

**The Pastor’s Piece**  
**Fish Sticks & Tartar Sauce**  
**By Pastor Walt Hampton, J.D., CFC**

Lent was always a buzzkill growing up.

Heavy and dark and foreboding.

And unpleasant.

We’d have to give up something. Like Saturday morning cartoons. Or chocolate.

We’d say the rosary every night. Out loud. On our knees. On the hardwood floor. In front of the huge statue of Mary.

And we’d eat fish sticks and tartar sauce every Friday. And Wednesdays too. Why Wednesdays? No clue.

All sackcloth and ashes.

It would be a long 40-day slog to Easter.

I would dread it every year.

But I don’t anymore.

Because Lent isn’t actually about doom and gloom.

Lent is about renewal. It’s an opportunity to stop and reflect. Which is more important than ever right now.

We live in a world that doesn’t stop. Not for a minute. There’s always one more email. One more errand. One more thing to do before calling it a night. And then we wake up and do it all again.

Lent invites us to slow down. To pause. To ask: What really matters? What’s getting in the way? What do we need to release?

It’s not about guilt or shame. It’s about paying attention.

In the earliest days of the Jesus movement, Lent was a time of preparation. New believers spent weeks getting ready for baptism. They fasted. They prayed. They stripped away distractions so they could focus on what was most important.

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## **Pastor's Piece continued from page 1...**

It wasn't about punishing themselves. It was about making space.

That's what Lent can be for us too. A season of making space.

Not just giving something up for the sake of giving something up. Not just fish sticks and tartar sauce on Fridays. But real, intentional clearing.

Clearing the clutter in our minds. The endless worry. The overcommitments. The distractions that keep us from being present.

Clearing the noise. The doomscrolling. The outrage cycle. The voices that tell us we aren't enough.

Clearing the hurry. The rush from one thing to the next. The pressure to be productive at all times. The fear that if we slow down, we'll fall behind.

What if we used these 40 days to make room for something better?

Instead of fasting from chocolate, what if we fasted from self-criticism?

Instead of giving up coffee, what if we gave up being so hard on ourselves?

Instead of subtracting, what if we added?

More quiet walks. More deep breaths. More moments of gratitude. More laughter. More kindness. More time with the people who matter.

Lent doesn't have to be heavy. It doesn't have to be a slog. It can be a reset. A realignment. A chance to choose what brings life.

Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days, not to suffer for the sake of suffering, but to prepare. To listen. To be strengthened for what came next.

What if we did the same?

What if these 40 days weren't about deprivation but about transformation?

What if they helped us come out on the other side more awake, more aware, more grounded?

Lent is not about proving anything to God. God already loves you beyond measure. It's about becoming more attuned to God's presence. More aware of grace. More open to love.

It's about realigning our hearts with what matters most.

That can look different for each of us.

Maybe it's choosing to be present in our daily lives, instead of always rushing ahead.

Maybe it's tending to relationships that have been neglected.

**Continued on page 3...**

## Pastor's Piece continued from page 2...

Maybe it's letting go of old wounds. Releasing resentment. Forgiving someone—not because they deserve it, but because we no longer want to carry the weight.

Maybe it's choosing stillness instead of distraction. Or wonder instead of cynicism.

Maybe it's simply remembering that life is a gift. That we don't have to earn love. That we are already enough.

Maybe it's rediscovering joy.

We don't talk about joy much during Lent. But maybe we should.

Because Lent, at its core, is about renewal. Not just self-denial, but self-discovery. Not just discipline, but delight.

What if we practiced joy this season? What if we approached these 40 days not with dread, but with curiosity? What if we let Lent be a time of awakening?

Maybe joy looks like gratitude. Naming what is good. Noticing the small, ordinary blessings we so often overlook.

Maybe joy looks like letting go. Releasing the need to control. Trusting that we are held in love.

Maybe joy looks like service. Giving our time. Showing up for those in need. Extending compassion in a world that so desperately needs it.

Lent is not a punishment. It's an invitation. A call to something deeper, truer, freer.

Easter is coming.

But first, we have Lent.

An invitation to slow down. To make space. To prepare our hearts for what's next. Not a burden. But a gift.

May it be so.

Peace to you,

+ Walt



## The Wisdom of Lent: Potluck & Program

Lent is not meant to be a burden. It's an invitation.

An invitation to slow down. To make space. To ask: What really matters?

This season isn't about deprivation. Or sin and damnation. It's about realignment. A time to clear the clutter, release distractions, and listen more deeply.

On Tuesday, March 11, at 6:00pm in the Fellowship Hall, we'll gather for The Wisdom of Lent, an evening of good food, deep conversation, and shared reflection. Over a potluck dinner, we'll explore the season's deeper meaning—beyond guilt or obligation—to discover how Lent can be a time of renewal, intention, and even joy.

Bring a dish to share and an open heart. All are welcome.

Because Easter is coming. But first, we have Lent.

Join us.



## Deacon's Corner...

By Helen Goss – Diaconate Chair

I don't know about you, but I could really use a time out from the chaos of the first few months of this year. It's like the world is spinning way too fast, and even though I am retired, I still can feel like that hamster on a wheel. So I wanted to share a prayer I found called "The Romero Prayer" by Bishop Ken Untener that another local pastor expressed in her weekly writing. It helped me to put things in perspective. It is also timely where we have just held our Annual Meeting.

*It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.*

*The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision.*

*We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.*

*Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.*

*No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.*

*This is what we are about.*

*We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.*

*We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.*

*We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.*

*We are prophets of a future not our own.*

**Communion will be on March 9<sup>th</sup>**, as Pastor Walt is away on the **first Sunday of March**. That first Sunday will be a **Lay Service**, with yours truly giving the message. It is Transfiguration Sunday that of "astounding glory." Lord knows what story I will spin on this day! Come and critique! You know you want to.

The season of Lent is upon us and will start with **Ash Wednesday on March 5<sup>th</sup>**. We hope you will plan to join us as Pastor Walt always puts together such a meaningful service as we begin our journey. Worship will begin at **6pm** and the administering of ashes will be offered for those that wish to receive. This is done in remembrance that we are dust and to dust we shall return. Come and gather with us.



## WHAT WONDROUS LOVE IS THIS

A 19th CENTURY NORTH AMERICAN FOLK TUNE

By Muriel Magg

There have been so many great hymns written over the years about the love of God and how His love is so amazing and powerful. No great skill or experience in musical performance is needed to sing most of the exquisitely moving hymns that have come down to us over the centuries. Many of the most famous and moving hymns familiar to us today, sung in churches and in gatherings of Christian believers throughout the world, sprang from the spiritual experiences and sentiments of unknown humble people living otherwise ordinary lives in remote times and places.

These treasures have become enshrined in our culture through oral tradition. Often aided by the work of more educated men and women who temporarily stayed among the common people and preserved their best native music, and later bringing them out of obscurity and into the spiritual experience of believers everywhere. We can thank God for people like William Walker who collected these invaluable songs so we can continue to sing and enjoy them today. These songs were too wonderful to be forgotten.

A leading example of these “folk hymns” is the hauntingly beautiful “What Wondrous Love Is This” found on page #223 in *The New Century Hymnal*. Its discovery and preservation are most widely attributed to William Walker (1809-1875), an American Baptist song leader, shape note “singing master,” and compiler of folk music. While a teenager, the musically gifted Walker led congregational singing at the First Baptist Church in his hometown of Spartanburg, South Carolina. Later he collected and arranged tunes, participated in singing schools, and compiled melodies from southern Appalachia and camp meetings. William loved to collect songs in much the same way that some people today collect baseball cards, art, teacups, or pretty rocks.

In 1835, after moving to Hartford, Connecticut, Walker published *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion*, using the shaped note music notation system that was for generations the foundation of musical teaching in rural America because most people during that time had no idea how to read music. Shape Note Singing was a way to take something like music and give it to everyone, even the unlearned. “What Wondrous Love Is This” was included in this book and from it this hymn gained its first widespread exposure.

The hymn is incredibly haunting and beautiful, putting into words the question that most Christians have every day, what did I do to deserve such a wonderful love from God and from Christ? The text recounts and celebrates that JUSTICE and MERCY are one, that GOD is LOVE (1 John 4:8), and that to save every person from his own sins, the Lord of ALL left His glorious throne in Eternity and, while we were yet sinners, gave His life for us. (Romans 5:8).

The hymn tune (CHRISTOPHER), despite its minor key, which is often associated with sadness, bursts forth with the redeemed sinner’s joyful exultation, thankfulness, and praise to Christ for laying down his crown as King and humbling himself in the eyes of God. The theme is strengthened by the repetition in each stanza, building and reinforcing the power of the message as the hymn progresses which made the hymn easy to learn and remember for the 19th Century Appalachian pioneers who first sang it.

As we remember the Passion of our Lord during this Lenten season, let us all keep in our hearts and minds the WONDROUS LOVE that makes life possible with Him “through all eternity”!

AND SO, LENT BEGINS...



## One Great Hour of Sharing Offering

Each year our congregation fully supports Our Church's Wider Mission. We give to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) and all four special Mission offerings. They are: Neighbors In Need; One Great Hour of Sharing; the Christmas Fund; and Strengthen the Church. These offerings sponsor vital ministries that bring hope to people in the U.S. and around the world. When we give to all five and become a 5 for 5 church, that qualifies us for posters that recognize our church as a 5 for 5 church. Our congregation will also be recognized at General Synod!

On March 30th the One Great Hour of Sharing offering will be taken. We have enclosed the offering envelope in this newsletter. You can mail your offering to the church or bring it to church on March 30th.



TOWN OF CONWAY

# BATTLE OF THE BADGES

SATURDAY, MARCH 29TH - 4:00PM - HAM ARENA

VS

**FREE ADMISSION**  
50/50 RAFFLE | DRINK-A-PUCK  
MUYHYHA SCRIMMAGE  
BETWEEN PERIODS

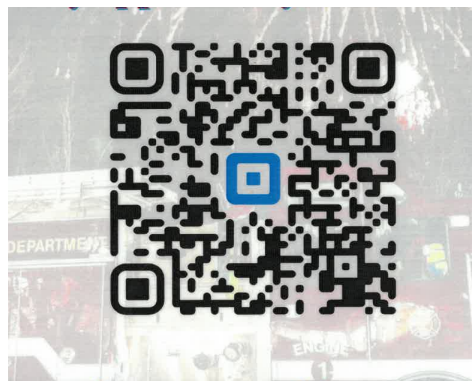
ALL MONEY RAISED WILL  
BE DONATED TO  
**THE VAUGHAN CENTER  
FOOD PANTRY &  
LEARNING CENTER**

ICE TIME GENEROUSLY DONATED BY THE HAM ARENA

The North Conway Fire Department is putting on this fundraiser to benefit the Vaughan Food Pantry and Vaughan Learning Center.

All proceeds from the 50/50 raffle and donations will go to Vaughan Community Service.

If you wish to donate, please see the QR code below. This is the North Conway Fire Department code.



## Focus On Immigration

By Pastor Walt

Last month, Helen Goss and I sat in a nearby church sanctuary, listening to stories that should never be real. Stories of families torn apart. Of people disappearing into detention centers. Of fear so thick that people are afraid to go to the grocery store, to walk outside, to go to work.

It is happening here.

In our quiet towns. In our backyards.

ICE agents sweeping in, masked and armed, rounding up refugees and immigrants. Some with visas. Some without. It doesn't seem to matter. All that matters is their skin, their accent, their vulnerability.

This is not a crisis happening somewhere else. It is immediate. It is dire. It is proximate.

And we cannot look away.

I invite you—no, I urge you—to open your eyes. To see. To name what is happening. To call it out.

Speak about it. Write about it. Call your representatives. Demand that they take action.

Support the New Hampshire Alliance for Immigrants and Refugees. Go to <https://www.miracoalition.org/> to learn more, to donate, to help in whatever way you can.

And above all, stand with our immigrant neighbors. Offer what you can—a meal, a ride, a safe place, a hand to hold.

Do something.

But whatever you do—

Don't avert your eyes.

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### NHCUCC Mission Statement on Immigration

We envision a community that cares for all of its members and in which all migrants who seek safety and freedom from oppression and harm are welcomed to the United States – and to New Hampshire, if they choose – with dignity and compassion. We respect the personal power and agency of the immigrants in our midst as the decision makers in their own lives, and we understand our role as offering support and accompaniment whenever we are privileged to do so. We are guided by our faith and by love as we dedicate ourselves to the quest for justice and welcome for all.

To donate to the NHCUCC/IRSG Immigrant Bond & Support Fund, go here:

<https://secure.myvanco.com/L-ZHQV/campaign/C-148V1>





# March 2025

| Sunday   |  | Monday  |   | Tuesday   |  | Wednesday  |   | Thursday   |   | Friday  |   | Saturday  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|--|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>23</b><br>10:00am Worship Celebration<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship  | <b>24</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting<br>6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150 | <b>25</b><br>11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>12:30pm - 2:00pm Clergy of the Eastern Slope Luncheon<br>5:00pm Diaconate meeting | <b>26</b><br>3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal    | <b>27</b><br>12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open  | <b>28</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting | <b>29</b><br>4:00pm Battle of the Badges Fundraiser for Vaughan at Ham Arena | <b>1</b>  | <b>2</b><br>10:00am Lay Worship Celebration<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship<br>2:00pm - 5:00pm REVOLVING CLOSET-TEENS | <b>3</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting<br>6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150 | <b>4</b><br>11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>6:00pm Lent Potluck & Program            | <b>5</b><br>6:00pm Ash Wednesday Service  | <b>6</b><br>9:30am - 2:30pm W/C Program<br>12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal | <b>7</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting   | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>9</b><br>10:00am Worship Celebration and Communion<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship   | <b>10</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting<br>6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150 | <b>11</b><br>11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>6:00pm Lent Potluck & Program   | <b>12</b><br>9:00am - 11:00am Essential Non-Food Pantry | <b>13</b><br>12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal                                       | <b>14</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting | <b>15</b>  | <b>2</b><br>10:00am Lay Worship Celebration<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship<br>2:00pm - 5:00pm REVOLVING CLOSET-TEENS  | <b>3</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting<br>6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150                        | <b>4</b><br>11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>6:00pm Lent Potluck & Program                      | <b>5</b><br>6:00pm Ash Wednesday Service  | <b>6</b><br>9:30am - 2:30pm W/C Program<br>12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal         | <b>7</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting   | <b>8</b>  | <b>9</b><br>10:00am Worship Celebration and Communion<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship                          |
| <b>16</b><br>10:00am Lay Worship Celebration<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship<br>11:30am Mission Committee<br>2:00pm - 5:00pm REVOLVING CLOSET-TEENS | <b>17</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting<br>6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150 | <b>18</b><br>9:30am - 10:30am Faith Fellowship<br>11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>4:00pm Trustees meeting                      | <b>19</b>   | <b>20</b><br>12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal<br>4:00pm-5:00pm Bell Choir Rehearsal | <b>21</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting | <b>22</b>  | <b>10</b><br>10:00am Lay Worship Celebration<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship<br>2:00pm - 5:00pm REVOLVING CLOSET-TEENS | <b>11</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting<br>6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150                       | <b>12</b><br>9:00am - 11:00am Essential Non-Food Pantry   | <b>13</b><br>12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal | <b>14</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting  | <b>15</b>   | <b>16</b><br>10:00am Lay Worship Celebration<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship<br>2:00pm - 5:00pm REVOLVING CLOSET-TEENS |   |
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| <b>30</b><br>One Great Hour of Sharing Offering<br>10:00am Worship Celebration<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship                                      | <b>31</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting<br>6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150 | <b>1</b><br>11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open   | <b>2</b>  | <b>3</b><br>9:30am - 2:30pm W/C Program<br>12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal         | <b>4</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting  | <b>5</b>   | <b>30</b><br>One Great Hour of Sharing Offering<br>10:00am Worship Celebration<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship         | <b>31</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting<br>6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150                       | <b>1</b><br>11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open   | <b>2</b>  | <b>3</b><br>9:30am - 2:30pm W/C Program<br>12:30pm - 2:45pm Food Pantry Open<br>3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal         | <b>4</b><br>12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting   | <b>5</b>  | <b>30</b><br>One Great Hour of Sharing Offering<br>10:00am Worship Celebration<br>11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship |

## Prepared to Serve 2025

Prepared to Serve is the annual workshop day put on by the New Hampshire Conference of the UCC. The event is a place to boost skills, connect with others who share a hopeful vision for the future, and equip attendees with tools to bring back to their congregations! This year's event was amazing. Put it on your radar to attend next year!



### LECTIONARIES READINGS

#### MARCH 2, 2025

#### *Transfiguration of the Lord*

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36 [37-43]

#### MARCH 9, 2025

#### *First Sunday In Lent*

#### *Communion Sunday*

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

#### MARCH 16, 2025

#### *Second Sunday In Lent*

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Philippians 3;17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

#### MARCH 23, 2025

#### *Third Sunday In Lent*

Isaiah 55:1-9

Psalm 63:1-9

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

#### MARCH 30, 2025

#### *Fourth Sunday In Lent*

Joshua 5:9-12

Psalm 32

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32



Remember to set clocks ahead on Saturday, March 8th, before retiring for the evening. We don't want you to be late for church!!!

- 03-01 Jeanne Twehous
- 03-01 Fred Smith
- 03-09 Ken Schiller
- 03-11 Kelsey MacMillan
- 03-12 Francis Richardson
- 03-13 Jacqueline Howe
- 03-14 Joshua Leighton
- 03-15 Elizabeth Howland
- 03-15 Karen Davenport
- 03-19 Maureen Garrette
- 03-22 Raelynn Smith
- 03-28 Tom Davidson



- 03-16 Harry & Debbie Smith
- 03-19 Ron and Sally Kratt



Please pray for those dealing with illness, surgery or recovery, especially: **Tony; Evelyn Porter; Linda Hyde; Jesse & Linda Red Horse; Angie Terry, Jennifer Terry's sister-in-law; Mary Gaudette; Mary (Mae) Ellen Shea; and Mary Lou Waite.**

Remember those who mourn especially, the family of **Daniel Gannon.**

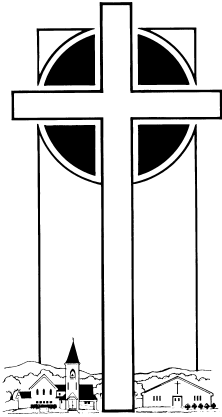
Remember those in our extended care facilities.  
*At Merriman House:*  
**Liz George-Hussey; Marilyn Elliott; and Cynthia Briggs.**

**Please call the church office with prayer concerns if you wish names to be listed in the next Congregate Tidings.**

**The Congregate Tidings**  
**First Church of Christ, Congregational**  
**United Church of Christ**  
**PO Box 401**  
**N Conway, NH 03860-0401**



**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**



**TO:**

## **Ash Wednesday Service**

Lent begins in ashes—not as an ending, but as an invitation.

On Wednesday, March 5, at 6:00 PM, we gather for a simple service of reflection, prayer, and the imposition of ashes. This is a time to pause, to clear space, to remember what truly matters. Not a ritual of sorrow, but a call to renewal.

Please join us. Come as you are. All are welcome.



## **CHURCH & VAUGHAN STAFF**

Pastor: Rev. Walt Hampton, J.D., CFC

Church Administrator/Editor: Denise Leighton

Pianist/Organist: Patrick Speckamp

Associate Organist: Muriel Magg

Chancel Choir and Handbell Choir Director:

Anne W. Polak

Vaughan Administrator: Jennifer Perkins

Vaughan Learning Center Director:

Heather Ouellette

Church Sexton: Mark Schiller

### **Worship Service at 10am**

**Church Office (603)356-2324**

**Pastor Ext. #2, Denise Ext. #1**

**Fax Number (603)356-2106**

**Vaughan Food Pantry (603)602-1801**

**Vaughan Learning Center (603)356-5213**

**E-mail addresses:**

**[pastor@firstchurchnc.com](mailto:pastor@firstchurchnc.com)**

**[churchoffice@firstchurchnc.com](mailto:churchoffice@firstchurchnc.com)**

**Church Website: [www.firstchurchnc.com](http://www.firstchurchnc.com)**

**Facebook: [www.facebook.com/firstchurchncnh](http://www.facebook.com/firstchurchncnh)**