

Welcome to First Congregational Church



The Old Arrow Maker
Edmonia Lewis,
Modeled 1866, carved ca. 1872
Marble 20 x 14 x 14 in.
Crystal Bridges Museum

Edmonia Lewis was the daughter of a Chippewa (Ojibwa) mother and an African American father. Educated at Oberlin College, the first college in the United States open to African Americans, Native Americans, and women, she eventually moved to Rome where she created many sculptures in a classical style that often focused on racial themes.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Advent Video Discussion: Following worship TODAY (and Nov. 30th, Dec 7th, Dec 14th) everyone is invited to join us for this year's advent video discussion series, in-person and on Zoom.

Outreach: Please take an angel from the bulletin board for the Salvation Army Christmas Toys for children. Thank You Sana Nichols

Weekly Prayers for the Nation: Join Rev. Renee' for a weekly hour of prayer for our nation on Zoom. Wednesdays at 1pm. Zoom link is in the weekly E-News and in the calendar on the website.

2025 Advent & Christmas Activities and Services

[We are following the Celtic Christian tradition of 40 days of Advent this year, which makes for 2 additional Advent Sundays]

Sunday, November 30th

10:30-11:30 am - Third Advent (Hope)

11:30-12:15 - Celtic Christian Advent Discussion

MONDAY, December 1st

2:30-3:30 pm - Blue Christmas Service

Sunday, December 7th

9:30-10:30 am - Greening the Chapel

10:30-11:30 am - Fourth Advent (Peace) with Communion

11:30-12:15 - Celtic Christian Advent Discussion

Sunday, December 14th

10:30-11:30 am - Fifth Advent (Joy) & Hanging of the Chrismons

11:30-12:15 - Celtic Christian Advent Discussion (?)

Sunday, December 21st

2:30-4:30 pm - Jazz Sanctuary; Sixth Advent (Love)

Wednesday, December 24th

6-7pm - Candlelight Christmas Eve Service (Christ)

Sunday, December 28th

10:30-11:30 am Worship service with Christmas Hymn Sing

Sunday, January 4th

10:30-11:30 am Epiphany worship service with Communion

11:30 Coffee hour

Welcome to First Congregational Church
An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ
Rev. Emilia Halstead
November 23, 2025—Thanksgiving Sunday

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude

For the Beauty of the Earth

Annie Papinsick

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (written by John O'Donohue)

Movement is a sign of life. It is intriguing that the presence which has the most grace and swiftness cannot be seen, namely, the wind.

The wind has power and huge presence. It symbolizes pure freedom.

Jesus likens the way of the Holy Spirit to the rhythm and energy of the wind; it is presence as spontaneity.

To dwell in 'new spirit' is to enter a complete spontaneity of direction; this is a voyage of trust imbued with passion - where any destination is possible.

In phrases, like the one Jesus shares with Nicodemus, we glimpse the wild heart of Jesus.

Bringing Ourselves into God's Presence: (written by John O'Donohue)

Beauty makes presence shine. It brings out elegance and dignity and has a confidence, an effortlessness, that is not labored or forced. This fluency and ease of presence is ultimately rooted below the surface in surer depths. In a sense, the question of Beauty is about a way of looking at things. It is everywhere; and everything has beauty. It is merely a matter of discovering it.

OFFERING OUR MOMENTS OF BEAUTY

SONG: #421

We Gather Together (Public Domain)

We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing;
to live in community, seeking God's will.
We come now, as sisters and brothers, confessing
The sins that divide and the wrong in us still.

Beside us, forgiving, enabling, sustaining,
You call us, O Savior, to life that is new.
You draw us away from self-centered complaining,
You lead us and guide us in ways that are true.

All praise to the Spirit, provider, defender.
You offer us freedom, to follow or stray,
Empowering all by the hope you engender,
Grant wisdom and courage to follow your way.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES (created by Pastor Emilia with words by Jean McLachlan Hess)

Relight the Candle for the Creator

Unity forms one of the greatest lessons that Creation teaches us:

Unity lies at the heart of the Gospel message.

'How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity.' (Psalm 133:1)

'Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.' (Ephesians 4:3).

Light the Candle for the Holy Spirit

**Holy Spirit, Truth Divine,
Dawn upon the soul of mine;
Word of God, and inward Light,
Wake my spirit, clear my sight.**

**Holy Spirit, Peace Divine,
Still this restless heart of mine;
Speak to calm this tossing sea,
Stayed in Thy tranquility.**

Hear now our modern lesson: "John (the Baptist)" by Lucille Clifton

Let us share together the Psalter Lesson...

Hebrew Scriptures Psalm 104:4-6 (The Voice)

Sheila Swenson

You make Your messengers like the winds;

**the breeze whispers Your words,
Your servants are like the fire and flame.**

You made the earth,

and You made its frame stable forever.

Never will it be shaken.

You wrapped it in a gown of waters—

ancient mountains under layers of sky.

Here ends the Lesson.

Amen.

Hear now from the Hebrew Scriptures...

Sheila Swenson

Hebrew Scriptures Genesis 1:1-2 (NRSVUE)

When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth embodied complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from the Eternal swept over the face of the waters.

Here ends the Lesson.

Amen.

Hear now from the New Testament

Sheila Swenson

New Testament Lesson Acts 2:1-2 (The Voice)

When the holy day of Pentecost came, 50 days after Passover, they were gathered together in one place. Picture yourself among the disciples: A sound roars from the sky without warning, the roar of a violent wind, and the whole house where you are gathered reverberates with the sound.

Here ends the Lesson.

Amen.

Hear now from the Gospel of John...

Sheila Swenson

Gospel Lesson John 3:5-8 (The Voice)

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, if someone does not experience a birth from water and Spirit, there's no chance they will make it into God's kingdom. Like from like. Whatever is born from flesh is flesh; whatever is born from Spirit is spirit. Don't be shocked by my words, for I tell you the truth.

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Even you, an educated and respected man among your people, must be reborn by the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. The wind blows all around us as if it has a will of its own; we feel and hear it, but we don't understand where it has come from or where it will end up. Life in the Spirit is life held by the wind of God."

Here ends the Gospel Lesson.

Amen.

SERMON

"The Wind"

Rev. Emilia Halstead

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

Song: #419

Now Thank We All Our God (Public Domain)

Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices;
who from our parents' arms, has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us,
And keep us still in grace, and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills in this world in the next.

All praise and thanks to God our Maker now be given,
to Christ, and Spirit, too, our help in highest heaven
the one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore;
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

Global Ministries Weekly Prayers: Lesotho

(Prayer and Mission Moment written Rev. Masilo Martin Phate (Executive Secretary))

Mission Moment & Responsive Prayers with Lesotho

Gracious and Merciful God,

At Calvary's hill, where Jesus's prayer says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," You turned suffering into salvation, darkness into light, and despair into hope. We come before You in humility and hope. May that same redemptive power heal our land and renew our hearts.

We lift our beloved country, Lesotho, into Your loving hands. Lord, forgive us where we have fallen short and heal the wounds of our land. Bring unity where there is division, justice where there is oppression, and peace where there is turmoil. May Your grace flow through our mountains and valleys, reviving our people with the spirit of truth, compassion, and love. Pour out Your spirit of peace and unity upon our leaders and people, that we may live with love, truth, and righteousness guiding our steps.

Heavenly Father, we lift before You the work entrusted to the Executive Secretary's office of the Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa (LECSA). Guide our hearts and minds to serve with integrity, wisdom, and humility. Let every decision we make, every word we speak, and every act we perform bring glory to Your name and growth to Your kingdom. Strengthen our pastors, elders, and members to live faithfully and serve courageously in the mission You have given us.

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Lord Jesus, You promised paradise to the one who turned to You in faith. Remember the people we serve, those burdened by poverty, sickness, and despair. Bring them comfort, healing, and renewed hope. Teach us to forgive one another, to lift each other up, and to walk together as one people under Your cross of love.

In Your mercy, Lord, transform Lesotho through Your saving grace.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

(Response to each prayer:)

God of the Wind,
Receive our prayers.

PASTORAL PRAYER (written by Rev. Karla Miller)

Lord's Prayer:

Our father, who 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, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Sung Amen: #101 Comfort, Comfort O My People (Public Domain)

"Comfort, comfort O my people, tell of peace," thus says our God;
Comfort those whose hearts are shrouded, mourning under sorrow's load.
Speak unto Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;
Tell them that their sins I cover, and their warfare now is over.

Offertory

Invitation (written by Rev. Quentin Chin)

GRATITUDE MUSIC Great Is Your Faithfulness (Public Domain)

Great is your faithfulness, O God, Creator,
with you no shadow of turning we see.
You do not change, your compassions, they fail not;
All of your goodness forever wilt be.

Refrain: Great is your faithfulness, great is your faithfulness,
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed your hand has provided;
Great is your faithfulness, God unto me.

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To your great faithfulness, mercy, and love. **[Refrain]**

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Pardon for sin and a peace that enduring,
your own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside. **[Refrain]**

LITANY OF DEDICATION (written by the Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel)

O God, who desires good for all creatures,

Satisfy our hunger not just for food, but for freedom, truth, justice and love.

O Risen Christ, you revealed yourself to us as one who cares for all people.

We dedicate our lives and our offerings to your service.

O Holy Spirit, bless these gifts and abide in our hearts,

So that our gifts and our actions move from our faith, glorify God, and bring forth a fruitful harvest for the kingdom; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

CLOSING SONG: #422

Come, O Thankful People Come (Public Domain)

Come, O thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home;
all is safely gathered in, as the winter storms begin.
God our Maker does provide for our wants to be supplied;
come to God's own temple, come, raise the of harvest home.

All the blessings of the field, all the stores the gardens yield,
all the fruits in full supply, ripened 'neath the summer sky.
All that spring with bounteous hand scatters o'er the smiling land,
all that liberal autumn pours from its rich o'er flowing stores.

These to you, our God, we owe, source from whom all blessings flow;
And for these our songs we raise, grateful vows and solemn praise.
Come, then, thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home,
come to God's own temple, come, raise the song of harvest home.

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

GREATEST COMMANDMENT

UNISON SENDING (written by John Birch)

God of harvest, gardener supreme, you place us at the center.

**You feed us, equip us, and, having provided for us, look to a different harvest—
a fruitfulness of lives in service to you and others.**

**God of harvest, feed us, prune us, harvest us; that our lives might bring glory to
you.**

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

For the Fruit of All Creation

Annie Papinsick

For the Fruit of All Creation (AR HYD Y NOS)

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Contributors: Fred Pratt Green, arr. Ralph Vaughan William

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For the fruit of all creation, thanks be to God.

For God's gifts of every nation, thanks be to God.

For the ploughing, sowing, reaping, silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe-keeping, thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labor, God's will is done;

in the help we give our neighbor, God's will is done;

in our world-wide task of caring for the hungry and despairing,

in the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God;

for the good we all inherit, thanks be to God;

for the wonders that astound us, for the truths that still confound us,

most of all that love has found us, thanks be to God