Welcome to First Congregational Church



The Wedding, 1943
Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000)

Jacob Lawrence painted both the histories of Black Americans in series such as "The Great Migration" and "Harriet Tubman", as well as the everyday events of his Harlem neighborhood. Here he depicts both solemnity and joy of a marriage ceremony. By placing the figures with their backs to the viewer, Lawrence's composition invites in as witnesses. The preacher appears serious, the great colorful urns of flowers and building elements evoke feelings of joy and happiness.
(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!]*

Upcoming Shows in the Clinton Street Concert Series (Sponsored by FCC and WUMC). All shows are 6:00-7:15 PM

August 5 - Electric Praise; August 19 - The Scott Spradling Band

Java & Jazz at William & Sons Coffee Company
August 15th, August 29th.



Start your Saturday morning with smooth bossa novas, fresh brews, and a whole lot of soul! From 9:00–11:00 AM, members of the Jazz Sanctuary House Band will be serving up live jazz to pair perfectly with William & Sons' Brazilian-inspired coffee, decadent pastries, and breakfast sandwiches.

Every tip dropped in the jar goes straight to Family Promise of Greater Concord, supporting young families facing homelessness. (Tips optional, good vibes guaranteed!)

Outreach: Save the Date: October 10th – Crop Walk

Thank you for your donations to our CWS Kid Kits.
We now have 32 completed kits.
The sales have started for back to school items.
Please take advantage of these sales. We need,
Glue sticks
24 count crayons
12 count colored pencils
Blunt, rounded tip scissors
12"/30 cm rulers
Unsharpened pencils
Thank you,

Website: Please visit and explore at www.concordsfirstchurch.org.

Welcome to First Congregational Church
An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ
Rev. Emilia Halstead
August 2, 2026

Welcome & Announcements

PRELUDE Front de bœuf (trad. Quebecois) Annie Papinsick

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Come, Beloved of God.
We come, longing to hear the Voice that knows us.
Come, you who are weary.
We come seeking words that restore hope.
Come, you who rejoice.
We come ready to share love freely.
God has called each of us by name.
We are precious in God's sight.
Christ still speaks our names with tenderness.
We gather to listen, to love, and to become love for the world.

COMING INTO THE INVISIBLE EMBRACE OF BEAUTY (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
**Loving God, before we ever learned to speak your name,
you whispered ours. Before we ever reached toward you,
your love had already reached toward us. Open our hearts this morning and quiet the voices of fear and self-doubt. May this worship become a love note from our hearts to yours. Amen.**

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

OPENING SONG: #43 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling, Charles Wesley
Tune: Public domain Text: © 1995, Pilgrim Press, The
Reprinted/Podcast/Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-739671. All rights reserved.

Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, on earth be found;
Fix in us a humble dwelling, all your faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, you art all compassion, pure, unbounded love impart;
Visit us with your salvation, enter every trembling heart .

Breathe, O breathe your loving Spirit into every troubled breast;
Let us all in you inherit, let us find your promised rest.
Take away our love of sinning, Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning, set our hearts at liberty.

continued on next page

Come, Almighty to deliver, let us all your life receive;
Suddenly return, and never, never more your temples leave.
You we would be always blessing, love you as your angels love,
Pray, and praise for your unfailing, wounded arms outstretched above.

Finish, then, your new creation, pure and spotless may we prove;
Let us see your great salvation, perfectly restored in you.
Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
Crowned as saints, we ever shall be lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Let us share together from the prophet Isaiah; this passage is a breathtaking love letter from God. It is deeply personal and reassuring… *Annie Papinsick*
Hebrew Scriptures Isaiah 43:1-4 (Inspired by The Message, adapted in a womanist voice, using ChatGPT)

But now, hear the Word of the Holy One, the One who shaped you from the beginning, O Jacob, the One who formed you into a people, O Israel:
Do not be afraid. I have called you back into wholeness. I know your name. You belong within my beloved community.
When the waters rise around you, I will move through them with you.
When the rivers swell, they will not carry you away.
When the fires of suffering surround you, they will not consume your spirit. The flames will not have the final word.
For I am the Holy One, the Liberator who journeys with you, the Wellspring of your life and your hope.
Nations have risen and fallen. Empires have spent themselves. Yet my covenant with you has never failed.
You are precious, not because you have earned it, but because you bear my image. You are honored because love has named you, and I delight in your flourishing.
Nothing in all creation can separate you from my steadfast love. No empire, no exile, no violence, no loss, can undo the bond that joins us. You are held, and together we will make a way where none can yet be seen.
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

Hear now from the first letter attributed to John. This is the theological heart of the morning. Love itself is the place where God dwells… *Annie Papinsick*
Hebrew Scriptures 1 John 4:17-21 (Inspired by The Message, adapted in a womanist voice, using ChatGPT)

Love comes to its fullness among us when we make our home in the Holy One and allow the Holy One to make a home in us. As love settles into every room of our lives, it teaches us courage. It frees us from living in fear of judgment, for we are learning to embody the same compassionate presence we see in Christ.

Continued on next page

Perfect love leaves no space for fear to rule. Fear shrinks the soul, guards the heart, and teaches us to expect punishment or abandonment. But love opens what fear has closed. Where love is growing, fear gradually loses its grip.

We love because Love first welcomed us. Before we found the Holy One, the Holy One had already found us. Before we learned to trust, we were already held. Our love is simply our response to the Love that has always been reaching toward us.

If someone says, "I love God," while despising a neighbor, rejecting a stranger, or refusing the dignity of another beloved child of God, their words ring hollow. For if we cannot love those whose faces we encounter, whose stories we can hear, whose wounds we can touch, how will we recognize the Holy One, who lives beyond our sight?

The way of Christ is beautifully simple: Love the Holy One. Love your neighbor. Love yourself as one who bears the image of the Holy. These are not separate paths, but one sacred way.
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

SERMON "Love Notes" Rev. Emilia Halstead

PAUSING FOR MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

SONG: #23 There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (Public Domain)

There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in God's justice, which is more than liberty.
There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than in God's heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment given.

For the love of God is broader than the measure of our minds;
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful, we should trust God's word;
And our lives would show thanksgiving for the goodness of our God

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

O Love That Will Not Let Me Go, George Matheson
Text: © 1992, Pilgrim Press, The
Reprinted/Podcast/Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-739671. All rights reserved

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 *(Written by Global Ministries staff)*

INVITATION TO GIVE (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

GRATITUDE MUSIC Rêve du quêteux Tremblay (trad./André Alain) Annie Papinsick

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Generous God, receive these gifts we offer today. Multiply them beyond what we can imagine, so that they become signs of your compassion, expressions of your welcome, and reminders to this community that your love continues to find new ways to reach the world. In Christ's spirit we pray. Amen.

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

COMMUNION HYMN "Open Table" by Mary Luti (pg. 96-7 of *Do This*), Hymn tune: LANCASHIRE

THE PRAYER GREAT THANKSGIVING "Table or Not" by Phiwa Langeni (pg. 98-100 of *Do This*)

CLOSING SONG: They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love

They'll Know We Are Christians, Peter Scholtes
TheReprinted/Podcast/Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE, License #A-739671. All rights reserved.

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord (x2)
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love

We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand (x2)
And together we'll spread the news that God is close at hand
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will work with each other, we will work side by side (x2)
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

GREATEST COMMANDMENT

BENEDICTION & SENDING (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

POSTLUDE Turlutte d'Antonio Bazinet (trad./Antonio Bazinet) Annis Papinsick