

NORTH STAR

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
January 2024

NORTH STAR



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UCC
January 2024

Gathered Since 1730

**Serving, Welcoming, Growing in
Christ**

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From The Pastor

Greetings Beloved in Christ,

"Certainly many instances of earthly beauty - a song, the twilit sea, the tone of the harp, the voice of a child, a verse, a statue, a garden, a single flower - all possess the divine faculty of making humanity hearken unto the innermost and outermost boundaries of their existence, and therefore it is not to be wondered at the lofty art of Orpheus (in Greek mythology, Orpheus was a bard; legendary musician and prophet) was esteemed to have the power of diverting the streams from their beds and changing their courses, or luring the wild beasts of the forest with tender dominance, of arresting the cattle a-browse upon the meadows and moving them to listen, caught in the dream and enchanted, the dream-wish of all art: the world compelled to listen, ready to receive the song and its salvation."
(from *The Death of Virgil* by Hermann Broch, written in 1945)

"Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16)

2024 has arrived! This is a monumental year for me, as on May 25th of this year I will have been your pastor for a decade. Even as I type that sentence, I am struck by the power of time and of my deep gratitude to the First Congregational Church of Concord for trusting me with your spiritual care and guidance these past 10 years. I am equally humbled that God continues to call us to do the work of this community together. There is much that God has already invited us into and guided us through, and equally more that God is eager to unpack within us and through our shared ministry.

One of those containers that God is inviting us to unpack is the truth of racism, guided by the Racial Justice Steering Team (Tim Wildman, Carol Hovey, Eleanor and Phil Kimball, Inez McDermott, and Jim Wildman). I strongly encourage you to read their update here in the North Star and to participate in the many facets that they are curating for our community. This is good and holy work.

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The other long-neglected crate that God is inviting us (me in particular) to pry open is that of the power and necessity of Beauty. "At first, it sounds completely naive to suggest that now might be the time to invoke and awaken beauty. Yet this is exactly the claim that this book explores. Why? because there is nowhere else to turn and we are desperate; furthermore, it is because we have so disastrously neglected the Beautiful that we now find ourselves in such terrible crisis." That quote comes from John O'Donohue in his book called *Beauty - The Invisible Embrace: rediscovering the true sources of compassion, serenity, and hope*. God has invited me to embark on the massive creative project of creating a lectionary (the order of scriptures used on any given Sunday) in dialogue with this book from O'Donohue.

Beginning on Sunday, January 7th, 2024 and (estimated) ending in January 2028, we will be embarking, in worship, on a conversation about Beauty with the use of both the "small book" of scriptures called the Bible and the "big book" of scriptures known as Creation,

all in conversation with O'Donohue's book: *Beauty - The Invisible Embrace*.

If you would like to follow along more closely as we unpack Truth and Beauty together, I invite you to purchase a copy of the 2004 edition of John O'Donohue's book, and tune into the weekly E-News for the listing of which section we will be reflecting on each Sunday. If you need help finding a copy of the book, please let me know. I currently have 3 available used copies in my office.

I am deeply grateful to the Spiritual Life Ministry team for supporting me and our congregation in this work of holding Truth in one hand and Beauty in the other, asking God to transform us from the inside out, so that we can be the Good News of Christ in all our endeavors.

Blessings of the New Year to you and yours,

Pastor Emilia

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Ministry of Spiritual Life

Our Chrismon decorated tree, our beautiful nativity displays, and our lovingly decorated chapel set the scene for worship services from Advent through Christmas. Pastor Emilia gifted us with stimulating sermons and lots of food for thought. The presentation on the Black Madonna by Pastor Emilia and Inez McDermott was very interesting. In keeping with the NH Conference's Racial Justice Committee's recommendation, we have a black nativity as part of our altar display, and two images—ancient and modern—of the black Madonna on our chapel wall. Our Jazz Sanctuary Service on the 17th was indeed joyful, and we do need joy in our lives!

On Jan. 7, we will be celebrating Epiphany Sunday which will also be Communion Sunday. We'll be enjoying a King's cake and star cookies!

As of the new year, Pastor Emilia will be introducing a new lectionary. This new lectionary has to do with Beauty. The SLMT unanimously endorsed our pastor's new lectionary. Beauty is a positive force in our lives to offset ugliness and negativity. The Inspiration for this lectionary comes from a book by John O'Donohue: Beauty: The Invisible Embrace. Pastor Emilia will share with us how beauty can lead to compassion, serenity and hope.

We'll be combining our Lenten Study with our Racial Justice process by offering a series of videos after worship service with some modern Black perspectives. Videos will be 12 - 15 minutes. We'll have a ten minute or so discussion, or longer, if warranted. We'll begin in January and go through March for the 12 videos.

As another aspect of our Racial Justice process, we'll be incorporating African American music from our hymnals into our worship services. With introductions by members of the Racial Justice Steering Team, we'll be coordinating these hymns with the video themes. Hopefully, this will increase appreciation of the contributions Black Americans have made to music, and add to our understanding of Black theology.

Page Turners will be reading The Ministry for the Future - it's a prophetic science fiction with some interesting ideas of how to deal with the global warming issue. We'll be reading it over a period of two months. This book will make for a couple interesting discussions! We meet the fourth Monday from 2 -3:00 in person and on zoom. You're welcome to join in the discussion or simply sit and listen.

We know that the holidays aren't always happy times, particularly this year with all that is going on in our world. We hope the above opportunities will provide spiritual

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inspiration and hope for this new year. We look forward to seeing you in person, or on zoom; and of course, there is always Facebook if you do miss a service.

May the Advent and Christmas blessings of hope, peace, joy and love continue in your new year.

Eleanor Kimball, Spiritual Life

From The Council

Work is progressing on a new Web Site and a new logo. Work this past month has centered on

- “Contact Us” page
- Weekly Newsletter
- Monthly North Star
- “I am new” spot

Some new logo designs and colors are being considered. With more feed-back sessions expected, the tentative goal is to have a product by the end of February.

As part of the move from North Main Street to a new location, many of our church belongings were placed in storage. Now that we have moved to Wesley Methodist Church it is clear that some of the things in storage will not be needed. The cost of storage is a consideration. The actual day when we

remove from storage the things that we don't wish to keep, will probably take place in late spring. Planning on the site where the removals will take place; who will be involved in the decision-making and doing the physical work; finding if church members and friends wishing to take some of the goods to be removed, are all part of the planning process that will start in January.

Starting in December, 2023 our monthly rental fee was increased by \$70 to reimburse Wesley for some of the cleaning expenses.

In anticipation of our next budget, we will be considering the following:

- How much do we want to budget for guest musicians?

- Membership pledging seems to be a thing of the past, how can we expand donations.

- Last music flea market worked well. Plan another.

- Council will plan a separate meeting to do budget dreaming.

- Jock should be included.

Phil Kimball for Council

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Technology Corner

**"How to Like, Comment, and
Subscribe on YouTube"**

When a person is using YouTube, the site will suggest videos for them based on their interests. YouTube assumes that videos with lots of "likes" and comments have valuable content and will suggest these first. So, by liking and commenting on First Church's videos, you'll be helping our reach a larger audience.

You have to be signed in to YouTube to do this, so the first step is to sign in by clicking on the "Sign in" button at the top right of the YouTube page. If you don't see the "Sign in" button and there's a circle with a letter in it, instead, then you're already signed in.

To "Like" a video you need to be watching it, first. Look below the video for a little thumbs-up icon that looks like this:



The number next to the thumbs-up lets you know how many other people have already liked this video. Click on the thumbs-up button to let YouTube know that you like the video - You'll know that you've done it right when the little hand is filled in like this:



The thumbs-down button should only be used if you really don't like, or are offended, by a video. It's best not to click on either button if you simply don't care for a video.

To comment on a video, scroll down below the video description and click on the words that say "Add a comment..."

1 Comment Sort by

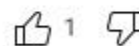


Add a comment...



@emiliahalstead49 1 month ago

Such a great summertime song! 🎵 ☀️

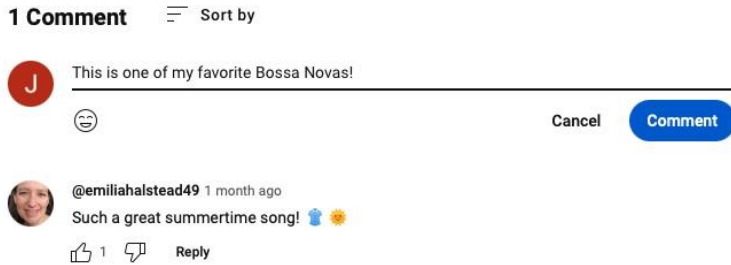


Reply

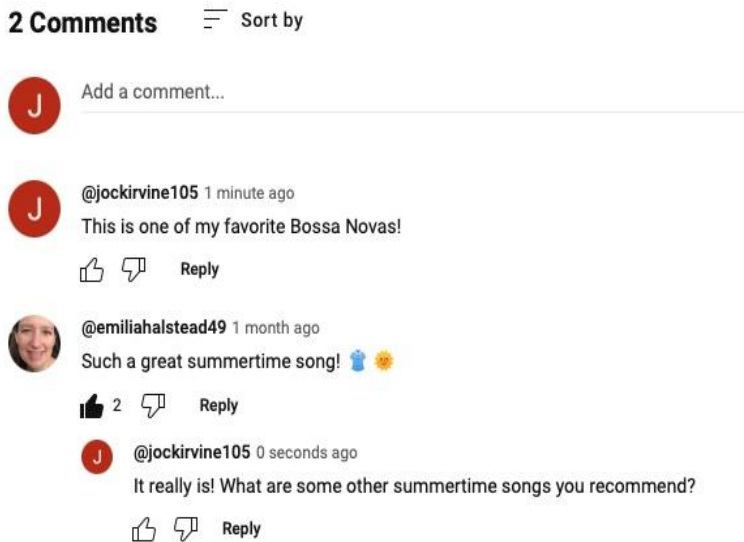
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Type your message (See the picture below) and click on the blue "Comment" button to share your thoughts about the video.



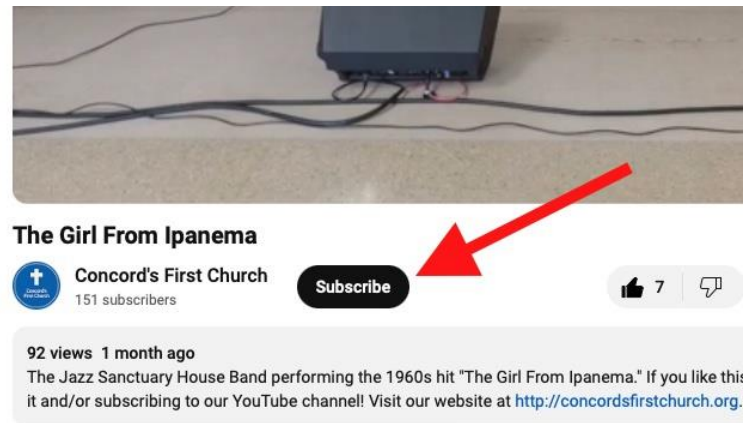
You can also respond to other people's comments. See the example below where I've liked and replied to Pastor Emilia's earlier comment on this video.



She can then like and reply to my comment if she wants, or someone else may choose to chime in, and the conversation is started!

When YouTube sees this kind of engagement on a video, they consider this "valuable content" and will begin recommending it to other people.

You can subscribe to a YouTube channel by clicking on the "Subscribe" button below the video. When you do this, you will be notified when this channel posts any new videos.



To summarize, doing these three things on YouTube can really help First Church reach more people and it doesn't cost anything more than a little of your time. Please try it this month!

Jock Irvine, Technology

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**RACIAL JUSTICE STEERING
COMMITTEE UPDATE**

At our December meeting, the Anti-Racism Steering Committee voted to change our name to the Racial Justice Steering Committee as that name has a more positive ring and it is similar to the name used by the NH Conference committee working for justice (the Justice & Witness Ministry).

You will recall that at our annual meeting in June, we voted to proceed on a racial justice process. At that time, we had planned to use a program recommended by our NH Conference. Shortly after our annual meeting, we received a brochure from the Anti-Racism Ministries group superseding the previous recommendations. First Church's Racial Justice Steering Committee is working and planning with the new recommendations.

As a way to move forward in our process, those who had participated in the three-year Anti-Racism Study Group offered "witness statements" based on their experience. These witness statements were well received.

We also provided book recommendations, and set up a lending library of books at the back of the chapel. Pastor Emilia provided links to videos and You-Tube selections on various topics having to do with Black Americans.

As we move toward the Advent/Christmas season, we decided to follow one of the suggestions from the NH Conference Anti-Racism Ministries group: to discuss the

Black Madonna—her history, and its importance today. Inez McDermott, Art Historian, and Pastor Emilia provided pictures and videos which included the representation of the Madonna over the centuries and in various cultures. We learned why a Black Madonna is important to our Black brothers and

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sisters. To remind us, and to honor this tradition, we have two photos of Black Madonnas in our chapel—one ancient and one more modern—and we have a Black Nativity on display.

We made plans to continue our process of learning about Black American history. Pastor Emilia proposed a series of videos that we will use as our Winter/Lenten study. We will begin on January 7th to view the 12-part series, which will end on Palm Sunday (March 24th). The Steering Committee previewed the videos and found them engaging and offering a perspective that we don't always have as privileged whites.

These videos will be offered after each worship service, including Jazz Sanctuary. Each one runs from 10-15 minutes. We will allow ten minutes for discussion, or longer if discussion warrants. We're hopeful that members will participate in this series as part of our process.

Did you know that our New Century Hymnal contains thirty-four African American Spirituals, and another five African hymns? We will be including them in our worship services. Some will be familiar, and we'll be learning some new ones. We'll try to thematically tie them with the videos we will be watching after our worship services. This will be in line with what we learned about the music traditions that Black Americans have brought to our culture. Worship bulletin cover art will be chosen to reflect the topics we'll be studying.

We look forward to continuing this process of working for Racial Justice. We believe that it will be an enriching experience for all of us.

Eleanor Kimball

For the Racial Justice Steering Committee

Pastor Emilia

Carol Hovey

Phil Kimball

Tim Wildman

Inez McDermott

Jim Wildman

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Ministry of Outreach

School Kits and Clean Up Buckets:

Now that Christmas is over and we have more free time, please consider sewing a bag for the school kits. These school kits help children around the world continue their studies after tragedy strikes. A young girl in North Carolina, after her school was flooded and CWS provided them with school kits, responded "Thank you for making these school bags for the kids who need them and thank you for everything from the bottom of my heart." Don't forget to add items needed for the clean-up bucket to your grocery list. Buckets remain in the United States and are given out to people after fire, flood, hurricane or other natural disasters.

Zimbabwe:

Sara Nichols sent a few pictures and wished the people in our sister church a Merry Christmas. We received the following message, " Harare church members wish you a merry Christmas and a peaceful, prosperous and blessed new year."

Salvation Army Christmas Angels:

Thank you to everyone who took an angel from the "tree" and purchased presents for children. You helped make a Christmas special for a child. When the presents were dropped off at the Salvation Army, Sara was given a thank you note and a small bag of candy.

Christmas Eve offering:

The loose offering at the Christmas Eve service will be given to Family Promise. Thank you to all who contributed. The amount will be posted in the next North Star.

Heifer International:

When one doesn't need another tie or sweater, a contribution to Heifer International is the perfect answer. This was the perfect solution for the person who has everything and thank you for making use of this opportunity. An amount will be posted in the next North Star.

Christmas Fund for Veterans of the Cross: Thank you to all who contributed to the Christmas Fund. The retired clergy and their family thank you. This money has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the UCC for over 100 years.

Sara Nichols, Outreach

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Jazz Sanctuary

Our New Year has arrived with several devastating wars and conflicts around the world and a discouraging level of continued division here in the US. In the face of this, Jazz Sanctuary will be looking back musically to previous times of "war and rumors of war" with "Peace Now - Songs of Protest."

Songs like "Fortunate Son," "Imagine," and "Blowin' in the Wind" defined a generation of push-back against the violence and injustice of war, as there is something about singing together that helps folks move from frustrated helplessness to engaged action in whatever way people can act. So, if you want to be encouraged and inspired to be a peacemaker (remember how Jesus blessed them in the Beatitudes?), come join us on Sunday afternoon, January 21 at 2:30 in Hannah Hall. Pastor Emilia and the Jazz Sanctuary House Band will be joined by Musical Guest, Gary Noel, a guitarist from the Nashua area who plays with Jock, Ed, and Joey in the State Street Vets band. We felt it was essential to add a guitar to most of these songs! Chuck Booth will also be adding additional percussion, again to add to the musical authenticity of these important bits of American musical history. Our Conversational Time will explore what it means to be a "peace maker."

The First Sunday Jazz Jam continues at its new time of 2:30 PM on Sunday, January 7 and Sunday February 4. As always, we welcome instrumentalists and vocalists of all levels of experience, AND if you like jazz you will REALLY ENJOY coming to listen!!!

February 18 at 2:30 Jazz Sanctuary will observe our annual celebration of Mardi Gras (Not to be missed!), and the March Jazz Sanctuary is actually on March 17, St. Patrick's Day, so we will be dialing up some of Jock's jazz arrangements of Celtic classics. Since Easter is so early this year, a second Jazz Sanctuary will happen on Good Friday evening, March 29 when we repeat the powerful liturgy focused on Mary Magdalene's vigil at Jesus' tomb accompanied by jazz standards of love and loss.

Jazz Sanctuary and First Church "on the road" as "music missionaries" will continue as well with a presence at this year's NH Conference Prepared to Serve on Saturday, February 24 - more on that in next month's North Star - stay tuned.

The entire Jazz Sanctuary Team (listed below) remains grateful for the involvement and support of our First Church family as we head into another year of this excellent adventure with the Holy Spirit!

Emilia Halstead
Jock Irvine
Joey Placenti
Ed Raczka
Brenda Placenti
Jean Donohue
Ron Dieter
Carol Hovey
Carroll Blake
Tim Wildman

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Happy Birthday

Douglas King – 1/8

Ron Dieter – 1/26

Susanne Driscoll – 1/28

Roger Tasker – 1/30

Cedric Dustin III – 1/31



PRAYER CONCERNS

If you would like your name included in the weekly bulletin prayer list, please contact our church administrator, Kathy.

(secretary@concordsfirstchurch.org)

The Prayer Circle asks you to keep in prayer for the following members and friends:

Elizabeth Hardy – Hope

Nancy Sanborn – Healing

Dot Cassady - Hope

Hannah Irving - Healing

Kay Graves - Peace

Carol Emery - Healing

Carol Hovey - Healing

Family of Jon Huntington - Peace