



February 2025



Pastor's Perspective

The Dark Night of the Soul

Psalm 22:1-3 A Psalm of David. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? ² O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. ³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.

Here we are in the middle of winter. It's cold. It gets dark so early in the afternoon and the sun doesn't rise until after 7 a.m.. We tend to not get out nearly as much in the winter which means that our physical activity is lower than usual. As a result, we are more grumbly, irritable and gloomy. In short, we have the winter blues. For some, this is just a small, temporary change in mood that easily corrects itself when the warmer days of late winter and spring arrive. For others, this can turn into a full-fledged depressive state of being. The illness of depression is receiving more and more attention, yet it is still perceived by so many as a stigma. It's a source of shame and embarrassment for millions of people that suffer from what's often called, "the dark night of the soul." This shouldn't be!

David no doubt struggled with his own seasons of darkness throughout his life. Whether it was fearing for his life while being pursued by King Saul or dealing with the consequences of his mistake with Bathsheba, he certainly had times of struggle. The Psalm I've chosen today reflects one of those dark nights. David felt that God had abandoned him, and indeed, in our darkest nights, we can feel the same way. It is encouraging, however, to

realize that Jesus felt the same way that we do. He actually quoted this Psalm in His darkest moment on the cross!

Depression is a serious thing, and you should never try and cover it up or hide it from the people around you. Chances are you won't be able to anyway because the people that know and love you are probably more perceptive than you think. Rather, why not seek help in your struggle? There are so many qualified people who have helped so many through exactly what you are dealing with. If you need help, then first admit it to yourself and to the people that you love. Those that love you will want to help in whatever way they can. If you attend FCC on a regular basis, then you already have many people here that love you and will help you to find a good friend, counselor, pastor (I know of one!), or mentor to walk with you through the dark night. Before long you will find yourself emerging into a fresh new morning!

Even Jesus' darkest moments in the garden of Gethsemane turned into the brilliant joy of his resurrection morning! Let God do the same for you. He has so much in store for you, just waiting for you to receive it. God's blessings to you...

Pastor Chris

February Worship Schedule

Sunday, February 2nd 10:00 AM

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
 Sunday Friends
 Chapel Communion Service following Worship

Sunday, February 9th 10:00 AM

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
 Sunday Friends

Sunday, February 16th 10:00 AM

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
 Sunday Friends

Sunday, February 23rd 10:00 AM

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

Senior Moments

With Rev. Barbara Papagian

February is Valentine Month. I don't send many valentines any more. My sister and brother-in-law get one, my sons get one, Larry gets one, and my friend in Idaho. I like to send funny ones---well, maybe one romantic one.

This year I am thinking of sending God a Valentine. I love God more than anyone, so he should get a valentine ... Hmmmm, what should I say?

Dear God, it's kind of hard to write Happy Valentine's Day when there is so much sadness in the world. But there are millions of people who love you, and I know you love everyone, but I am wondering if it is a sin that you stole all of our hearts. You say that thou shalt not steal, but I guess it's ok because you are in all our hearts urging us to help others and introduce others to you. So thank you for taking my heart and molding it into something that bursts with love for all people, and animals and nature.

One more question... Your friend, St. Valentine called the other day and wondered why, since he had been through beatings and he was beheaded and then buried, why since he had been through all this do we celebrate with boxes of chocolates. Shouldn't we be kneeling down and thanking him for all he did, or at least give HIM a box of chocolates?

Thank you, God, for reading my letter and putting my heart in the right place.

Your faithful follower,
Rev. Barbara Papagian



The Church Office will be closed on Monday, February 17th in observance of the President's Day Holiday.



Gospel Music Sunday March 2nd at 10 am

The Chancel Choir, Soloists, and percussionist Leo LeBlanc will lead uplifting hymns, spirituals, and anthems to celebrate the gift of Gospel music.

Please invite your friends and neighbors to attend this moving service.

February Committee Meetings

- Sunday, February 2 at 11:15AM—Deacons
- Tuesday, February 4 at 6:30PM—Membership
- Monday, February 10 at 6PM—Stewardship
- Tuesday, February 11 at 6PM—Church Council
- Monday, February 17 at 6:30PM—Church Trustees
- Open & Affirming and Outreach Committee Meetings in February to be announced...

- ⇒ If you do not see your meeting listed here, please reach out to Lauren in the church office—thank you!
- ⇒ Please confirm the location of your meeting with committee chairs especially during the winter months.

Children's Ministry News



Bring your family and friends and join us! Sunday Friends, our children & youth program, meets in the rec room after the *Musical Offering* and includes lessons, crafts and games. We can't wait to see you there!

We meet in February on Sunday, February 2nd; Sunday, February 9th; and Sunday, February 16th.

Our Lenten Offering...

Lent is the 40 day period between Ash Wednesday, March 5th, and Easter Sunday, April 20th. Traditionally it has been a time when Christians re-examine their spiritual life and try to discern the quality of their relationship with God.

Watch for our annual Lenten letter coming to your mailbox in early March so that you can plan your own offering. On the back of the envelope you can write in your Pledge number, or write your name, so we can report it on your annual giving statement.

We thank you for whatever you are able to do to strengthen the work of our Church!



Bible Study News

Rev. Stevens will be offering future bible study session times/modes (Zoom) to accommodate different schedules — please stay tuned for an announcement on upcoming bible study dates!

Reach out with questions to Rev. Stevens via email to: cstevens@FCCManchesterNH.org.



Volunteer Opportunities at FCC!

Help serve the evening meal at **Families in Transition (FIT) from 4:30 to 5:45 pm**

Held at the FIT Adult Emergency Shelter at 199 Manchester Street.

Upcoming dates include Tues., Feb. 11th, Weds., Feb. 19th & Fri., Feb. 28th. Put your name on the sign-up sheet on the church office window.

Join FCC Volunteers at the **FIT Food Pantry: Date to be announced...**

We sort donations and stock shelves and help wherever needed—just 2 hours of your time to help the food insecure in Manchester. Please see the sign-up sheet on the church office window.

FIT Family Center: Date to be announced...

Do crafts with kids (ages 5 - 12) while parents are preparing their dinners in the kitchen. See the sign-up sheet on the church office window.

Resilience Reins at UpReach Therapeutic Riding Center:

We are serving and providing dinner for the families of this wonderful program on **Wednesday, Feb. 5th at 6 pm**. See the sign-up sheet on the church office window.



Evening Conversation Café is Monday, February 3rd from 6:30-7:30 pm.

Volunteers provide conversation, laughter, connection and encouragement for the students. Sign up on the church office window to join us!

Volunteers are needed to assist with the FCC Community Food Pantry by serving our visitors twice per week on Mondays from 9-12 and Thursdays from 12-3 at FCC.

Please sign up on the office window!

Join Coach Bill Jones as a Young Athletes volunteer coach on Mondays from 5:30-6:30pm at the Manchester Music School!

For this opportunity, please contact Bill via cell or email: 603-860-1236 or wjones0615@comcast.net.

Sign-up sheets for all volunteer opportunities are posted on the church office window (office hallway near restrooms).

If you have questions on any of these volunteer opportunities or would like to sign up, speak to Lauren in the office Mon-Friday or contact Liz Verity, Volunteer Coordinator, at liz-v@comcast.net, call or text to 603-494-6785.

Volunteers Make a Difference

News From FCC Outreach February 2025



FCC Food Pantry News



Our February Donation food for the Food Pantry will celebrate heart friendly canned tomato products such as tomato sauce, diced or stewed tomatoes, pasta sauce, tomato paste. We already have plenty of tomato soup, so sauces

would be especially welcome. **Thanks so much for your support!**

We welcome volunteers to assist with the Food Pantry by serving our visitors twice per week on Mondays from 9-12 and Thursdays from 12-3 at FCC. Please sign up on the office window!

Holly Berry Fair News!

The Holly Berry Fair craft gathering is starting up for our fourth annual fair on October 18, 2025!

Get ready to join in on the fun Thursday morning starting March 6 from 9:00 to 12:00. Remember you don't have to have a lot of experience, just come willing to help in any way possible. We will be meeting every other week on Thursday morning.

Here is the schedule: March 6 & 20, April 3 & 17. On May 1st we will begin meeting every Thursday morning until the fair!



Here are some pictures of the neatly organized Holly Berry Fair Craft Room ready for another year of laughter, fun and craft, craft, craft!



Elliot Health System Honors Dr. Paul Hoff with Prestigious Bill Green Award for Inspiring Excellence and His Dedication to Community!

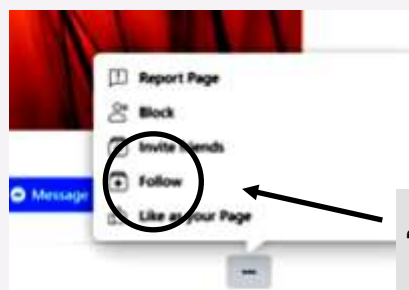


Congratulations, Paul!

The 2024 award was bestowed by the Elliot Board of Directors on January 16, 2025 to Dr. Paul Hoff, former member of the Elliot Health System Board of Trustees and long-time, trusted advisor. This honor recognizes his steadfast commitment to The Elliot, commitment to excellence, and his lasting impact on the health system!

Hello FCC,

In order to provide a better social media experience, we are in the process of reorganizing our church's social media accounts. To help us with this project, please click the link below and "Follow" the new FCC Morning Watch page. When we get 100 followers, we will be able to broadcast our **FCC Morning Watch** from this new channel. <https://www.facebook.com/fccmorningwatch>
Below is a screenshot that highlights how to "Follow" the page...



Click this button with the three dots

Then click the "Follow" option. Done!

Women's Connection News February 2025



Women's Connection had our annual "Game Day" on the evening of January 13th

We played the very popular BINGO game on Zoom. We had eleven ladies on the list to play but when the evening came, life got in the way for a few ladies and we ended up

playing with six of us. That is what's good about Zoom BINGO. It doesn't really matter how many play because it is fun no matter what! We socialized a bit then got down to the business of playing the game. This time we had two winners. Liz Verity and Karen Hawver have now joined the "royal court" with their yellow crowns. If you missed playing this time around, look for the next opportunity. We will probably set up another date to play.

Our next event is the Thirteenth Annual Valentine's Day Breakfast! Saturday, February 15th at 8:30 am in the dining room

We will have a quick business meeting with social time and some fun and laughs along with the delicious food that everyone will be bringing to share. The sign-up sheet is on the church office window. If you sign up, there are a few things you need to bring that day. The food you signed up to bring and a Valentine's Day Card with your name inside. Write "Happy Valentine's Day" on the envelope which will go into a box to share. Everyone will get one to take home. Also very important... please buy an item from the Dollar Tree Store that cost \$1.25. Here is the key... it has to fit into a brown lunch bag. It can be a Valentine's item but it doesn't



have to be. When you arrive for the breakfast you will get your own brown bag to put your item into so that all bags will look the same. If you have never been to one of the breakfast events before, this is one you won't want to miss. So sign up and come to join in on the fun and laughs!



Looking forward to the March event... Save this date: Sunday, March 16th at 2:00 pm for the "Escape to Margaritaville" at the Palace Theatre

We have 10 tickets saved for us. The cost is \$35.00 per ticket. This is a group rate. We have to sell all 10 tickets to get this price. Why not invite a friend? The sign up sheet is on the office window. A check can be made out to FCC with Palace Theatre in the memo and put in Nikki Brown's mailbox or given it to Pam LeBlanc.

Also coming up in March and April ... "Missy's Closet Prom Dresses and Tuxedos for Teens" will be looking for volunteers!

Watch for sign-up sheets on the church office window for dates and times. Many ladies volunteered last year and we had a great time helping teens find just the right outfit their proms.



News from the Girl Scout Troops at FCC!

The Girl Scouts meet at FCC every Tuesday evening and will soon be selling their cookies during Fellowship Hour in February—watch for dates to be announced in the Sunday News. *They will also have a special Scout Sunday in March!*



The Deadline for the March Church Window Newsletter is Friday, February 14th!

Please submit your articles & pictures to Lauren Henderson at LHenderson@FCCManchesterNH.org



Offering Envelopes now available

Please find offering envelopes in the narthex. Boxes have your name on them. If you do not have a box of offering envelopes but you would like one, please reach out to FCC Bookkeeper, Nikki Brown at NBrown@FCCManchesterNH.org or call her at 603-625-5093 x 230 (M-F from 9 am-1 pm).

- ⇒ **2024 Written Committee Reports are now available to pick up at church**
- Please find them in the narthex, front office and on the hallway table outside the sanctuary.
- ⇒ **The 2025 Annual Church Meeting is set for Sunday, March 9th following the Worship Service.**

Please plan to attend so we may have a quorum.

Open & Affirming Committee February 2025 News and Reflections

*"Draw the circle wide. No one stands alone,
we'll stand side by side."*

From the choir anthem, composed by Mark Miller

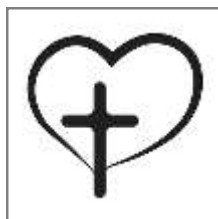
The lyrics of the choir anthem of January 19 reminded us of the promises of FCC's Open and Affirming Covenant, in which we affirm "...that each individual is a child of God and that all are worthy of God's love and grace." We revisit the covenant regularly, because it guides our thinking and our efforts on behalf of marginalized groups in our faith community and the greater Manchester area, as it did during the *Conversation* about the homeless last November.

While the homeless population may be less visible during these cold winter months, our prayers for shelter and safety continue for this group – much in need of grace, support, resources, and hope. Our own Maryann Linscott has shared her journey through being homeless. Please read her story, published with her permission in the sidebar to this article. Thank you, Maryann! Justin May summed up our responses to her story.

"This is very inspiring- and is a true testament to what faith, friends, and resilience can do to help someone get through even the toughest of times. We are very blessed to have Maryann in our lives!"

In 2025, our group will continue to support the Interfaith Coalition of the Homeless. Pastor Chris and Pat Long are integral members of the coalition, which meets regularly at FCC. A training session for homeless support is scheduled for May, and we will support that effort. Other plans include our annual participation in Manchester Pride in June.

We will also arrange for FCC folks to attend "*Considering Matthew Shepard*," an acclaimed oratorio to be performed by Manchester Choral Society in June.



The Open and Affirming Committee, with support of Pastors Chris and Barbara, and other FCC groups, strives to stimulate learning and spiritual growth and offer loving service to the Manchester community. The words of our Open and Affirming Covenant are

inclusive. *We seek to "draw the circle wide."* As we took stock of our efforts in 2024, we focused on mental health with a *Conversation* with Randy VanDeventer, we celebrated America's diversity and rich musical traditions when we organized a concert trip to hear the American Spiritual Ensemble, we engaged with and supported the LGBT+ community at Manchester Pride, and focused on the humanity of the homeless and the challenges they face when we met in November for a *Conversation* with Pastor Chris, Pat Long, and Randy VanDeventer.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Manchester

All are Welcome and Wanted

www.fccmanchesternh.org

We're proud that First Congregational Church welcomes all and that "*no one stands alone.*"

There are so many ways we can make a difference and faithfully live out the words FCC's Open and Affirming Covenant. Would you like to join with us? Please contact Pastor Chris or a member of the committee if you are interested. Our next meeting will be held on Zoom in February. Look for details on the FCC Calendar and in *Sunday News*.

Faithfully,

The Open and Affirming Committee
Jeanine Finefrock, Jeffrey Frye, Karen Hawver, Justin May,
and Carol Soucy, Chair.

My story by Maryann Linscott

In 2022 my mother and I were evicted from our apartment and moved in with my Aunt Jill (my mother's sister). Then my mother got cancer and went to a nursing home to be looked after until she died.

My Aunt became my guardian and she began to yell at me. I started running away and I missed my Mom. My Aunt would call the cops to look for me and finally she said she couldn't take it anymore so she dropped me off at the Shelter in Manchester (the Adult Emergency Shelter).

I lived there for 8 months and I had no hope but I got the help I needed and now I live in my own apartment. I have a part time job at Hannaford's in Goffstown. I have a job coach, therapist, and a case worker called Paige. I have a cat called Princess who is so much fun and keeps me company.

I go to church every Sunday, and I volunteer with them to work at Families in Transition and other places, to give back. I've been involved with Special Olympics for 15 years as a competitor and volunteer. I got baptized at my church and I have a God Mother and we talk every day.

I have my church family and my work family. My Aunt Jill is no longer my guardian, I am my own! I am so proud that I can prove to everyone and myself that I can do it!

THIS MONTH AT FCC

ACTIVITIES, DATES AND TIMES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. PLEASE REFER TO THE PRINTED CALENDARS BY THE OFFICE OR GO TO WWW.FCCMANCHESTERNH.ORG

FEBRUARY

Saturday, February 1st

No Church Activities Scheduled

Sunday, February 2nd

10:00 AM Worship Service & Sunday Friends

11:15 AM Chapel Communion Service

11:15 AM Deacons' Meeting

Monday, February 3rd

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

5:30 PM *Special Olympics Young Athletes*

6:30 PM Evening ENA Conversation Café

Tuesday, February 4th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

6:30 PM Membership Committee Meeting

Wednesday, February 5th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

6:00 PM *Volunteer Opportunity for Resilience Reigns Dinner Service*

7:00 PM Chancel Choir

Thursday, February 6th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

11:00 AM Greater Manchester Clergy Association Meeting w/luncheon (in parlor)

Friday, February 7th

No Church Activities Scheduled

Saturday, February 8th

No Church Activities Scheduled

Sunday, February 9th

10:00 AM Worship Service & Sunday Friends

Monday, February 10th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

11:30 AM Homeless Initiatives Group Meeting (in parlor)

5:30 PM *Special Olympics Young Athletes*

6:00 PM Stewardship Committee Meeting

Tuesday, February 11th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

10:00 AM Staff Meeting

4:30 PM *FIT/New Horizons Kitchen Volunteer Evening*

6:00 PM Church Council Meeting

Wednesday, February 12th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

7:00 PM Chancel Choir

Thursday, February 13th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

Friday, February 14th

No Church Activities Scheduled

Saturday, February 15th

8:30 AM Women's Connection Valentine's Day Breakfast

Sunday, February 16th

10:00 AM Worship Service & Sunday Friends

Monday, February 17th

Church Office Closed for President's Day Holiday

6:30 PM Church Trustees' Meeting

Tuesday, February 18th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

10:00 AM Staff Meeting

Wednesday, February 19th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

4:30 PM *FIT Kitchen Volunteer Evening*

Thursday, February 20th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

Friday, February 21st

No Church Activities Scheduled

Saturday, February 22nd

'Prepared to Serve' Workshops at Pembroke Academy

Sunday, February 23rd

10:00 AM Worship Service

Monday, February 24th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

5:30 PM *Special Olympics Young Athletes*

Tuesday, February 25th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

10:00 AM Staff Meeting

Wednesday, February 26th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

7:00 PM Chancel Choir

Thursday, February 27th

9:00 AM "Morning Watch Prayers" on Facebook

Friday, February 28th

4:30 PM *FIT Kitchen Volunteer Evening*

Please note the FCC Food Pantry is currently open to the public Monday from 9 am to 12 noon & Thursday 12 noon to 3 pm.

Outreach Committee and Open & Affirming Committees February Meeting dates are to be announced...

Save the Date: Sunday, March 9th, 2025 First Congregational Church Annual Meeting

Following the 10 am Worship Service

Join Coach Bill Jones as a Young Athletes volunteer coach on Mondays from 5:30-6:30pm at the Manchester Music School!

Please contact Bill via cell or email:
603-860-1236 or
wjones0615@comcast.net.





The February 2025 Church Window

Our monthly newsletter

First Congregational Church

508 Union Street
Manchester, NH 03104-4890
(603) 625-5093
www.fccmanchesternh.org

Sunday Worship 10:00 AM

*In-person with livestream option available
from our homepage
www.FCCManchesterNH.org*



WELCOME
Come Worship With Us



Rev. Christopher Stevens
Senior Pastor

Rev. Barbara Papagian
Associate Pastor

Adam Peithmann
Director of Music Ministry

The Church Office Hours

M—F from 9AM to 3PM

Please note that the office is closed on major holidays.

Newsletter Changes



FCC has transitioned to an electronic format (email) for the monthly Church Window Newsletter. If you would like to receive the Church Window Newsletter by regular postal mail, please reach out to the church office at 603-625-5093 x100.

Inclement Weather and Church Office Hours

FCC Church policy is that when Manchester schools are closed or open late due to inclement weather, the Church office follows the same schedule.

Please note that Worship Service cancellations are posted on WMUR.com.



Pledges & Donations

Your monetary gift has a big impact on our ministries and those we serve!

Scan this QR code to learn more.



1. Place smart phone camera over the QR code and click the link that appears.
No need to "log in" for one time giving
2. Scroll the giving categories and make your offering.

Thank you for continuing to mail in your pledges!
It's ok to consolidate a month. You can also send via your own bank's Bill Pay, or go to Vanco via our website. Call Nikki Brown, FCC Bookkeeper, if you need help at 603-625-5093 x230.



www.facebook.com/FCCManchester
Stay current by visiting FCC online at www.fccmanchesternh.org