Welcome to First Congregational Church



Head of a Black Woman, 1935

Sargent Claude Johnson (1888-1967)

Sargent Claude Johnson often combined abstract elements drawn from African sculpture and masks—such as the regularly scored marks that describe hair—with a naturalistic portrayal of the human form. In the 1920s and 1930s, writer and philosopher Alain Locke urged artists to seek aesthetic inspiration from African art, and Johnson frequently followed this advice. Johnson is able to capture an image that is at once personal and specific, yet timeless and universal. (Art Institute of Chicago)

ANNOUCEMENTS

*[Please send any announcements for the bulletin or weekly Enews to the Secretary (secretary@concordsfirstchurch.org) by **9am Thursday morning**. Please include the exact wording of how you would like the announcement to appear. Any information received after 9am will be included in the following week's bulletin and Enews. Thank you!]*

Tending Our History/Turning 300: TOMORROW from 11:00–12:30, Spiritual Life and Pastor Emilia invite you to a monthly gathering as we begin exploring the archival treasures currently stored in Pembroke. Each month, we'll tackle three boxes, one for each member of the Trinity! Together, we'll decide what to donate to the Congregational Library & Archives in Boston, what to keep as we approach our 300th anniversary, and what can be recycled. Afterward, we'll enjoy fellowship over brown-bag lunches.

Circle Gatherings for 2026/2027: Beginning Sunday, September 27, and continuing on most fourth Sundays through May, we will gather *after* worship from approximately 11:45–12:45 for conversation and shared discernment. As we approach our 300th anniversary, our gatherings will center around one important question: *How is God calling us to live with intention into the next season of life as First Congregational Church of Concord?*

Outreach: Save the Date: October 10th – Crop Walk
We received a thank you from CWS for our support of the kits program. The note is posted on the bulletin board outside the chapel.
For the Kid Kits: "Please continue to support this effort. We can still take advantage of the back-to-school sales. Please do so by buying, specifically: 24 count crayons and 12 count crayons". Thank You Sara Nichols

Your smartphone wants to know what's happening at First Church!
Scan this QR code with your phone's camera.

Welcome to First Congregational Church
An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ
Rev. Emilia Halstead
Regathering Sunday - September 13, 2026

Welcome & Announcements

PRELUDE The Care the Eagle Gives Her Young Annie Papinsick

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Before we had names, we were known.
Before we could speak, we were held.
In hidden places, life took shape.
In sacred darkness, the Holy was already creating.
Today we come from many places and gather again as one community.
We bring with us all that has grown, changed, rested, struggled, and awakened.
We do not return merely to what has been.
We gather to discover what is becoming.
Come, people of God. Let us enter the mystery of creation.
Let us worship the One who is forever bringing life to birth.

COMING INTO THE INVISIBLE EMBRACE OF BEAUTY (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Divine Creator, you know the mystery of hidden beginnings. You meet us in the darkness where life is still taking shape and something new is becoming within us. As we regather this morning, make this congregation a womb of grace. May your Spirit move among us until we recognize the new life already stirring in our midst. Amen.

OFFERING OUR MOMENTS OF BEAUTY & PRAYERS OF JOY
(*Response to each offering/prayer:*)
O Love of our hearts,
Receive our praise.

OPENING SONG: #553 There Is a Balm in Gilead (African American Spiritual)

Refrain: There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain,
But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again. **(Refrain)**

Don't ever feel discouraged, for Jesus is your friend,
Who, if you ask for knowledge, will never fail to lend. **(Refrain)**

If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus, who died to save us all. **(Refrain)**

Let us share together from the prophet Isaiah in which Divine love is described as embodied memory…

Hebrew Scriptures Isaiah 49:1, 14-16 (the Voice translation) Sara Nichols

Listen to this, everyone—near and far: The Eternal One singled me out, even before I was born. God called me and named me when I was still in my mother's belly. [...]
Zion: **The Eternal One has abandoned me. God has walked out the door; my Lord left me alone. God has forgotten all about me.**
The Eternal One said, "Is it possible for a mother, however disappointed, however hurt, to forget her nursing child? Can she feel nothing for the baby she carried and birthed? Even if she could, I, God, will never forget you. Look here. I have made you a part of Me, written you on the palms of My hands. Your city walls are always on My mind, always My concern."
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

Hear now from the book of Psalms, in which the psalmist turns our attention toward the hidden beginning of human life when we are already held within the creative attention of God…

Hebrew Scriptures Psalms 139:13-18 (the Voice translation) Sara Nichols

For You shaped me, inside and out. You knitted me together in the womb long before I took my first breath. I will offer You my grateful heart, for I am Your unique creation, filled with wonder and awe.
You have approached even the smallest details with excellence;
Your works are wonderful;
I carry this knowledge deep within my soul.
You see all things; nothing about me was hidden from You
As I took shape in secret, carefully crafted in the heart of the earth before I was born from its womb.
You see all things;
You saw me growing, changing in my mother's womb;
Every detail of my life was already written in Your book;
You established the length of my life before I ever tasted the sweetness of it.
Your thoughts and plans are treasures to me, O God! I cherish each and every one of them!
How grand in scope! How many in number!
If I could count each one of them, they would be more than all the grains of sand on earth. Their number is inconceivable!
Even when I wake up, I am still near to You.
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

Let us share together from the book of Luke, when Mary and Elizabeth come together while each carries new life within her. The Holy does not wait for birth before becoming present. God is already moving in hidden places…

Gospel Lesson Luke 1:39-45 (the Voice translation) Sara Nichols

Mary immediately got up and hurried to the hill country, in the province of Judah, where her cousins Zachariah and Elizabeth lived. When Mary entered their home and greeted Elizabeth, who felt her baby leap in her womb, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth (shouting): **You are blessed, Mary, blessed among all women, and the child you bear is blessed! And blessed I am as well, that the mother of my Lord has come to me! As soon as I heard your voice greet me, my baby leaped for joy within me. How fortunate you are, Mary, for you believed that what the Lord told you would be fulfilled.**

Here ends the Lesson.

Amen.

SERMON "Woman: Womb of Being" Rev. Emilia Halstead

PAUSING FOR MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

SONG: #123 Mary, Woman of the Promise

Mary, Woman of the Promise, Mary Frances Fleischaker
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Mary, woman of the promise, vessel of your people's dreams:
Through your open, willing spirit waters of God's goodness streamed.

Mary, song of holy wisdom sung before the world began
Faithful to the Word within you, as you bore God's wondrous plan.

Mary, morning star of justice; mirror of the Radiant Light;
In the shadows of life's journey, be a beacon for our sight.

Mary, model of compassion; wounded by your offspring's pain:
When our hearts are torn by sorrow, teach us how to love again.

Mary, woman of the gospel; humble home for treasured seed:
Help us to be true disciples, bearing fruit in word and deed.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE - MOVING PAIN TO POSSIBILITY

(*Response to each prayer:*)

Divine Attraction,

Receive our prayers.

PASTORAL PRAYER (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

Lord's Prayer:
Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sung Amen: O Love That Will Not Let Me Go, verse 1 (Public Domain)

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in you;
I give you back the life I owe.
That in your ocean depths its flow may swell ardor true.

Offertory

GLOBAL MINISTRIES WEEKLY PRAYERS: PALESTINE
(Written by Bishop Dr. Imad Haddad, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land)

MISSION MOMENT FROM PALESTINE

PRAYERS WITH PALESTINE
Lord of life, breathe your life into our dark days.
Lord of peace, guide our words and actions to become instruments of your true and lasting peace.
Lord of justice, teach us your righteousness and lead us in your truth.
Lord of mercy, look upon us with compassion, and shape our hearts after your merciful heart.
Lord, we pray for our land, Palestine. A wounded land, fragmented by walls and checkpoints, scarred by violence, and burdened by fear and hatred. Have mercy on us.
With the prophet Isaiah we cry: "Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down." Come down, O Lord, and establish your justice, your peace, and your steadfast love among us.
How long, O Lord? How long shall our cries seem unanswered? How long shall our people endure violence, loss, and dehumanization? Come, Lord, and restore your image in us and in those we call our enemies.
We trust in you, Lord, yet we are weary. We know you hear us, yet our pain has become heavy to bear.
Come, Lord, empower us, though weary, to run for justice and peace. **Come, Lord, touch our weeping souls to see the light of your righteousness. Lead us from the shadow of death into the joy of the resurrection and the fullness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

INVITATION TO GIVE (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

GRATITUDE MUSIC Surely No One Can Be Safer Annie Papinsick

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
God of hidden beginnings, receive these gifts and nurture through them what we cannot yet see. May they feed possibility, protect what is fragile, strengthen what is growing, and help bring into the world the life you are forming among us. Amen.

RITUAL OF COMMUNION
(We serve gluten-free bread and grape juice)

LITANY OF UNITY: "We Are One" by Kenneth L. Samuel (pg. 15 of *Do This*)

COMMUNION HYMN "When Jesus Calls His Friends to Eat" by Mary Luti (pg. 14 of *Do This*), Hymn tune: DUKE STREET

THE PRAYER GREAT THANKSGIVING "Not Just Us" by Mary Luti (pg. 12-13 of *Do This*)

CLOSING SONG: #391 In the Midst of New Dimensions
In the Midst of New Dimensions, Julian Rush
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1. In the midst of new dimensions, in the face of changing ways,
Who will lead the pilgrim peoples wandering in their separate ways?

Refrain: God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar, we your people, ours the journey now and ever, now and ever, now and evermore.

2. Through the flood of starving people, warring factions and despair,
Who will lift the olive branches? Who will light the flame of care? **(Refrain)**

3. As we stand a world divided by our own self-seeking schemes,
Grant that we, your global village, might envision wider dreams. **(Refrain)**

4. We are man and we are woman, all persuasions, old and young,
Each a gift in your creation, each a love song to be sung. **(Refrain)**

5. Should the threats of dire predictions cause us to withdraw in pain,
May your blazing phoenix spirit resurrect the church again. **(Refrain)**

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

GREATEST COMMANDMENT

BENEDICTION & SENDING (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

POSTLUDE Sent Forth By God's Blessing Annie Papinsick