

NORTH STAR

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
December 2025

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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

UCC

December 2025

Gathered Since 1730

Serving, Welcoming,

Growing in Christ

79 Clinton Street

Concord, NH 03301

Phone: 603-225-5491

Email:

secretary@concordsfirstchurch.org

Website:

www.concordsfirstchurch.org

Office Hours: In-Person,
Monday and Thursday
9:30am-12:15pm
Worship: Sunday 10:30am

Senior Minister

Rev. Emilia Halstead

Musician &

North Star Editor

Annie Papinsick

Church Secretary

Kathleen Akerman

Historian

Treasurer

Terry Blake

Financial Secretary

Council Chair

Susan Lauze

Council Vice Chair

Phil Kimball

Council Recorder

Sara Nichols

Technology Integrator

Jock Irvine

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FROM THE PASTOR

Beloved in Christ,

"Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart; Naught be all else to me save that thou art. Thou my best thought by day and by night; Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light." [Translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne, M.A. (1880-1931) was born in Ireland. She translated the Old Irish Hymn, "Bí Thusa 'mo Shúile," into English as "Be Thou My Vision" in Ériu (the journal of the School of Irish Learning), in 1905.]

"Thou my best though, by day or by night.." reminds me of Paul urging the church in Thessalonica to 'pray without ceasing,' which comes from 1 Thessalonians 5:17: "Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." This verse is part of a larger passage (verses 16-18) that encouraged the church to continually rejoice, pray, and give thanks.

This year for Advent the Spiritual Life team and I invited our community to follow the ancient Celtic Christian tradition of 40 days of Advent (in order to mirror the 40 days of Lent), which began on November 15th. The first two candles are dedicated to "Creator" and "Holy Spirit." Part of the reason for this decision was that we felt we could all use an extended time of gentleness. Advent invites us into that gentleness of waiting and the Divine Ones wrap us in it; not unlike when Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes to keep him safe and make sure he felt held and secure.

As the season of winter storms begin, I wonder: what allows your heart to remain gentle in this season, even as the "frosty winds made moan"? Perhaps the 'winter storms' are more metaphorical for you, either because of local, national, or international news; or sorrow and grief; or uncertainty. Where do you turn when you start to feel chilled all over?

Might I encourage us all to turn to the warmth of God? To hold God in our hearts, mind, and souls by day and by night? The incarnation of the Divine in Christ is so much more than a gift – It's an invitation. It's an active verb. A living thing. Christ is an invitation to Hope. To Peace. To Love. To Joy. "This is the will of God, in Christ Jesus, for you" that we all might experience the Presence of the Divine all day and all night - no matter what storms come our way.

Blessings of the gentleness of Advent and of the Peace of Christ be yours,
Pastor Emilia

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Ministry of Outreach

Kid Kits And Clean Up Buckets:

We need bags for the Kid Kits. While you have your sewing machines out for your Christmas projects, take time to sew a bag or two. Directions can be found at CWS School Kits or on the bulletin board in front of the chapel.

Please continue to take sticky notes for the items needed to fill clean up buckets.

Crop Walk: It's not too late to turn in money for crop walk. A final total will be given when all the money is in.

Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe has been having rains daily the past two weeks. The Wall Street Journal reported that parts of Africa are experiencing cholera due to the rains.

Neighbors In Need: We have received \$20 for NIN. \$135 for Strengthen the Church and \$90 for Zimbabwe. Thank you.

Salvation Army Christmas Angels:

Please take an "angel" from the bulletin board and return the requested items unwrapped by Dec. 10.

Heifer International: Need help finding the perfect gift, Heifer International has the answer. Buy the gift that will make a long lasting impact. Buy a share of a goat, heifer or sheep. Buy a flock of chickens or some honeybees. Sara Nichols has catalogues and cards if anyone is interested.

The Christmas Fund: The Christmas fund has been caring for active and retired clergy for over 100 years providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums and Christmas thank you gift checks each December to our lower income retirees. Please give generously.

Christmas Eve offering: It has become a tradition to donate the money received on Christmas Eve to Family Promise. Let's continue this tradition and contribute to a good cause.



Sara Nichols, Outreach

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Spiritual Life Ministry

We have entered into the Advent Season when we look forward to Christ coming into our world. For many, the holidays are a joyful, anticipatory time; for others, however, it is a difficult or even sad time because of issues in our lives, losses, sad memories, concerns about our county and the world. Pastor Emilia understands the range of emotions this season brings, and will be giving us an opportunity to recognize and acknowledge them.

At our Nov. 16 Jazz Sanctuary, we were introduced to a Celtic Advent celebration. This tradition is six weeks or forty days, rather than our traditional four weeks. The first week of the Celtic Advent commemorates our Creator, with a candle lit on our seven-candle candelabra.

At our November 23 worship service, we lit a candle remembering the Holy Spirit. On the 30th, we lit a candle for Hope. In December, we will light candles for Peace, Joy, Love and on Christmas Eve, the light of Christ. Although Advent is a time when we anticipate Christ coming into the world, Pastor Emilia reminded us that Jesus is with us already and accompanies us on our journey.

On the first day of December, Pastor Emilia will be leading a Blue Christmas Worship Service at 2:30 in the chapel. This service will be followed by our "hanging the greens" in the chapel on December 7th, Chrismon Sunday on December 14th when we hang our symbols of Christ Chrismon decorations on our tree. On the 21st, Jazz Sanctuary Worship Service, our Jazz Sanctuary Band will be taking requests for Christmas music. That service will be held in the parlor, across the hall from our chapel. We'll have a Christmas Eve Worship Service on the 24th, and a Christmas Hymn Sing on the 28th. Epiphany will be celebrated on January 4th. Within all our worship services, there will be music and liturgy that honors the range of emotions and moods we might experience this Advent/Christmas Season. In our church community, we are reminded that we are not alone, In terms of friendship and support, but also helping us find peace and hope for the spiritual dimension of our lives. We look forward to seeing you at these services.

In addition to our worship services, we will be viewing videos from Work of the People, as we did last year. These videos will be shown after worship.

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They are short (15 minutes perhaps), followed by a brief reflection time led by Pastor Emila. The whole experience is thoughtful and spiritually nourishing.

We wish you all the rich dimensions of this season, whatever your need. May you find beauty and peace in the crystalized snowflakes and the snow covered landscapes, as well as in the inspiration of our worship offerings.

Blessings to all.

Eleanor Kimball for
Spiritual Life Ministry Team
Kellie Heath
Brenda Placenti
Sheila Swenson



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Jazz Sanctuary



SANCTUARY
First Church, Third Sunday

The Christmas season is filled with both challenge and fulfillment, and for most of us it's some of both through the years. In our Jazz Sanctuary December gathering on Sunday, December 21 at 2:30 PM, we will seek to provide a "spiritual container" for both, as we are rolling our annual "Christmas Special" in with our Jazz Sanctuary gathering, moving to the Wesley Church parlor, and inviting everyone to settle in to a relaxed and joy-filled time of music and liturgy.

The "Jazz Set" will feature requests for Christmas favorites from those gathered in person and on YouTube, and the liturgy will blend the story of the Prodigal Son (trust us, it's more of a genuine Christmas story than you thought!) and O'Donohue's wisdom about the movement of dance in the crazy (and typical) mix of all that IS Jazz Sanctuary. Emilia, Renee', Joey, Jock, Eddie, and I will be welcoming you to have ALL of who and where you are this Christmas be present! Come join us won't you?

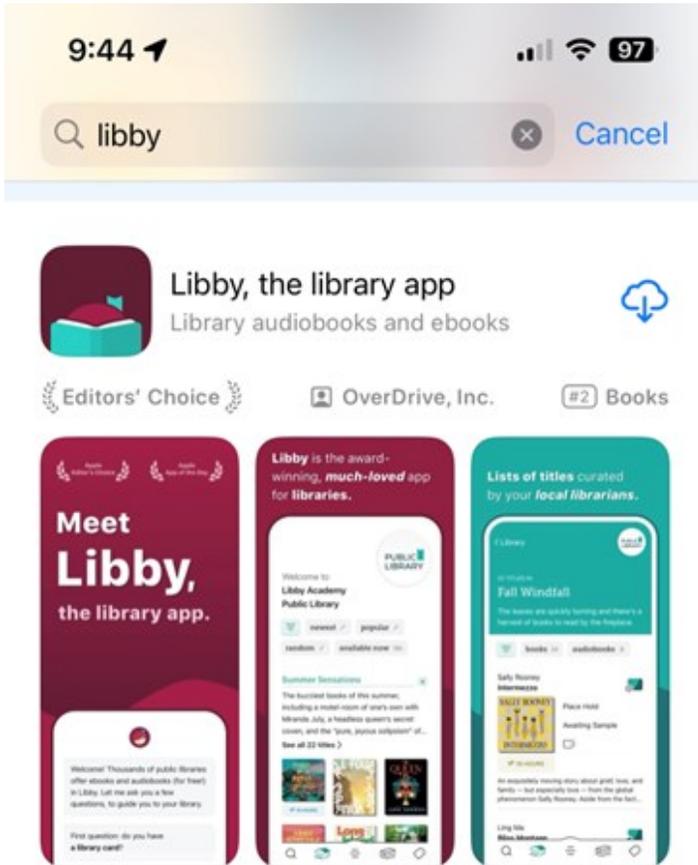
January's Jazz Sanctuary is something you definitely don't want to miss, as Pastor Emilia's amazing vocal talents will be featured in "Emmy Sings Ella" - the music of the singer who many consider the greatest female jazz vocalist of all time, Ella Fitzgerald. Going forward in the New Year, Jazz Sanctuary will be taking the music out into the community, so our February Mardi Gras service will be "somewhere out there" - stay tuned!

We all wish you the deepest blessings of this sacred season!

Emilia, Renee', Joey, Jock, Eddie, Brenda, Jean, Carroll, Ron, Carol, and Tim

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Technology Corner



Jock Irvine (With assistance from ChatGPT)

Discover Free eBooks & Audiobooks With Libby

If you're looking for something new to read or listen to this winter, the Libby app is one of the easiest ways to enjoy free books from your local library. Libby works through the New Hampshire Downloadable Books Consortium, which means that if you have a valid library card from most public libraries in the state, you already have access to a huge collection of eBooks, audiobooks, and even digital magazines—no trip to the library required.

Getting started is simple. Install the free Libby app on your smartphone or tablet, then search for your library and enter your card number. From there, you can browse thousands of titles, borrow books with a tap, and either read or listen right in the app. Everything you borrow returns automatically on the due date, so there's no worry about late fees. If a book you want is checked out, you can place a hold and Libby will let you know as soon as it becomes available.

Libby is especially helpful for anyone who finds small print challenging. You can adjust the text size for comfortable reading—or switch to audiobooks and let someone read to you. It's a great way to stay engaged, entertained, and connected to your library during the colder months. If you need help getting started, your local librarian will be happy to assist.

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Social Media Engagement for November

YouTube

Subscribers: 187 (1 new subscribers)

Views: 506 (About the same as usual)

Watch Time: 22.4 hours (2.4 more than usual)

Subscribers = The number of people who have subscribed to our channel, indicating they want to receive updates and see our content

Views = The total number of times a person intentionally plays one of our videos and watches it for at least 30 seconds.

Watch Time: The total amount of time people spent watching our videos

Facebook

Views: 858 (Down 78%)

Interactions: 5 (Down 93%)

Followers: 580 (One more than last month)

Views = Total number of times our content was played or displayed, including repeat views

Interactions = The total number of times someone interacts with one of our posts including likes, comments, shares, reactions, etc.

Followers = The number of new people who have chosen to receive updates from our Facebook profile

Jock Irvine, Technology Integrator

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Birthdays

Arthur Swenson Jr. – 12/6



PRAYER CONCERNS

If you would like your name included in the weekly bulletin prayer list, please contact our church administrator, Kathy. (secretary@concordfirstchurch.org)

The Prayer Circle asks you to keep in prayer for the following members and friends:

Carol Hovey - Healing

Matt Wildman - Healing

Family & Friends of Howard "BJ"

Steinberg - Peace

Family of Franklin Richardson Rouse—
Peace