

STEEPLE VIEWS

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF WAKEFIELD

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATION



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The Pastor's Page

Sacred Communities

Rev. Larry Brickner-Wood

Greetings and welcome to 2024 friends! As the calendar moves into a new year, we are one month into our Christian calendar, which begins each year with Advent. These are special times of change and carryover, restoration and reflection, and remembrance and re-creation. A time to look back, look forward and center in the present. May you ground yourself in the very core of your being, the beauty of your presence, and the unique specialness that God brings to life through you. What gifts we each are!

This time of year always has me reflecting on one thing or another, usually multiple things at the same time! I am reflecting in these moments on Jesus: his life, of which we only know a small portion, and of his relatively short public ministry. I am reflecting on the Jesus we don't hear much, if anything, about. The Jesus who laughs, who dances, who plays and appreciates music, who sings, and who watches sunrises and sunsets with his beloveds. The joyful, playful Jesus, who lived in sacred community with his disciples, friends and followers.

I think about Jesus and his relationships with his band of disciples, students and beloveds. How he reacted to the insightful wisdom of Mary of Magdala; his joy and exasperation at the dogged faith and persistence of Peter. His curiosity about the insecurity of John. His wonderment at the boastful energy of James. His understanding of the blind arrogance of Judas' zealotry. His love for his mother Mary, the steadfast constant in his human life. The admiration and respect he had for Joseph, earthly father and model of integrity and courage. His admiration for the probing questions of Thomas and his love for his beloved friend, Lazarus. His special connection to the sisters Mary and Martha, and the woman who anointed Jesus on that special night. The conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, and her earnest desire to learn, to know and to be. I reflect on Jesus and his time with Herod, his compassion for the ruthless dictator and his understanding that Herod did not have the courage, integrity or strength to do the right thing. Jesus knew earthly powers always shake in the presence of true love.

We know so little about Jesus' public ministry, which lasted for 1-3 years, or the many years before he came into his own through his ministry. We only know the characters sprinkled through the sacred texts, through the stories shared, the accounts portrayed, or the lessons being communicated. We listen, read, and pray through these timeless scriptures. Just as folks have done so for thousands of years, with the wondrous possibility that each new encounter brings the possibility of unique revelation and discovery. Hallelujah!

Throughout my careers in local government, community development and ministry, I have been fascinated and inspired by the notion of community. In our Christian tradition, I am awed that a person (the human nature of God in Jesus) led a revolution that forever changed the world. A short life and public ministry that formed, grew and changed over the course of over 2,000 years, and continues as we live and breathe in this present moment.

The early faith communities of Rome and Corinth, Phillipi and Thessalonica, the seven churches in the first three chapters of the book of Revelation, have shaped and shifted through the centuries, touching us here in Wakefield as they have impacted our kindreds of faith across the ages. We are ancestors of those early faith communities, created so lovingly by Paul,

(Continued on Page 2)

nurtured so tenderly by Timothy, James, Peter, Mary of Magdala and others. Those shepherds of the faith, those keepers of the flame, forerunners to our deacons, our moderators, our finance stewards, our leadership council, our hospitality crew, our arts and music team, our singers, dancers and prayers. We carry the beauty of God's eternal light, as did our ancestors in the faith. We face the shifting and changing future, often unable to see around the bend, much like our kindreds throughout these 2,000+ years.

The prognosis for the future of Christianity can often seem uncertain at best, devastatingly bleak at its worst. Especially in our mainline Christian tradition, the forecast of our future can be distressing: our open, welcoming, inclusive and justice oriented perspectives sometimes crowded out by an angrier, less tolerant, exclusive, more vengeful and violent form of expression. As in so many arenas, the loud voices often get the greatest attention.

The gentle and tender voices, the compassionate and loving hearts, the wisdom and welcoming communities are always there, surviving, growing, changing and morphing into the needs of the present and the future. We honor our ancestors and storied past by living and loving into a future full of hope, peace, joy and love. We breathe into the way forward, even as we know with it will also come change, new ways of being and new songs to sing. As did our beloveds in days gone by, we are called to sing to the Lord a new song, and to echo God's transforming love to new generations, new believers, and new disciples. What an exciting time to be alive, to be disciples of the risen one, and to be present in this sacred community, holding each other in God's tender care.

Happy New Year, friends, and blessed Epiphany and glorious Martin Luther King, Jr, day to you!

Safe Church Positions Filled

The C & D ministry is deeply appreciative that Jim Hayford, Nate Fogg, and Brian Shipley have agreed to be part of a revitalized Safe Church Team. Safe Church is an important ad hoc team of the Leadership Council working with Building and Grounds and other ministries to promote practices to keep us all safe. We thank Carol Lundgren and Buddy Dee for their unwavering effort to keep our church a safe space.

We have other positions we would like to see filled in 2024. A Church clerk and a historian/archivist are two. Revitalization of our youth ministry is another. Every ministry welcomes new participants. Working together keeps our congregation strong!

Please see Margie Galabrun, Jan Brejwo, Harriet Wilson or me if you would like to see how your talents and interests might best be utilized.

Connie Littlefield

Search and Call Update

We have been working to complete our Church's Profile to present to pastors that may be interested in becoming our new settled pastor. At first a simple rewrite of the old Profile seemed possible but many questions needed to be answered first. We needed information of what the Congregation wants and needs in a new pastor, the Holy Cow survey was the answer.

We are pleased to inform everyone that the new Profile is now completed. The next step is editing for mistakes then it will be available for the Congregation to review and suggest any changes or additions that are deemed necessary. Limited printed copies will be available due to the number of pages. However we will post a link that you may read it on your computer.

Following the Congregational review it will be sent to the Conference for final approval. Once approved, it will be released on the UCC website for local and national interested parties to apply to us. We are hoping this will be ready to go national by the end of January or first of February. We know that a new pastor is out there looking for a Church like ours. Let us pray that we find each other. Thank You.

Search and Call

Offering Envelopes!

We're just about out of boxed offering envelopes and before buying the same again, we decided to rethink how the envelopes are being used and the best way (and most cost-efficient way) to proceed.

In past times, many people donated weekly, often with cash. A box of 52 envelopes made sense then. But these days, donations come in many forms (cash, check, online) and at varying intervals (weekly, monthly, quarterly, randomly). Some people prefer using envelopes, some don't.

We've decided the best way to proceed is to buy unboxed envelopes and package them on an as-needed basis. For instance, if you want to use envelopes and you pay your pledge monthly, we would just need to package 12 envelopes for you for the year.

If you'd like envelopes, please contact Julie Kessler (julielouisekessler@gmail.com or 603-871-8066) and let me know how many you need. At that time, we can arrange how I would deliver those envelopes to you.

Julie Kessler, Assistant Treasurer



My deepest thanks and appreciation to all the wonderful, generous people who renewed their annual commitment to child sponsorship, those who contributed through alternative giving for the children of Daisy Dube and for school fees, and those very special gifts that enables the progress on the medical clinic in Humani to continue. There is now electricity at the clinic building, a huge step forward. Interior painting is underway and exterior painting will follow.

The Men's Fellowship made a generous financial contribution for the children at Daisy Dube. The social worker assigned to the home made a long "wish list" which included school uniforms, school shoes, socks, underwear, notebooks, pens, crayons, scientific calculators, umbrellas, backpacks and more. I look forward to sharing photos of what is purchased!

Photos of distributions from the container continue to trickle in. The attached photo is of women and girls happily receiving underwear at a church gathering. My friend Silindiwe said they quickly found a place to put them on as they were not wearing any.

Connie Littlefield

Help Needed

The Sound Team could use one or two new "techs" to help in monitoring the sound system and the Zoom/ Facebook Link for our Sunday service. No experience needed—we will train you. No weekly commitment, but on an as-needed basis. If you are interested, please contact Carol Jeffery—carol.jeffery@gmail.com.

When I was young, Christmas was not the traditional Christian experience. The carols I knew were learned at school and sometimes sung at home as my mother played the beautiful 'songs' on the piano. There was no going to church, lighting Advent candles, or listening to stories of Jesus' birth. Yes, there were decorations, a tree with lights and lots of presents given and received. Christmas morning was celebrated by opening the abundance of gifts, mostly from Santa, after which we enjoyed an elaborate breakfast with most of our extended family. Then, Christmas was over. As a young child, Christmas was exciting and fun but as I got older the 'magic' of Santa and the glitter of the Christmas lights faded rather quickly as the last of the decorations were put in the attic until the following year.

Even though I grew up being 'unchurched' I did have faith: I believed in ONE God, knew about the Ten Commandments, was taught to love my neighbor, did not use the word 'hate' about anything (including vegetables I didn't like), did not dare to steal, and was expected to never, never, NEVER lie! I didn't fully understand a lot of what I read in the Bible (which was very little and a lot of it scared me) but I knew that the God I was exposed to was kind and generous and protected us all. God was love. This was because of my parents' example and how they raised my brothers and me.

It wasn't until much later in life that I felt that there was much more to faith and religion than I realized. I wanted to know more and I wanted to know why. Fortunately, after many years of harboring a vast spiritual void, I discovered the importance of church family, prayer, spiritual discussion, and continuing faith formation, including the nuances of Bible scripture translation. I eventually found a church I felt comfortable attending and I joined the First Congregational Church of Wakefield, UCC. Every day I try to open my heart to God's love with understanding so that I might *feel* my faith grow stronger.

I know now that Christmas is not a 'one-day-a-year' celebration. It is a '365-days-long' story!! Every year December 25th will be celebrated as it was the year before with all its pageantry, gifts and gatherings. But it is only the first day of the joyful celebration of light brought into this world by a tiny baby. Whatever you believe about that day, let it be just the beginning of the hope, joy, peace and love shining on your life every day.

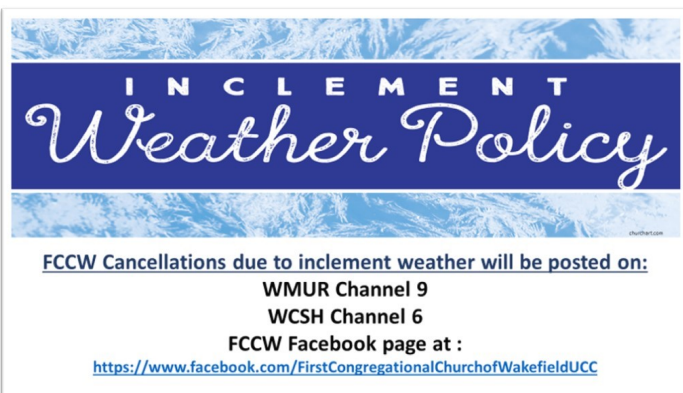
*Happy New Year!
Linda Messer*

Hazel MacBrien NS News

We started December with introducing number 4 and doing some gingerbread activities. We had gingerbread paper cutouts with numbers on them and the kids had to identify the number and then put the correct number of mini erasers on the gingerbread man. Both classes made gingerbread for our classroom bulletin board. The threes sponge painted a plate and glued foam shapes to make a face. The fours made a gingerbread house for their foam gingerbread person. The kids really enjoyed reading *The Gingerbread Bear* and putting up the different characters from the book onto the feltboard. Our sensory table had green and red linking discs, pom poms and gems the kids loved finding the gems and filling little plastic cups with their treasure.

The next week we did the letter Rr for reindeer. We made reindeer art for our bulletin board and paper snowflakes for our school family tree. The four year olds cut construction paper into pieces and then glued them on a snowflake. The threes ripped paper into pieces to make their snowflakes. We played roll a reindeer using dice, worked on simple patterns with manipulatives and did some cutting practice. We made a cube that had different pictures of reindeer with movements on it; like fly, jump, gallop, stomp and hop. The kids loved rolling it and then moving around the classroom like reindeer. Our sensory table continued the red and green theme with magnet blocks, jingle bells and magnet wands. Miss Sara and I heard a lot of the kids singing Jingle Bells that week

For the last week before the holiday, we worked on letter Ss. We traced a Santa, did a count, cut and glue how many Santas and did Christmas pictures syllable claps. We also played; what color chimney is Santa hiding behind. On our last day of school, we played reindeer games; ring toss candy cane and reindeer bucket toss. We also played; keep the red and green balloons off the floor and decorated a Yum Yum Shop gingerbread cookie. We finished off the month with a special visitor from the North Pole! We sang Jingle Bells with him and had a nice! The children were delighted! Lots of Christmas Magic to be had! We want to wish everyone a wonderful New Year!!!



I N C L E M E N T
Weather Policy

FCCW Cancellations due to inclement weather will be posted on:
WMUR Channel 9
WCSH Channel 6
FCCW Facebook page at :
<https://www.facebook.com/FirstCongregationalChurchofWakefieldUCC>

Save the Date

The New Hampshire Conference will hold its annual **Prepared to Serve** on February 24. This is a day-long opportunity for learning, sharing, building relationships & meeting some of our partners. Registration will open in January. Watch for more information via church emails and Sunday bulletins this month.

Why Me, Lord?

I can't imagine being any more blessed. I have a loving husband, family, and friends. I have all the material things anyone could ask for. I have food, clothing, a house, and good health. So, then I ask, "Why me"? Why was I born to this country full of abundance? Why am I not one of the marginalized or homeless that struggle to live in this country? Why was I not born in another country where there is war, or famine? Why did I survive an overdose of baby aspirin when I was five? Why did I survive a coma and near-death experience from that horrific car crash at ten years old? Why me, Lord?

The Charge of the Light Brigade by Lord Alfred Tennyson written in 1854 says, "Ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do and die". Not quite the "Lord" I wanted answers from, but those words could have been Biblical. We pray and search for understanding of so many things. Life hands us blessings and curses. What we choose to do with life's gifts is up to us. We have free will to travel whatever path is set before us. I have tried to make good choices with the opportunities that God has given me. Maybe that's why those life-threatening events didn't come to fruition. I remember having a conversation with some of my students and we shared what I call the "It's a Wonderful Life" moments. I told them if either the car accident or the overdose had been successful, then there would not have been an amazing person called Azure Leigh Shaw who lives in Alaska. And all the people she has influenced in her 45 years of life would not have happened. In my 27 years of teaching, I reached the minds and hearts of hundreds and hundreds of humans who have in turn made their own list of good and bad decisions. I could go on about the ripple effect our lives create. I guess I will never know the answer to the "why me" here in Wakefield, New Hampshire, USA, or the "why not me" homeless and destitute.

As I begin this 2024 new year, I will try and not waste time pondering questions that I cannot answer. I will take the blessings that have been bestowed upon me and share the love of God through my words and deeds. I imagine the Lord God had some influence in the writings of Lord Tennyson. Okay God, I get it, no more "reasoning why". I'm ready to just "do".

Donna V Ackerman

Tree of Memories 2023



The FCCW Community Tree of Memories provided folks with a chance to remember loved ones during the holiday season. What a blessing to be able to share this love with one another. Many thanks to all who participated.

There was a bounty of Advent and Christmas activities at our church this year! Many thanks to those who organized and participated in Advent Studies, Caroling, the Pageant, Blue Christmas Service, Tree of Memories, Alternative Gifting, Special Music, and our wonderful Advent and Christmas Worship Services!

Worship Schedule for Epiphany Season

- January 8, 2024—Epiphany Sunday—
Confirmation Sunday, Communion; Psalm 29;
Acts 19:1-7, Mark 1:4-11
- January 15, 2024—MLK Sunday; Where did our
dreams go? 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-
51
- January 21, 2024—Follow Me: Ecumenical Sun-
day; Psalm 27; Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:31-12;
Community Voice
- January 28, 2024, Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk
Humbly; Micah 6:1-8; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13;
Mark 1:21-28
- February 4, 2024, Communion; strength for the
journey; Psalm 147; Isaiah 40: 21-31; Mark
1:29-39;
- February 11, 2024; Racial Justice Sunday; Com-
passionate Community; Psalm 50; 2 Corinthe-

Epiphany Drum Circle

Please join us in celebrating Epiphany with a drum circle on Wednesday, January 17, at 5:00 p.m. We will have some Epiphany treats, and do some call and response songs and some festive rhythms to celebrate the season and drive away the cold! All are welcome! We have plenty of instruments and you are welcome to bring your own! Friends and family are also very welcome to join!

Rev. Mary James to Speak at PH Meeting

Medical Aid in Dying: What Is It All About? Join our Pastor Emerita, the Rev. Mary James, to learn about Medical Aid in Dying at the Parish Helpers meeting on January 11 at 1 p.m.

This time-tested, end-of-life health care option is legal in ten states and the District of Columbia, and is available to terminally ill, cognitively intact adults who have a prognosis of six months or less to live. It is not yet an option in New Hampshire. Mary is serving on the Board of Directors of the New Hampshire Alliance for End of Life Options, a grass roots group dedicated to ensure that all NH residents are aware of and can access the care, information, and support they need to make important decisions about their bodies, spirit, and emotional well-being when nearing end of life. The group is working diligently to bring the right to choose Medical Aid in Dying to NH residents who qualify and who desire it. Let's come together to learn, listen about, and explore this important topic, and how we may engage it from a faith perspective.

Gearing up for Souper Sunday!

Happy New Year from the FUNdraising team! Our next effort is the ever-popular Souper Bowl Soup Sale. Do you have a favorite soup/chowder/stew that your family loves? We would love to have some new varieties to offer up. This year our sale is on Saturday, February 10. We will need to know what you are making, a list of ingredients, and how many 12-oz containers we will have to sell. As these are all pre-ordered, we must have this info by January 31 to publicize and get orders in time.

AND, while we're at it, the FUNdraising team is also in need of fresh ideas and fresh bodies! With the vote to hire a full-time settled pastor, it is more important than ever to have a robust, imaginative group in place to come up with some new ideas to raise much needed cash.

Nancy Dee for the FUNdraising Team

Gesundheit!

COVID-19, FLU, RSV and Cold Season is in full swing but you can reduce your chances for infection. Refer to current CDC Guidelines for precautions for COVID-19 and other contagious viruses circulating throughout the winter. Here's what you can do—Practice good hygiene (wash hands frequently); Get vaccinated for Flu, Covid, RSV, Pneumonia; Stay home and isolate if you are sick; test for COVID-19; alert others you may have infected. If you absolutely must be in public—Social distance and wear a mask. You can find more information here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your->

Celebrations!

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

- 4 Max Gehring
- 7 Donna Ackerman
- 9 Rachel Wilson
- 12 Jillian Currier
- 15 Lindsay Baldwin
- 16 Carole Doughty
- 19 George Szirbik
- 22 Susan Raban
- 23 Jill Mullen
- 25 Mjo McCarthy
- 29 Tim McCarthy
- 30 John Hebb
- 30 Joanne Dolbear
- 30 Janie Silcocks

JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

- 12 Richard & Diana Peckham
- 16 Jeff & Valerie Ward

Thank You



I wish to express my gratitude to many of our Church family friends for providing our sanctuary with gorgeous poinsettias. The holiday plants created a colorful, festive and inviting atmosphere!

They are a symbol of good will and community spirit and a reminder of God's Grace shining upon us.

Cheers, Rachel

FELLOWSHIP OF CONCERN

We believe that prayer is powerful! During this time of transition in our church, let us pray for the Diaconate, the Search Committee, the Officers, Ministry Coordinators, and Leadership Council for their thoughtful deliberations in guiding our church onward.

And as always, please keep in your prayers all those who suffer in any way in mind, body and spirit,

We ask also your prayers for peace in our world, for the health and integrity of our democracy, and for the flourishing of the work of our community of faith.



Please pray for:

Laura F and family; Dave S; Connie L; Marie and Jack H; Bob L; Dave and Charlotte L; Sue L; Arlene L; Cindy E; Carol J's Family; Chrissy, Maryann, and Michael

FCCW Prayer Chain: Through emails and text messages, we are able to increase our prayer power for "immediate intercessory prayer" for the concerns of our congregation and friends. If you have a prayer request, please email Harriet Wilson (dhwilson39@gmail.com) All prayer requests are kept strictly confidential and will only be shared with the express permission of the people involved.



We are saddened by the sudden passing of Walter Frye on Christmas Day. Walter is the husband of Laura Frye, a dear member of our church and welcoming hostess at our weekly coffee hours. Please keep Laura and her family in your prayers during this difficult time.

Prayer Requested for Conway Church

Friends, I would invite the prayers of all our churches to be with the Conway Village Congregational Church. On Monday, December 18, the church was damaged by flood waters. The damage was so extensive that the building is currently deemed unusable and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

On Sunday, the Conway Village community will be worshipping with their neighbors at First Church of Christ, Congregational, in North Conway.

The needs and impact of this event in the lives of the Conway Village Church community will be long lasting. Please hold them in your prayers over the weeks and months to come.

Reverend Gordon Rankin

JANUARY 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	<p><i>1</i></p> <p>NEW YEAR'S DAY</p>	<p><i>2</i></p> <p>Caregiver's Support Group 9:30–10:30 a.m.</p> <p>Faith Formation 12 Noon</p>	<p><i>3</i></p> <p>Scrabble Group 1–3 p.m.</p> <p>Diaconate Meeting 5 p.m.</p>	<p><i>4</i></p>	<p><i>5</i></p> <p>Al- Anon Family Group 7 p.m.</p>	<p><i>6</i></p> <p>The Epiphany</p>  <p>Grief Support Group 11 a.m.</p>
<p><i>7</i></p> <p>1st Sunday after Epiphany Confirmation Sunday Worship and Communion—10 a.m.</p> <p>Coffee Hour</p>	<p><i>8</i></p> <p>Safe Church Team Meeting 4 p.m.</p> <p>Choir 5:30</p>	<p><i>9</i></p> <p>Faith Formation 12 Noon</p> <p>Ukulele Club 6–7:30 p.m.</p>	<p><i>10</i></p>	<p><i>11</i></p> <p>Parish Helpers Meeting 1 p.m.</p>	<p><i>12</i></p> <p>Al- Anon Family Group 7 p.m.</p>	<p><i>13</i></p> <p>Grief Support Group 11 a.m.</p>
<p><i>14</i></p> <p>2nd Sunday after The Epiphany MLK Sunday Worship 10 a.m.</p> <p>Coffee Hour</p>	<p><i>15</i></p> <p>Martin Luther King Day</p> <p>Caregiver's Support Group 9:30–10:30 a.m.</p> <p>Choir 5:30</p>	<p><i>16</i></p> <p>Prayer Shawl Ministry—10 a.m.</p> <p>Faith Formation 12 Noon</p>	<p><i>17</i></p> <p>Epiphany Drum Circle— 5 p.m.</p> <p>Fellowship Hall</p>	<p><i>18</i></p>	<p><i>19</i></p> <p>Al- Anon Family Group 7 p.m.</p>	<p><i>20</i></p> <p>Grief Support Group 11 a.m.</p>
<p><i>21</i></p> <p>3rd Sunday after Epiphany Worship 10 a.m.</p> <p>Coffee Hour</p> <p>Leadership Council Meeting</p>	<p><i>22</i></p> <p>Choir 5:30</p>	<p><i>23</i></p> <p>Faith Formation 12 Noon</p> <p>Ukulele Club 6–7:30 p.m.</p>	<p><i>24</i></p>	<p><i>25</i></p>	<p><i>26</i></p> <p>Al- Anon Family Group 7 p.m.</p>	<p><i>27</i></p> <p>Grief Support Group 11 a.m.</p>
<p><i>28</i></p> <p>4th Sunday after Epiphany Worship 10 a.m.</p> <p>Coffee Hour</p>	<p><i>29</i></p> <p>Choir 5:30</p>	<p><i>30</i></p>	<p><i>31</i></p>			



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