

The Congregate Tidings

Volume 40, Issue 3

March 2026

The Pastor's Piece

Holy Vessels

By Pastor Sue Davidson

The Season of Lent, a 40-day fervent season marked by many with fasting, prayer, giving to the poor and making commitments to 'giving up something'. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and leads up to Easter. These 40 days symbolize Jesus' time of temptation in the wilderness. It serves as a period for spiritual reflection, repentance, and preparation for the resurrection.

With all of this being said, I like to take this season for a time of just being and not thinking so much about doing. I know that may sound a little funny as many of us, myself included, are thinking about Easter celebrations, warmer weather, and gardens. The retail spaces are filled with all kinds of bunnies, baskets, and candy which tempts me to lose a bit of focus.

I am not one who has ever been able to maintain a commitment to giving up something. Oh, I have tried! But in giving up something there has to be a compelling reason for this 40-day practice. This idea of giving up something is intended to enable us to turn away from sin, reduce worldly distractions, and increase our focus on God. Over the years I have known people who gave up negative habits, chocolate, coffee, or social media. I think my approach to this season will be to add something. So, I have chosen guided readings of faith.

As indicated last month, worship will be centered on Holy Vessels. The starting point for this series is that each of us is created a precious vessel of God's love. Each of us has experienced hurt in some way, bringing a sense of brokenness. To move toward healing is to offer the gift of life and wholeness. As we begin to see each person as a Holy Vessel, we come to desire that wholeness for all of creation.

The image of a vessel in the form of a beautiful glass container and the image of broken glass in the form of tumbled beach glass is a visual metaphor upon which the message of healing out of brokenness is developed. This metaphor will be used in many ways throughout the series to help us make something beautiful from that which feels broken.

"Ordinary pieces of tableware or beer or soda bottles are flung into the ocean. Years pass, or decades, and then one day, there it is upon the shore: a small shard from one of those long-ago discarded objects. Shifting currents have rounded its edges; abrasion has polished its surface; exposure to the sun has altered its hue. And so, when we happen upon it, here amidst the shells and seaweed, we can't help but laugh with joy at what seems a miracle: this ordinary fragment of silica that time and adversity have transformed into something beautiful."

— Formerly accessed from Writers at the Beach — no reference available.

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The opportunity to worship as a community of faith is a way that can make this season a time of recovery and closeness to God. May your season of Lent be filled with moments in which you, a Holy Vessel of God, finds peace, joy, and the goodness of God.

Scriptures for March:

March 1 - Matthew 8: 5-13

March 8 - Matthew 9: 27-33

March 15 - Matthew 9: 18-26

March 22 - Matthew 8: 18-27

March 29 – Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Matthew 21:1-11

Matthew 9: 1-8



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

Sunday, March 15, 2026

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

Dear Friends,

While traveling to UCC congregations across the country, I see evidence of their commitment to One Great Hour of Sharing. I'm always gleefully taking photos of OGHS offering envelopes and posters hung on the wall. I've found them in rural Pennsylvania, in the suburbs of Washington D.C., and from the West Coast to the East Coast. It's the privilege of my work to see this evidence — many churches working together to spread love in the world.

The impact of One Great Hour of Sharing is similarly dispersed. Our gifts don't support a single cause, but rather a network of partners worldwide. These connections mean we can respond quickly when needed and preemptively equip partners with the resources they require. This is a true love offering, sent forth with prayer and hope.

I will be praying this year over this Spirit-filled abundance of connections. I invite you to join me as you give generously out of love. I also invite you into the transformation that comes from being in this expansive community. The suggested date for the OGHS offering this year is March 15, 2026, but we welcome your gifts whenever your church calendar allows. Many congregations even designate a whole month for the offering.

Thank you for sharing in this love offering.

With thanks,

Rev. Rachel McDonald

Generosity Officer, Our Church's Wider Mission and Special Mission Offerings

Deacon's Corner...

By Helen Goss – Diaconate Chair

We just experienced a beautiful *Transfiguration Sunday* led by Eryn Morency. The service was meaningful, well-coordinated, and had a distinct flow to it that tied to her message. Eryn is in the process of becoming a chaplain or even going further in the ministry, and we can already see her calling is evident.

We also had a good Annual Meeting where the budget was logically discussed and the abilities of our present faith community realized. We decided that blueberry crisp at the Fryeburg Fair was no longer a sustainable model for a variety of reasons, but that did not stop creative minds from considering how we can still serve this sought after product from the church. We had a good run at the fair, thanks to Dr. Eugene Hussey, but times have changed both at the fair and for at church. We need new fresh fundraising plans.

At this meeting, we voted to work with Rev. Paul Nickerson of Nickerson Coaching, the consultant that the NH Conference recommended. He will be coming to speak with everyone to try and help us heal as a congregation and move forward from the fractured state many of us are feeling. I have included more information in this *Tidings* of what he can do for us, if we are willing to share. Once the time of his visit is determined, that will be made known to everyone.

Lent will begin this week with Ash Wednesday on February 18th. Without a pastor, we will not be holding a service, but there are other local churches that can fill this need. Pastor Sue will be with us for the majority of the Lenten Season once she returns from a southern mission trip on March 2nd. For the first Sunday in Lent, Rev. Linda Hirst, NHCUCC Transitional Associate Conference Minister will be leading worship, and then on March 1st I will be in the pulpit. This year we chose a themed series entitled, "Holy Vessels," for this period leading up to Easter. Pastor Sue has done a great deal of planning with Diaconate's support to make certain we could enter into Lent and carry this message while she is away being the hands and feet of Christ.

Our Mission Team spoke on Sunday about what we can each give back to help the church and our wider community with love and kindness. For Lent, I think this is the perfect time to consider not what you will give up, but rather what you can give back. As Sonya Porter pointed out, everyone has God given talents that were meant to be shared. Now is the time!

And a final piece of good news, the Bell Choir will be adding chimes to our musical instruments! This was on Floyd's wish list for many years, and thanks to the due diligence of Pastor Sue, it will soon become a reality. The Music Ministry of First Church continues to shine bright!

We look forward to seeing you at church for any and all our special Lenten services which will lead to yet another glorious Holy Week. Please join us and bring your friends!



Glass Beach, Fort Bragg, CA – photo by Christopher Ryan

“The View from My Window”
By Jennifer Perkins

On Friday February 13th, the Madison Food Pantry hosted a Meet and Greet with Congressman Chris Pappas whereby food pantry Directors from local food pantries and a representative from the New Hampshire Food Bank were able to voice concerns regarding food insecurity in our state. New Hampshire receives 1.2 million dollars from the government (USDA) and it barely makes a dent in the need we share. We were able to enlighten Congressman Pappas with our fundraising efforts, and expressed our gratitude to the many people in our communities who donate on a regular basis. That said, we have only so many people to tap for resources and that pool is being exhausted.



Simply a reminder...Strawberry Festival planning is well underway, and we would love to sign you up as a volunteer for the event being held in front of our church on Saturday June 27th. Make it a family affair, invite your siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews! Rain or shine, join us!

Vaughan Learning Center

Things are going great at Vaughan Learning Center! We are super excited for Spring to arrive, and our kiddos are loving the snow and being outside with the "warmer" weather! We are getting prepared for our April Calendar raffle, and we will be selling tickets the whole month of March. The money raised from our calendar will go towards bettering and enhancing our playground. To purchase tickets, please contact Natalie or Heather at 603-356-5213.

APRIL
2026

\$10 PER TICKET

CHANCE TO WIN EVERY DAY!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 (3) \$20 TOKEN CARDS TO FUNSPOT	2 BREAKFAST BASKET FROM THE BARTLETT REC DEPARTMENT	3 \$40 GIFT CARD TO BATTER UP BAKERY
4 OUTDOOR WATERPROOF SPEAKER	5 (2) DAY PASSES TO SANTA'S VILLAGE	6 \$25 LEAVITT'S BAKERY GIFT CARD	7 MEN'S BEARD GROOMING KIT BY MERAKI SALON & DAY SPA	8 CAKE BY KYLIE'S CREATIONS	9 MICHAEL KORS WOMEN'S HAT AND SCARF SET	10 FREE HORSE RIDING LESSON FROM TERRA EQUINE
11 HANDMADE BLANKET BY MISS. AUBRIE & \$50 SETTLER'S GREEN GIFT CARD	12 2 DELUXE PASSES TO URBAN AIR IN S. PORTLAND	13 15 MINUTE PHONE READING FROM ENLIGHTENED HORIZONS	14 TONIE BOX STARTER SET WITH 3 TONIES	15 \$25 THE MET GIFT CARD	16 SACRED CIRCLE \$60 MINUTE MASSAGE	17 \$100 GIFT CARD TO 603 AXES
18 (4) DESERT OF MAINE TICKETS	19 MICHAEL KORS WOMEN'S HAT AND SCARF SET	20 \$50 GIFT CARD TO RUTHIE'S FLOWER SHOP	21 \$50 CHEESE LOUISE GIFT CARD	22 BIRD FEEDER AND BIRD FOOD	23 POCO PREMIUM CHILD HIKING CARRIER	24 2 FREE OIL CHANGES FROM CRANMORE AUTOMATIVE
25 \$25 99 RESTAURANT GIFT CARD	26 5 IN 1 HAIR DRYER BRUSH SET	27 ROOT CELLAR PRODUCT GIFT BAG	28 \$25 THE MET GIFT CARD	29 STORYTELLER COLLECTION PACKAGE (\$450 VALUE) FROM THE CANDID LENS		

March 2026



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 10:00am Worship Celebration 11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship 11:30am Mission Meeting 2:00pm - 5:00pm Revolving Closet-Teens	2 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting 6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150	3 11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open	4	5 9:30am - 2:30pm WIC Program 12:00pm - 2:15pm Food Pantry Open 4:00pm - 5:00pm Bell Choir Rehearsal	6 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting	7
8 10:00am Communion Worship Celebration 11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship 	9 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting 6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150	10 11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open	11 9:00am - 11:00am Senior Non-Food Pantry	12 12:00pm - 2:15pm Food Pantry Open 3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal 4:00pm - 5:00pm Bell Choir Rehearsal	13 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting	14
15 10:00am Worship Celebration 11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship 2:00pm - 5:00pm Revolving Closet-Teens 	16 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting 6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150 April Congregate Tidings Deadline	17 11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open 4:00pm Trustees meeting 	18	19 12:00pm - 2:15pm Food Pantry Open 3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal 4:00pm - 5:00pm Bell Choir Rehearsal	20 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting	21
22 10:00am Worship Celebration 11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship	23 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting 6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150	24 11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open 5:00pm Diaconate meeting 	25 1:45pm Music Team meeting 	26 12:00pm - 2:15pm Food Pantry Open 3:00pm - 4:00pm Chancel Choir Rehearsal 4:00pm - 5:00pm Bell Choir Rehearsal	27 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting	28
29 10:00am Worship Celebration 11:00am Coffee Hour After Worship 	30 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting 6:30pm - 8:00pm Scouts of America Troop 150 and Pack 150	31 11:30am - 1:45pm Food Pantry Open	1	2 9:30am - 2:30pm WIC Program 12:00pm - 2:15pm Food Pantry Open 	3 12:00pm - 1:00pm AA meeting 	4

THE OLD RUGGED CROSS THE STORY

By Muriel Magg - Music Team Chair

Sunday, February 22nd, was the first Sunday in Lent this year. Lent, a season of penitence and spiritual renewal, began with Ash Wednesday on February 18th and ends on Easter (April 5th). It is a 40-day period (not counting Sundays) of renewal and recommitment to the Christian life, examining our lives in the light of Christ whom we are to follow.

As we settle into the season of Lent, our worship takes on a more reflective nature. Lent is a time of reflection about our lives, a time of repentance and preparation for the remembrance of Christ's passion - and music meets us in these places in profound ways. A song which reminds us of the importance of the cross on which Jesus died at Golgotha is "The Old Rugged Cross" (#30 in the red hymnal - Favorite Gospel Hymns).

If you look inside any church, you are likely to find a Christian Cross. Typically, it is made of stone, polished hardwood, some type of synthetic material or metal, and occasionally gilded with gold leaf. Very rarely is it a cross of roughly hewn timbers, which is odd because Jesus was not crucified on a cross of polished hardwood, synthetics or metal, and certainly not a cross gilded with gold leaf.

Over a hundred years ago, an American named George Bennard (1873-1958) spent quite some time contemplating this deviation from the norm and came up with a new hymn: "The Old Rugged Cross." George Bennard, who wrote both the words and the music, was born in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of a coal miner. When George was sixteen, his father died in a mining accident, leaving him the sole support for his mother and four sisters. George hoped to become an evangelist, but further education was impossible for him, so he too became a miner.

Some years later, George moved his mother and sisters to Chicago where he eventually married. George and his wife became active in the Salvation Army; in fact, they both served as Salvation Army officers. Bennard was later ordained as an evangelist for the Methodist Episcopal Church (the oldest and largest Methodist denomination in the United States from 1784-1939) and traveled throughout the north central United States and Canada conducting services.

In 1913, George Bennard was struggling with a problem that caused him much suffering. As he wrestled with his problem, Bennard's mind returned again and again to Christ's agony on the cross. After reading Galatians 6:14, he began meditating on the theme of the cross and was convinced that the cross was not merely a symbol of Christianity, but the very heart of it. The cross in his mind was no gilded icon; it was rough, splintery and bloodstained. The theme was so great he was moved to write the hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross."

The words, "the old rugged cross," came into his mind and then the notes of a melody ran through his head. Several weeks later, after a period of prayer, the poetry of the verses began to flow from his pen almost spontaneously. "I saw the Christ of the Cross as if I were seeing John 3:16 leave the printed page, take form and act out the meaning of redemption," he later said.

The song depicts the wonderful sacrifice made for us by Jesus Christ in His crucifixion. In stanza 1, we have a statement of the cross as an instrument of suffering and shame. In stanza 2, the cross is an attraction for us because it was carried by the Lamb of God for us. In stanza 3, we see a beauty in the cross because on it Jesus died to pardon us from our sins. In stanza 4, the cross becomes our means of identifying with our Savior and going to be with Him. The chorus describes what our reaction to the message of the cross should be.

CHORUS: "Then I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it someday for a crown."

Following the writing of "The Old Rugged Cross," George Bennard ministered another forty years. During this time, he wrote additional gospel hymns, numbering more than 350. None of his subsequent hymns ever received the wide public acclaim which was given to his first hymn.





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

03-01 Fred Smith
03-12 Francis Richardson
03-13 Jacqueline Howe
03-14 Joshua Leighton
03-15 Elizabeth Howland
03-19 Maureen Garrette
03-22 Raelynn Smith
03-28 Tom Davidson



Please pray for those dealing with illness, surgery or recovery, especially:
Dick Altenbern,
Evelyn Porter, Deb Smith,
Barbara Starkey, Mike James, Jeff
and Lois Ward, and
Frances Richardson.

Remember those in our extended care facilities.
Mineral Springs: **Liz George-Hussey**
Mountain View: **June Waltz and Jean Smykla**

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

Mission Moment

By Chris DeVries

Peace and Blessings to you all!

The Mission Committee is undergoing a transitional period, much like our Church in general. We are, however, blessed with two amazing additions to Missions, Karen Umberger and Eryn Morency have joined! We are so very grateful for their willingness to serve!! I feel that the Mission Committee has diverse representation from amongst the congregation, and that those who are serving all bring wonderful passion and determination for faithfully trying to hear how God guides us to serve as His disciples.

We would love to hear from you all about your ideas and hopes for how First Church can be a positive and helpful resource to our community. Where is God directing your prayers and concerns? Please find someone from Missions and share with us! You may also notice the Heart up on the bulletin board in the Fellowship Hall. Feel free to post a heart saying where God is leading you.

Moving forward, the Mission Committee will be providing regular update announcements during Sunday service to help keep the congregation informed on what we are working on and where we may need help.

God will never give us more than we can handle, I look forward to faithfully walking with you all as we find out what our Amazing Creator has in store for us!

Peace and God Bless!

NICKERSON COACHING

Congregations Moving Forward



Rev. Paul Nickerson

Nickersonp@comcast.net

Nickersoncoaching.com

8 Iverson Road,
Beverly, MA. 01915

508-930-9327

Coaching Proposal for First Church of Christ, Congregational

Purpose: To assist in resolving the current conflictual situation and then help to clarify the future vision of the Church.

Process:

A Weekend Site Visit: Meeting with congregational members in small, listening groups, giving everyone an opportunity to share their experience of recent events. Staff would be included in this process. This would be followed by preaching on Sunday morning and a 2nd hour to share my reflections and recommendations.

6 months of coaching: Working with a team, there would be 6 months of long-distance coaching that would include monthly Zoom calls, unlimited email coaching in between the calls and a weekly church vitality newsletter. The purpose of this coaching would be:

1. Implementing the recommendations to heal the conflict.
2. As the conflict lessens, clarifying the vision for the future as the Church enters a pastoral search process.

It would be a pleasure to walk with First Church of Christ as it heals and moves toward a fruitful future.

With grace and peace,

Rev. Paul Nickerson

Continued on page 9....

Nickerson Coaching continued from page 8...

Rev. Paul Nickerson is a UCC minister who served local churches in New England. He was on the Staff of the Massachusetts Conference as the Minister of Church Vitality. For the past 16 years he has served as a full-time trainer, coach and consultant to churches all over the United States, working with all the Mainline Denominations. Paul resides in Beverly, MA. with his wife, Rev. Dr. Marlayna Schmidt, who is Pastor of First Congregational Church in Hampton, NH. They have two grown sons, two grandsons and a beloved Fox Hound named Mona.

What Others have said about Paul's ministry:

Thanks to you for all your guidance, support, knowledge, hand-holding, insight and just plain friendship, during our six month journey together. Our church needed to address very uncomfortable topics, and with your help, we made it through the process with member involvement, agreements, and ownership. Stacey Darlington, lay leader, Hebron UCC, NH.

Our church's Vision Team has been blessed to be coached by Paul Nickerson. He has been a "good shepherd" filled with encouragement, optimism and positivity. He laid out a solid process, providing tools to help our discernment. Paul helped to build up our confidence, slowing down or speeding up to meet us where we were. We engaged the congregation in creating a purpose statement and dreamed together to imagine a vision for our future selves if we fully live into our purpose. Paul's connections add both credibility, value and insight into what the current experiences are of congregations throughout the country. Rev. Ami Giguere, Pilgrim Congregational, Harwich Port, MA.

Williston Federated Church has faithfully embraced and consistently put into practice the principles and strategies that emerged from multiple workshops and coaching sessions **under your leadership, Paul Nickerson**. We have heeded God's call to carry the gospel into the wider community. And we have followed your encouragement to be a visible presence in the world outside the walls of the church building. Williston Federated is a vital, growing congregation--and your coaching and encouragement are a major reason why. We give thanks to God--and we are thankful to you as well. Rev. Paul Eyer, Williston Federated Church, VT.

Rev. Paul Nickerson leads and teaches with a heart of God. He has been working with our church for over two years helping us write goals, vision statements, strategic plans and stewardship plans. Every step that Paul has walked us through has proven to be beneficial in helping our church increase their giving, be relevant to our community and reach new people for Christ. Rev. Kimberly Arbaugh- Carrollton First UMC, Ohio.

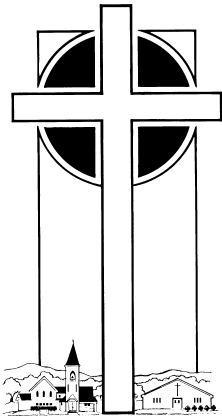
I have read dozens of books on church vitality, been to scads of conferences and worked with multiple coaches. Paul is simply the best: practical, knowledgeable, kind and optimistic. If you listen to him, you will get results. Paul was our growth coach at First Church Somerville UCC and his early tutelage has netted us a fivefold increase in worship attendance and pledged giving, and an exponential increase in joy--this, in one of the toughest town around where mainline Christianity is concerned. God is good! And so is Her servant Paul.

Rev. Molly Baskette

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



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



TO:



Remember to set clocks ahead on Saturday, March 7th, before retiring for the evening. We don't want you to be late for church!!!

CHURCH & VAUGHAN STAFF

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

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