Welcome to First Congregational Church



***Daddy Grace at the Altar with Choir,* 1938**
James van der Zee (1886-1983)

Between World Wars I and II, James Van Der Zee was one of the most popular photographers in Harlem, New York. Known primarily for his portraits, Van Der Zee also worked for a wide range of clients outside of his studio, including a variety of Harlem's diverse faith communities. Daddy Grace, born Marcelino Manuel de Graca, founded the United House of Prayer for All People in 1919. As leader of this independent Christian church, Grace became well-known for his charismatic style of evangelism and stories of faith healing.
(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*

SAVE THE DATES:

Regathering Sunday: NEXT WEEK! We invite you to join us as we begin a new program year and regather after our summer season of rest. Following worship, we'll share coffee hour in the Parlor, across the hall from the Chapel. If you would like to bring something to share, please contact a member of Spiritual Life: Kellie Heath, Eleanor Kimball, Brenda Placenti, or Sheila Swenson.

Tending Our History/Turning 300: On Monday, September 14th, 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.

Cleanup Bucket #1 needs 2 pr. heavy duty dishwashing gloves and one pair work gloves with leather palms.

Kits should read:
12 count colored pencils
24 count crayons

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 6, 2026

Welcome & Announcements

PRELUDE Take My Life, God, Let it Be Annie Papinsick

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
Before there were monuments or machines, before there were cities or sanctuaries, there was the mystery of life bringing forth life.
And God looked upon creation and called it good.
Through bodies strong and vulnerable, through hands that protect and hearts that hope, life continues to enter the world.
We give thanks for the holy labor that makes room for life.
We remember Shiphrah and Puah, who stood against the machinery of death and chose the dangerous work of protecting life.
We remember Elizabeth, whose laughter and astonishment became the cradle of something new.
And we remember that creation is not finished.
God is still creating.
In every act of courage, every work of compassion, every beginning carefully tended,
Something beautiful is struggling to be born.
Come, people of God. Let us worship the One who labors among us for life.

COMING INTO THE INVISIBLE EMBRACE OF BEAUTY (Created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
God of womb and wilderness, bless every one of us with courage to become midwives to whatever new thing you are bringing forth.
When the powers of death tell us that life must be diminished, make us stubborn for life.
When fear tells us that nothing new can happen, make us imaginative.
And when something small, fragile, and new is placed into our keeping, teach us to recognize it with wonder. Amen.

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

OPENING SONG: #563 We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky
We cannot own the sunlit sky, Ruth Duck
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We cannot own the sunlit sky, the moon, the wild-flowers growing,
For we are part of all that is within life's river flowing.
With open hands receive and share the gifts of God's creation,
That all may have abundant life in every earthly nation.

Continued on next page

When bodies shiver in the night and weary wait for morning,
When children have no bread but tears, and war horns sound their warning,
God calls humanity to awake, to join in common labor,
That all may have abundant life, oneness with their neighbor.

God calls humanity to join as partners in creating a future free from want or fear,
Life's goodness celebrating, that new world beckons from afar,
Invites our shared endeavor that all might have abundant life and peace endure forever.

Let us share together from the book of Exodus in which we hear a story about labor, but it is also a story about power. Pharaoh fears the growing Hebrew people and attempts to control women's bodies and determine which children will be permitted to live. But two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, refuse to cooperate with death. Their resistance is quiet, clever, dangerous, and profoundly holy…

Hebrew Scriptures Exodus 1:8-21 (the Message translation) Shelia Swenson

[Narrator] A new Pharaoh came to power in Egypt who didn't know Joseph. He spoke to his people with alarm.
Pharaoh: **There are way too many of these Israelites for us to handle. We've got to do something: Let's devise a plan to contain them, lest if there's a war they should join our enemies, or just walk off and leave us.**
[Narrator] So they organized them into work-gangs and put them to hard labor under gang-foremen. They built the storage cities Pithom and Rameses for Pharaoh. But the harder the Egyptians worked them the more children the Israelites had—children everywhere! The Egyptians got so they couldn't stand the Israelites and treated them worse than ever, crushing them with slave labor. They made them miserable with hard labor—making bricks and mortar and back-breaking work in the fields. They piled on the work, crushing them under the cruel workload. The king of Egypt had a talk with the two Hebrew midwives; one was named Shiphrah and the other Puah.
Pharaoh: **When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the sex of the baby. If it's a boy, kill him; if it's a girl, let her live.**
[Narrator] But the midwives had far too much respect for God and didn't do what the king of Egypt ordered; they let the boy babies live. The king of Egypt called in the midwives.
Pharaoh: **Why didn't you obey my orders? You've let those babies live!**
The midwives [Pastor Emilia]: The Hebrew women aren't like the Egyptian women; they're vigorous. Before the midwife can get there, they've already had the baby.
[Narrator] God was pleased with the midwives. The people continued to increase in number—a very strong people. And because the midwives honored God, God gave them families of their own.
Here ends the Lesson.
Amen.

Hear now from the Gospel of Luke, in which we enter into the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah, where after a long season of waiting, new life has finally arrived. But the wonder is not simply that a child has been born. In naming him John, Elizabeth insists that this new life will not simply repeat the past. Something new has entered the world, and God is already imagining what it might become…

Gospel Lesson Luke 1:57-65 (the Message translation) Shelia Swenson

When Elizabeth was full-term in her pregnancy, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives, seeing that God had overwhelmed her with mercy, celebrated with her.

On the eighth day, they came to circumcise the child and were calling him Zachariah after his father. But his mother intervened: "No. He is to be called John."

"But," they said, "no one in your family is named that." They used sign language to ask Zachariah what he wanted him named.

Asking for a tablet, Zachariah wrote, "His name is to be John." That took everyone by surprise. Surprise followed surprise—Zachariah's mouth was now open, his tongue loose, and he was talking, praising God!

A deep, reverential fear settled over the neighborhood, and in all that Judean hill country people talked about nothing else. Everyone who heard about it took it to heart, wondering, "What will become of this child? Clearly, God has his hand in this."

Here ends the Lesson.

Amen.

SERMON "The Wonder of Creating New Life" Rev. Emilia Halstead

Or

"Laboring with God for Life"

PAUSING FOR MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

SONG: #539 Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant

The Servant Song, Richard Gillard

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1. Won't you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?
   Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too.

2. We are pilgrims on a journey, we are travelers on the road.
   We are here to help each other go the mile and bear the load.

3. I will hold the Christ-light for you in the shadow of your fear.
   I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

4. I will weep when you are weeping, when you laugh I'll laugh with you.
   I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.

Continued on next page

5. When we sing to God in heaven, we shall find such harmony,
   Born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

6. Won't you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?
   Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too.

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: INDIA
(Written by Global Ministries Staff)

MISSION MOMENT FROM INDIA

PRAYERS WITH INDIA
We thank you, O God, for the rich diversity of India and for your unfailing love toward our nation. We also thank you for the Church in India that continues to cling to you, faithfully witnessing to your love and truth despite many challenges.
Lord, we pray for the basic needs of our nation. May quality education reach every child, especially those in rural and remote communities.
May women and girls be treated with dignity and respect and be given equal opportunities to learn, grow, and serve.
Grant our leaders wisdom, vision, integrity, and compassion as they lead at every level.
We also pray that quality healthcare may reach every corner of India, especially the poor and underserved, so that all may receive timely, compassionate, and appropriate care. Help our nation to grow in truth, justice, peace, and hope.

Continued on next page

We especially pray for Evangelical Mission Hospital, Tilda, and every patient who comes through our doors. May they experience your healing, your love, and your peace through our ministry, and may everything we do bring glory to your name. Amen.

INVITATION TO GIVE (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

GRATITUDE MUSIC La laine des moutons (trad. Francophone lullaby) Annie Papinsick

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)
God of abundant life, receive these gifts and all the labor represented within them. Take what we offer and make from it something alive: hope where despair has settled, possibility where doors have closed, justice where power has wounded, and beauty where beauty has been neglected. May these gifts become midwives of your new creation. Amen.

CLOSING SONG: #532 Come, Labor On (Public Domain)

1. Come, labor on. Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain
   while all around us waves the golden grain?
   And to each servant does the Savior say,
   "Go work today."
2. Come, labor on. Claim the high calling angels cannot share;
   to young and old the gospel gladness bear.
   Redeem the time; its hours too swiftly fly.
   The night draws nigh.
3. Come, labor on. Away with gloomy doubt and faithless fear!
   No one so weak but may do service here.
   Though feeble agents, may we all fulfill
   God's righteous will.
4. Come, labor on. No time for rest, till glows the western sky,
   till the long shadows o'er our pathway lie,
   and a glad sound comes with the setting sun,
   "Well done, well done!"

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

GREATEST COMMANDMENT

BENEDICTION & SENDING (created by Pastor Emilia using ChatGPT)

POSTLUDE Rejoice, You Pure in Heart Annie Papinsick