Welcome to First Congregational Church



Many Mansions, 1994
Kerry James Marshall, (b. 1955)

This is the first in Kerry James Marshall's series of five large-scale paintings depicting public housing projects in Chicago and Los Angeles. Many Mansions depict Stateway Gardens in Chicago. The painting presents ironic juxtapositions of the real and artificial. The title of the painting, visible on the red ribbon above, is a variation on Christ's oft-quoted remark found in John [14:2]: "In my Father's house there are many mansions."
(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!]*

Clinton Street Summer Concert Series

Join us for an upcoming free outdoor concert sponsored by First Church and Wesley UMC. On July 1, vocalist Mary Fagan and the State Street Combo present *250 Years of American Music*, a musical journey from 1776 to today.

The July 1 concert is made possible through a grant from the Music Performance Trust Fund. Concerts are held from 6:00–7:15 PM and are rain or shine. Bring a chair, bring a friend, and enjoy an evening of live music in the heart of Concord.

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

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
June 28, 2026

Welcome & Announcements

PRELUDE

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
In the depths of winter, the earth appears silent.
Yet beneath the frozen ground, life is preparing to awaken.
In seasons of loss, discouragement, and waiting, our hearts may grow weary.
Yet God is always planting seeds of hope.
The Holy Spirit breathes where we least expect it.
Dry bones rise. Seeds grow. New life emerges.
Come, let us worship the One who makes all things new.
Let us worship God with grateful hearts.

COMING INTO THE INVISIBLE EMBRACE OF BEAUTY (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Holy One, you are the Source of every living thing. Awaken in us the holy longing for life, growth, and renewal. Open our eyes to the quiet miracles unfolding around us. Help us trust that even now your love is at work beneath the surface of our lives. Amen.

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

OPENING SONG: Morning Has Broken (Public Domain)

1 Morning has broken like the first morning,
blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing!
Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing
fresh from the Word!

2 Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven,
like the first dewfall on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness
of the wet garden,
sprung in completeness
where God's feet pass.

3 Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning
born of the one light Eden saw play!
Praise with elation,
praise every morning,
God's recreation
of the new day!

Let us share together from the prophet Ezekiel, in which the Spirit breathes upon what is lifeless. Winter gives way to spring…

Hebrew Scriptures Ezekiel 37:1-14 (The Voice) Sara Nichols

(Narrator) The Eternal had a hold on me, and I couldn't escape it. The divine wind of the Eternal One picked me up and set me down in the middle of the valley, but this time it was full of bones. God led me through the bones. There were piles of bones everywhere in the valley—dry bones left unburied.

Eternal One (Pastor Emilia): Son of man, do you think these bones can live?

Ezekiel: **Eternal Lord, certainly You know the answer better than I do.**

Eternal One (Pastor Emilia): Actually, I do. Prophesy to these bones. Tell them to listen to what the Eternal Lord says to them: "Dry bones, I will breathe breath into you, and you will come alive. I will attach muscles and tendons to you, cause flesh to grow over them, and cover you with skin. I will breathe breath into you, and you will come alive. After this happens, you will know that I am the Eternal."

(Narrator) So I did what God told me to do: I prophesied to the bones. As I was speaking, I heard a loud noise—a rattling sound—and all the bones began to come together and form complete skeletons. I watched and saw muscles and tendons attach to the bones, flesh grow over them, and skin wrap itself around the reforming bodies. But there was still no breath in them.

Eternal One (Pastor Emilia): Prophesy to the breath. Speak, son of man, and tell them what the Eternal Lord has to say: "O sweet breath, come from the four winds and breathe into these who have been killed. Make these corpses come alive."

(Narrator) So I did what God told me to do: I prophesied to the breath. As I was speaking, breath invaded the lifeless. The bodies came alive and stood on their feet. I realized then I was looking at a great army.

Eternal One (Pastor Emilia): Son of man, these bones are the entire community of Israel. They keep saying, "Our bones are dry now, picked clean by scavengers. All hope is gone. Our nation is lost."

(Narrator) He told me to prophesy and tell them what He said.

Eternal One (Pastor Emilia): Pay attention, My people! I am going to open your graves and bring you back to life! I will carry you straight back to the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Eternal One. I will breathe My Spirit into you, and you will be alive once again. I will place you back in your own land. After that you will know I, the Eternal, have done what I said I would do.

(Narrator) So said the Eternal One.
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

Hear now from Paul in his second letter to the church in Corinth, in which his language of renewal and rebirth echoes the emergence of spring.…

Hebrew Scriptures 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 (The Voice, edited) Sara Nichols

Therefore, if anyone is united with the Anointed One, that person is a new creation. The old life is gone—and see—a new life has begun! All of this is a gift from our Creator, who has pursued us and brought us into a restored and healthy relationship with God through the Anointed. And God has given us the same mission, the ministry of reconciliation, to teach others how to have a living relationship with God. It is central to our good news that God was in the Anointed making things right between the Eternal and the world. This means God does not hold our sins against us. But it also means God charges us to proclaim the message that heals and restores our broken relationships with God and each other.

So we are now representatives of the Anointed One, the Liberating One; God has given us a charge to carry through our lives—urging all people on behalf of the Anointed to become reconciled to the Creator.

Here ends the Lesson.

Amen.

Hear now from the Gospel of Mark. In which Jesus teaches that life rises secretly from the dark earth before anyone can explain how…

Gospel Lesson Mark 4:26-32 (The Voice) Sara Nichols

Here is what the kingdom of God is like: a man who throws seeds onto the earth. Day and night, as he works and as he sleeps, the seeds sprout and climb out into the light, even though he doesn't understand how it works. It's as though the soil itself produced the grain somehow—from a sprouted stalk to ripened fruit. But however it happens, when he sees that the grain has grown and ripened, he gets his sickle and begins to cut it because the harvest has come.

What else is the kingdom of God like? What earthly thing can we compare it to? The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the tiniest seed you can sow. But after that seed is planted, it grows into the largest plant in the garden, a plant so big that birds can build their nests in the shade of its branches.

Here ends the lesson.

Amen.

SERMON "Eros Awakens the Spring" Rev. Emilia Halstead

PAUSING FOR MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

SONG: #433 In the Bulb There Is a Flower (Hymn of Promise)

In the Bulb There Is a Flower, Natalie Sleeth

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In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;
There's a dawn in every darkness bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;
In our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity;
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

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 Come, O Come, Emmanuel, verse 7 (Public Domain)

7 O come, Desire of Nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind.
Make envy, strife, and quarrels cease;
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel,
Shall come to you, O people of God.

Offertory

Global Ministries Weekly Prayers: Laos
(Written by Global Ministries staff)

Mission Moment from Laos

Prayers with Laos:
Gracious and loving God, we come before you with grateful hearts, lifting the country of Laos and its people into your loving care. We pray for the nation and its government as Laos continues to build its future and seeks to address the needs of all its people.
We especially bring before you the Christian community in Laos, and the Lao Evangelical Church with its many ministries that bless and uplift the people of the nation.
At this time, we remember the students from the Lao Evangelical Church who are currently engaged in theological training. We pray that they may complete their studies with joy and dedication, and that they may become faithful servants in your vineyard in Laos.
As we are assured in the scripture reading for this day, we ask that you grant rest to all the people of Laos and to all of us who carry heavy burdens. Help us to experience the truth that your yoke is easy and your burden is light. In the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we pray, Amen.

INVITATION TO GIVE (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

GRATITUDE MUSIC ???

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Generous God, we offer these gifts with grateful hearts.
Bless them and use them to nurture hope, healing, and new life. May what we offer today become seeds of your love in this community and throughout the world. Amen.

CLOSING SONG: What A Covenant (Public Domain)

1. What a covenant, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms.
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms.

Refrain:
Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;
Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.

2. Oh, how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way, leaning on the everlasting arms.
Oh, how bright the path grows from day to day, leaning on the everlasting arms. **[Refrain]**

3. What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace with my Savior near, leaning on the everlasting arms. **[Refrain]**

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

GREATEST COMMANDMENT

BENEDICTION & SENDING (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

POSTLUDE