderach lladerac@mtholyhoke.edu or Bill Shaffer, wdsii333@gmail.com for more information. Everyone’s support is critical and much appreciated.
WISE Celebrates Fourth Anniversary

Four years ago last month, we unanimously voted to become a WISE (welcoming, inclusive, supportive, and engaged) congregation for mental health. This UCC certification recognizes our WISE covenant to “commit ourselves to providing and promoting education, activities, and resources for individuals and families, as well as advocating for legislative action and collaborating with other mental health organizations. To this end, we joyously extend our church’s compassionate welcome and love to members and non-members alike who experience mental illness/brain disorders or are touched by them.” Our covenant also expresses 11 aspirations for enacting this commitment in the life of our church.

As we head into the second year of COVID-19 isolation and stress, it is important to recognize that this altered reality can produce and worsen emotional and mental health challenges. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), rates of depression and anxiety are up as much as threefold since the pandemic began. Hoping to be helpful, our Wellness Action Group (previously the Mental Health Work Group), will periodically offer information and resources through Chronicle articles. In the April issue, there will be information obtained from Zoom attendance of the UCC Western NC Association’s March 6th Education Forum on Emotional Sustainability. Two very relevant workshops will address “COVID and beyond for 55 and over” and “loss and grief during the pandemic and beyond.”

Gary Cyphers, on behalf of the Wellness Action Group
Service and Giving is an important part of our church. Many of us participate in organizations and/or independent ways that personally extend our church’s mission of service and giving. Our expressions of loving outreach to others are especially needed and appreciated in these difficult times, and however you give it is a blessing to others and yourself.

Project Linus is one of my favorite ways to help others. Project Linus was named after the adorable security blanket-toting character from the Peanuts comic strip. Creator Charles Schultz was delighted to have Linus inspire blanket makers to help comfort children in need.

The WNC chapter of PROJECT LINUS covers 9 counties and began here in January, 1999. Its mission is to provide love, a sense of security, warmth, and comfort to children, ages 0 – 18 years, who are seriously ill, traumatized, or otherwise in need, through the gifts of special new, handmade blankets and afghans—and—special weighted blankets for autistic children with a sensory processing disorder. All blankets are lovingly created by volunteer “blanketeers,” with the hope and objective that each blanket will let a child know that someone cares about them and that each blanket will become a child’s treasured possession. As of January 31, 2021, since its inception here, WNC volunteers have donated new handmade knitted, crocheted, quilted and fleece blankets for 78,993 children!

Continued next page……
Tucked into blankets for children, ages 0-5, are knit dolls, and I have knitted 4,320 of them for PROJECT LINUS. I especially like finishing the dolls since each one is different and as I embroider each face, I bless it on its journey to some little child, and it brings a smile to my own heart.

Whatever your favorite way of sharing your love is, keep it up! If Project Linus is calling to you, feel free to contact me for more information.

Blessings,

Romella Hart-O’Keefe, 828-890-4889.

*February storm through the eyes of Dawn Kucera*
RACIAL JUSTICE

Our FCC Racial Justice team suggests you consider reading a book regarding racism. Here are a few suggestions:

**So, You Want to Talk About Race, Ijeoma Oluo** – The author guides readers of all races through many subjects regarding race in an attempt to make the seemingly impossible possible: honest conversations about race and racism.


**CASTE, Isabel Wilkerson** – Award winning book that examines the unspoken caste system that has shaped America and shows how our lives today are still defined by a hierarchy of human divisions.

**The Fire Next Time, James Baldwin** - 1963 bestseller gave passionate voice to the emerging civil rights movement—and still lights the way to understanding race in America today.

**Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out, Ruth King** - Exploring a crucial topic seldom addressed in meditation—Ourselves as racial beings, the dynamics of oppression, and our role in racism.

If you don’t have time to read a book, here is a 18 minute Ted talk we recommend “**How To Overcome Our Biases: CLICK HERE** to watch Verna Myers.
Palm Sunday

Our first outdoor service this Spring is Palm Sunday
March 28 at 11:00 a.m.

We will meet each Sunday for a unique and beautiful time together until it is safe for us to be back inside our building.

Sunday School Monthly Report - February
Ginger Zemp, Sunday School Teacher / Dede Walton, Nursery Teacher

Monthly Theme: Preparing for Lent

We continued interviewing Church Friends of the Week, building relationships with adult members of First Congregational Church. The children are gaining confidence and a sense of community as they get to know other members of their church family.

The children explored the meaning of Lent. We talked about why Jesus went into the desert and how we can show our faith during this special time. We began planning for individual craft projects to illustrate each child’s understanding of the Lenten season.

We took a break from Zoom Sunday School for two weeks while families prepared for the resumption of in-person schooling. We kept in touch with families via e-mails and utilized the great ideas and excellent instructional resources they provided.
If your church can help you in any way, whether through providing a listening ear or picking up a prescription, we are here for you.

Please email Karla or Mark:
karla@fcchendersonville.org
mark@fcchendersonville.org

Did you know?

There are many things of interest on the website (fcchendersonville.org)

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**CHURCH CALENDAR** (Activities)

**WEEKLY SUNDAY SERVICE VIDEO** (Sunday Worship Videos)

**CURRENT WEEK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS** (Members page)

**CHURCH COUNCIL MINUTES** (Members page)

**CURRENT ANNUAL REPORT** (Members page)

**CHURCH DIRECTORY** (Members page)

~~The church directory is password protected~~

If you don't have the password or have other questions, please contact
sheryl@fcchendersonville.org
NANCY KESWANI IS MOVING....

Nancy Keswani has served First Congregational Church in so many important ways in the past few years, including serving as Moderator. Nancy has been passionate about making our church a better place. Nancy will soon be moving to Massachusetts to continue being a mom to her daughter. Thank you Nancy, and know of our love and prayers as you begin this new time in your life.

If you would like to send a note to Nancy, her new address is:

50 Fifer Lane
Lexington, MA 02420
Sometimes
I just look up
smile and say:
"I know that was you,
thank you!"
PRAYER LIST

Norma Daly and family (friend of Anne Cain)
Al & Joan Diaz
Sue Eastin (friend of Becky Rowland)
Betty Gilliam (sister of Frances Yoder)
Joy Greenfield (friend of Trisha LaGrange)
Esther Jillson (friend of Becky Rowland)
Yvonne Kyker
Trisha LaGrange
Carol Marra (friend of Kevin & Joyce Tierney)
Patsy McCurry
Laura Nelson
Anne Ogburn
Ed & Romella O'Keefe
Betsey Parker
Joanne Schenck (friends of Al & Joan Diaz)
Family & friends of Mike Sollom
Lisa Everett & Todd Trussel (sister and nephew of Mindy Myers)
Ann Twiggs
Richard Tyler
David Vandre

Thank you for letting us know of people who need to be added to our prayer list as well as those that are ready to be taken off.

For words of encouragement, appreciation, hope, caring, gratitude and love, just take a breath, pick up the phone and call:

Ben Coonrod    828-284-0695          Diane Rhoades  828-696-9969
Ed O'Keefe      828-890-4889          Joady Perrett  828-243-3337
Sammye Whitney  570-664-1141          Romella Hart-O'Keefe  828-890-4889
March Birthdays

01: Shirley Retzsch
03: Sharon McLendon
03: David Vandre’
04: Roy Harris
05: Reid Barwick
08: Jean Raymond
09: Judy Cyphers
09: Linda Welch
12: Tamara Gregg
17: Bob Miles
23: Dora Littleton
24: Jim Hollingsworth
25: Melissa Melum
25: Lin Stogner
25: Bobby Sutter
26: Linda Simpson
26: Raymond Stone
27: Ron Miller
28: Roger Haagenson
28: Barbara Worcester
29: Dawn Kucera
29: Lois Popanz

March Anniversaries

03: Bob & Lydia Gossett
06: Ray & Lynn Conchado
06: Kirsten & Chris Cone
07: Dona & Richard Tyler
23: Charles & Dora Littleton
Februray 2021

Virtual Worship

Service   Zoom
YouTube Views   Sunday School
& Outside Worship & Zoom Worship

Jan. 31: 251 cancelled
Feb. 7: 189 5
Feb. 14: 156 cancelled
Feb. 21: 150 4

Did you know.........
Sunday worship services are available to view on our website. Go to fcchendersonville.org and click on Sunday Sermon or view from Home Page.

Photo by Dawn Kucera

Next Chronicle deadline
March 25, 2021