Welcome to First Congregational Church



***The Return of Odysseus,* 1977**
Romare Bearden (1911-1988)

Romare Bearden used collage and the inspiration of Benin masks and sculptures into the classic Greek scene. In this series, Bearden hoped to emphasize the link between Odysseus's struggles and those of all African Americans. Bearden was the leader of "Spiral," a group of artists based in Harlem committed to the advancement of African Americans during the Civil Rights movement. Benin gained independence from French rule in 1960, less than twenty years before this collage was made. By making the faces of the characters black instead of white as in the original fresco, Bearden endeavored to draw comparisons between the struggles of the Benin people and African Americans, and used the Greek epic to underscore the commonalities of all humans.
(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!]*

Circle Gathering: TODAY after worship from approximately 11:45–12:45pm. 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?*

Tending Our History/Turning 300: We have 3 boxes completed! Our next gathering is *Monday, October 12th from 11:00–12:30*. Each month, we are processing 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. Don't forget your brown-bag lunch!

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
September 27, 2026

Welcome & Announcements

PRELUDE Annie Papinsick

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Before we knew how to speak, someone spoke our name.
Before we understood belonging, someone made room for us.
Through parents and grandparents, teachers and neighbors, friends and chosen family, love has found countless ways to reach us.
Through imperfect human love, we glimpse the Love from which we came.
Today we remember the words that have blessed us. And we make room for words that still need to be spoken:
You are beloved.
You are precious.
You belong.
May these words find a home within us.
Let us worship the God whose love calls each of us by name.

COMING INTO THE INVISIBLE EMBRACE OF BEAUTY (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Holy One, you know how much a human life can depend upon a few simple words. Words of welcome, of encouragement, of appreciation. Bring to memory the words that have sheltered us. Heal within us the places where needed words were never spoken. And give us courage to offer blessings while there is still time to speak. Amen.

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

OPENING SONG: #32 God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale
God of the Sparrow God of the Whale, Jaroslav J Vajda
Text: © 1983, Concordia Publishing House
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1. God of the sparrow God of the whale God of the swirling stars
How does the creature say Awe how does the creature say Praise

2. God of the earthquake God of the storm God of the trumpet blast
How does the creature cry Woe how does the creature cry Save

Continued on next page

3. God of the rainbow God of the cross God of the empty grave
How does the creature say Grace how does the creature say Thanks

4. God of the hungry God of the sick God of the prodigal
How does the creature say Care how does the creature say Life

5. God of the neighbor God of the foe God of the pruning hook
How does the creature say Love how does the creature say Peace

6. God of the ages God near at hand God of the loving heart
How do your children say Joy how do your children say Home.

Let us share together from the book of Genesis in which Jacob blesses his grandsons. He places his hands upon them and speaks aloud the hope and love he carries for them and his son Joseph…

Hebrew Scriptures Genesis 48:8–20 (the Voice translation) Annie Papinsick
[Narrator] Just then Jacob noticed Joseph's sons.

Jacob [Pastor Emilia]: And who are these?

Joseph: **These are my sons, Father, whom God has given to me here in Egypt.**

Jacob: Please bring them here to me, so I can lay my hands on them and bless them.

[Narrator] Jacobs's eyes were dim because of his old age, so he couldn't see well. Joseph brought the boys near to him, and Jacob kissed them and hugged them warmly.

Jacob (to Joseph) [Pastor Emiilia]: I didn't know if I would ever see your face again, but now God has given me more than I hoped: God has let me see your children too.

[Narrator] Then Joseph moved the boys aside—they had been at his father's knees—and he bowed down low with his face to the ground. Then Joseph took his sons and brought them near to his father. He took his younger son Ephraim in his right hand and put him to the left hand of Jacob, and he took Manasseh in his left hand and put him to the right hand of Jacob. But Jacob stretched out his hands and crossed his arms, laying his right hand on the head of Ephraim, the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, the firstborn. And he spoke this blessing over Joseph.

Jacob [Pastor Emilia]: May the God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all of my life and still to this day, The messenger who has rescued me from all harm, bless these boys.

And let my name be perpetuated through them, as well as the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac, And let them grow into a great multitude of people throughout the world.

[Narrator] When Joseph saw that his father had laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, he was troubled, and so he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's.

Joseph: **No, Father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head.**

[Narrator] But Jacob refused.

Jacob [Pastor Emilia]: I know, my son, I know. Manasseh will also become a people, and he will be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his children will give rise to many nations.

[Narrator] So it was that Jacob blessed Joseph and his sons that day.

Jacob [Pastor Emilia]: When the people of Israel speak blessings, they'll remember you: "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh."
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

Hear now from 1 Samuel, in which we hear another kind of parental love. Hannah brings Samuel to the temple to dedicate him to God. Sometimes one of the deepest acts of parenting is learning that the child we love is not ours to possess…

Hebrew Scriptures 1 Samuel 1:21-28 (the Message translation) Annie Papinsick
When Elkanah next took his family on their annual trip to Shiloh to worship God, offering sacrifices and keeping his vow, Hannah didn't go. She told her husband, "After the child is weaned, I'll bring him myself and present him before God—and that's where he'll stay, for good."

Elkanah said to his wife, "Do what you think is best. Stay home until you have weaned him. Yes! Let God complete what he has begun!"

So she did. She stayed home and nursed her son until she had weaned him. Then she took him up to Shiloh, bringing also the makings of a generous sacrificial meal—a prize bull, flour, and wine. The child was so young to be sent off!

They first sacrificed the bull, then brought the child to Eli. Hannah said, "Excuse me, sir. Would you believe that I'm the very woman who was standing before you at this very spot, praying to God? I prayed for this child, and God gave me what I asked for. And now I have dedicated him to God. He's dedicated to God for life." Then and there, they worshiped God.
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

SERMON "The Surprise of Hearing What You Mean to Your Parents"
Rev. Emilia Halstead

PAUSING FOR MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

SONG: #426 O God, Whose Steadfast Love
Text: © 1994 Dr. James L. Haddix

O God, whose steadfast love, true motherhood has blessed;
Who shields the infant small upon its mother's breast:
Embrace us, too, O God, our God, and hold us in your
Loving arms, and hold us in your loving arms

Your promises, O God, so sure throughout the years,
Have lived in mothers' hearts, have bloomed from mothers' tears
So Sarah laughed, and Hannah wept, and singing Mary
Secrets kept, and singing Mary secrets kept.

In your great love, O God, full parenthood is known;
A father mourns his child, a mother's strength is shown.
Let parents' faithful lives unbind your love that through them
We might find Christ's deeper love for humankind.

May your household of faith one family become,
That love may be increased and none may be alone;
That mother's love and father's care and children's joy we
All may share, and children's joy we all may share.

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: Haiti
(Written by Global Ministries Staff)

Mission Moment from Haiti

Prayers with Haiti
God our Father, we thank You at this moment for the way You manifest Your love for us, for the Haitian people, and for everyone who places their faith in You.
God the Father, in this moment of prayer, we bring our country, Haiti, before You; we ask You, Lord, to help our leaders understand the suffering of this people—the suffering of every mother and father, and the suffering of every family weeping in their hearts because they can no longer bear it.
Yes, Father, they cannot bear to see their children dying anymore; they cannot endure hunger anymore; yes, they cannot go on sleeping in the streets anymore. Please, Father, say a word.
That is why, Father in heaven, we ask You to please visit every single child and every single parent You have entrusted to us in this work, so that they may find the strength of the Holy Spirit to keep moving forward—for it is You who have called us to this harvest.
Please, Father, as You visit the homes and families, please also visit our partners and supporters, those who never tire of helping us and our beneficiaries, and supporting our projects. Please bless them, Father, in Jesus' almighty name. Amen.

Invitation to Give (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

Gratitude Music

Prayer of Dedication (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Generous God, receive these gifts and receive the love with which they are offered. Use them to create places of belonging, to strengthen those carrying heavy burdens; to encourage those who feel forgotten, and to remind someone that they matter. May what we give today become blessings in ways we cannot yet imagine. Amen.

CLOSING SONG: #82 Go, My Children, with My Blessing

Go, my children, with my blessing, Jaroslav J Vajda
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Go, My children, with My blessing, Never alone.
Waking, sleeping, I am with you; You are My own.
In My love's baptismal river I have made you Mine forever.
Go, My children, with My blessing, You are My own.

Go, My children, fed and nourished, Closer to Me
Grow in love and love by serving, Joyful and free.
Here My Spirit's power filled you; Here His tender comfort stilled you.
Go, My children, fed and nourished, Joyful and free.

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

GREATEST COMMANDMENT

BENEDICTION & SENDING (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

POSTLUDE