

NORTH STAR

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
May 2024

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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UCC
May 2024

Gathered Since 1730

**Serving, Welcoming, Growing in
Christ**

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From The Pastor

Greetings Beloved in Christ,

Watch closely: I am preparing something new; it's happening now, even as I speak, and you're about to see it. I am preparing a way through the desert; Waters will flow where there had been none. (Isaiah 43:19, The Voice)

"You didn't come into this world. You came out of it, like a wave from the ocean. You are not a stranger here." —Alan Watts

Hello and welcome to May! April showers bring May flowers, and goodness, gracious the world is opening up into bloom. Incidentally I have the gift of witnessing TWO springs this year, as my time spent with The Forest Therapy School took place on the Pennsylvania/Delaware border, where everything but the trees are fully "leafed out." And here, especially up in my woods, things are still just waking up. I arrived home to beautiful Bleeding Hearts and "Cream Striped" Violets.

I am so very grateful to have had the space for a "home-rest" vacation, before my Forest Bathing certification training. My body was not in good shape physically or mentally. And, (praise God!) I now understand why. See, over the past few years, during the pandemic and beyond, the Holy Spirit has been peeling back layers of self-protection, so that I might continue to become, more and more, my authentic self.

First, I discovered that I am an introvert, which took a year to process. Then, I was led to see that I am "neuro-spicy," as the kids are calling it, in that I have ADHD. And now, with the space for healing this past month, God has revealed that I am also Autistic. Coming to that understanding has caused me to cry tears of relief, give myself a profound amount of compassion and grace, and to look back in my life, finally able to see my AuADHD self (that is one who is Autistic and also has ADHD) in all moments of my life.

I share this because I need you to know that how I do my ministry needs to change drastically in order for this work to be sustainable in my body. I can no longer "afford" the energy expenditure of 'clergy extracurriculars.' I cannot serve on teams and committees that are not directly part of my role as the Pastor of First Church of Concord. What's more? I don't want to.

We are doing such AMAZING, experimental, exciting things in our "small and mighty" community and it has been breaking my heart and spirit that I've had to say "no" to participating or have been showing up in body, but not in heart and mind, as I've had WAY too many other clergy commitments and I was autistically burned out.

I now understand that of the 168 hours in a week, 112 of those are "waking." Of those waking hours I need to spend at least 60% (67 hours) of my time alone, in my own head, and not thinking or worrying about anyone else. This leaves 45 hours that I am

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interacting with humans in a week. 40 of those are for my role as Pastor of First Church. That leaves 5 hours left for appointments, grocery shopping, time with friends (even "just" on the phone), dinner out - basically anything that involves other human beings.

I share that so you can understand where I am now coming from AND I also need to share that I am THRILLED to be able to finally give myself the permission to spend that much time alone (without feeling guilty). As well as the permission to more deeply commit my working hours to what God is doing in our congregation.

God is doing amazing things with and through us and I want to be here, present, as much as I am able. This means further personal adaptation, and I'm here for it as each new Divine revelation gives me greater freedom.

Blessings,
Pastor Emilia

PS. There will shortly be invitations to experience Forest Bathing for those who are interested!

A Jazz Sanctuary Sampler



On Tuesday, May 7, we'll be at Havenwood/Heritage Heights to present an abbreviated Jazz Sanctuary service. We're doing this in the hopes of encouraging the residents to start attending our Jazz Sanctuary services on the third Sunday of the month. Havenwood typically wouldn't provide transportation on a Sunday afternoon, but if enough people express interest, they may hire a driver for this.

We'd love to see some First Church folks there, so please consider attending! We will be in the downstairs auditorium in the main building from 2:00 to 3:00 PM

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Ministry of Spiritual Life

With Pastor Emilia's liturgy and sermons on beauty, the following verse from our Bible came to mind. It is from Paul's letter to the Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." By focusing on the beautiful, it seems we touch on other aspects of life that are positive.

Holy Week events were so amazingly special and uplifting, one might have expected a sort of downward spiral in April—especially with Pastor Emilia being away. However, April has proven to be a blooming month continuing Easter's promises of resurrection and new growth. Tim Wildman's service on April 7, with his lovely sermon "Resurrection Community (Like Beauty) - Ever Ancient, Ever New" continued Pastor Emilia's beauty theme.

On the 14th, members were invited to attend Rev. Jed Rardin's last service at South Congregational Church.

Jazz Sanctuary on the 21st, where we gathered round a magical campfire, celebrated Horton Center—the beauty of the site, the beauty of the experience, the joy of singing, the friendships that are formed, and the transformations that

can happen while camping. It was a fun, energizing and inspirational event.

The last Sunday of the month, The Rev. Gayle Murphy was our guest worship leader while Pastor Emilia was away for her NGLI course.

May will continue to be an Easter/resurrection kind of month with events to inspire and energize us. We will be celebrating Mother's Day, Pentecost, Pastor Emilia's Tenth Anniversary with us, and gearing up for our Annual Meeting coming up on June 9. Pentecost will fall on our Jazz Sanctuary Sunday so watch for details on what will be a very special celebration.

Page-turners are reading "The Covenant of Water" for April and May. It is a lovely book. Newcomers are always welcome to the discussions.

May you continue to be aware and blessed by the beauty that surrounds us. It's a wonderful spring tonic to take in every day.

Eleanor Kimball, For SLMT

Susanne Driscoll

Kellie Heath

Brenda Placenti

Sheila Swenson

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Technology Corner



Using Artificial Intelligence for Bible Research

Artificial Intelligence, or AI, tools are becoming more available for the average consumer every day and I recently found one specifically designed to answer questions about the Bible. At **bibleai.com** you can ask any question you'd like and the website will provide a written answer to your question. When I asked "Why did Abraham follow God's order to kill his son?" I received the following answer:

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac demonstrated his faith in God's promise to provide a son through whom the covenant blessings would come, even if it meant God would raise Isaac from the dead.

This was followed by what the web site calls "Answer verses." In this example the verses were Genesis 22:1-10. The full text of the verses was provided, but I omitted it here to save space.

The AI's answer to "Why did Jesus allow Judas to stay at the last supper?" was:

Judas was allowed to stay at the Last Supper because Jesus knew that his betrayal was part of God's sovereign plan for the redemption of humanity.

This was followed by "Answer verses" John 13:27, Matthew 26:25, Luke 22:21, Mark 14:18, John 13:2, Matthew 26:21, Luke 22:3, John 13:26, Matthew 26:23, and Mark 14:20 (Text omitted here to save space).

I encourage you to try this tool yourself, but I should warn you that it can be a little addictive. You may have a hard time stopping as you think of more and more questions to ask.

There are other AI tools that you might find useful. For instance, I used an AI tool to make the picture at the top of this article and for the "Jazz Sanctuary Sampler" later in this edition of the *North Star*.

Jock Irvine, Technology Integrator

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Ministry of Outreach

School Kits and Clean Up Buckets:



On May 3rd at 9:00 AM, Sheila Lugg and Sara Nichols will deliver the school kits we have available. More bags were

purchased at Michaels. A final number of kits will be given in the next North Star but at least 63 kits will be delivered.

Please continue to sew or purchase bags since we have the materials to fill them.

Watch the North Star for the next item to purchase for the Clean Up Buckets!

Mothers' Day:

Mothers' Day is May 12th. You may have seen the ads from stores "to give something she'll cherish!" You can do that by donating to the CWS blanket fund in honor of or in memory of your mother. Please let Sara Nichols or the church secretary know so a list can be compiled and published in the bulletin on Mothers' Day. Cards will be available if you want to give someone a card. Remember a blanket does more than keep someone warm, it can be a window shade, a room divider, a picnic blanket, a baby carrier, a tote bag, a shawl, or a raincoat. It also shows that someone cares about them.

OGHS:

Thank you to all who donated to OGHS. We raised \$315. Your money will go towards disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the UCC.

Zimbabwe:

Nolian Mapfumo sent us a video of children marching and chanting (in their language) "In the name of Jesus we are soldiers". Children from the northern province uccz churches came together for a Northern region Sunday school Annual General meeting. They evidently had a great time.

Sara Nichols, Outreach



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RACIAL JUSTICE PROCESS REPORT



It seems that this year has been a very productive year in the process of working for Racial Justice.

We have had great feedback on the African American Spirituals and their introductions this year. We discovered that we have 34 African American Spirituals in our NCH. People have found hearing about their beginnings, their theology, their hidden messages, interesting and inspiring.

The same can be said for the Covenantal Restoration video series. We had impressive gatherings for watching the videos after worship on Sunday morning, followed by great discussions. The same could be said for the two videos shown after Jazz Sanctuary services.

It was a speaker on one of the videos who inspired the Holy Saturday Concert which was such an amazing success. The speaker said that some Black Americans have trouble getting to resurrection as they are caught in the fear and confusion of Holy Saturday—not knowing what would come

next. Despite their fear, they continued their faith journey with hope and even joy.

The concert was a success not just in terms of attendance, but considering how quickly and seemingly easily it all came together. Musicians, vocalists, presenters all were enthusiastic about participating and the

audience gave rave reviews. We were also able to donate over \$900 To the NH Black Heritage Trail—including First’s Church’s Donating of \$300. This may turn into an annual event. Surely the Holy Spirit was operating here!

The Steering Committee plans to continue to meet and move forward in this process. If you have any thoughts or ideas, please share them with a member of the Steering Team. We would be happy to hear from you.

Eleanor Kimball
For the Racial Justice Steering Committee
Pastor Emilia Halstead
Carol Hovey
Phil Kimball
Inez McDermott
Jim Wildman
Tim Wildman
Ken Kalloch

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Birthdays

- Nicholas Heath – 5/17
- Jean Donahue – 5/23
- Timothy Wildman – 5/24
- Judith King – 5/27



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:

- Elizabeth Hardy - Hope
- Nancy Sanborn - Hope
- Dot Cassady - Hope
- Hannah Irving - Healing
- Carol Emery - Healing
- Carol Hovey - Healing
- Matt Wildman - Healing
- Family of Jon Huntington - Peace
- Phil Kimball - Healing
- Family of Linda Strand - Peace

