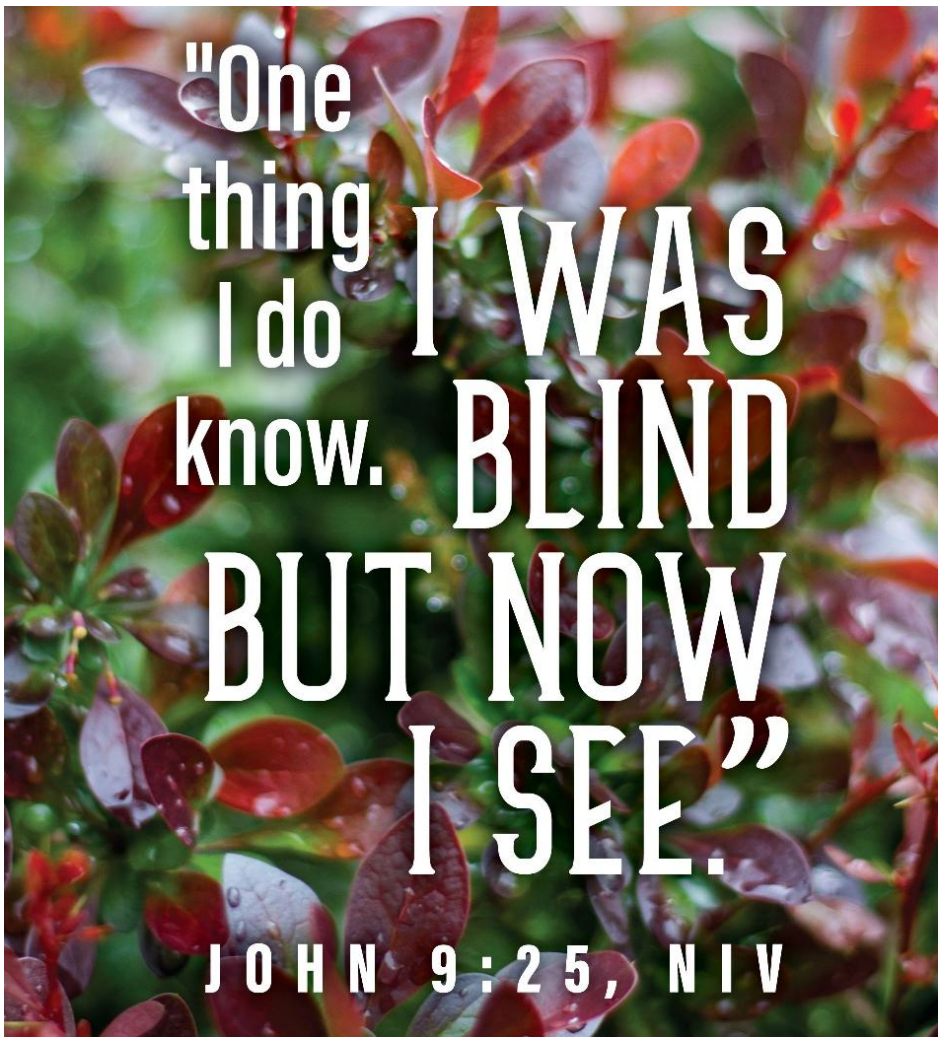

THE FIRST CHURCH

Congregational – United Church of Christ

†

Gathered December 16, 1685

No matter who you are, whom you love, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

Morning Worship

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 15, 2026 10:00 AM

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*If it is comfortable for you to do so, please stand.

APPROACH TO GOD

Let us keep silence as we prepare for worship.

TOWER CHIME Lisa Cleveland

MEDITATION "To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible." - Thomas Aquinas

PRELUDE *Ave Maris Stella*, Op. 18 (1920) M. Dupré *(1886 – 1971)*

II. *Jesus tender Mother, make Thy supplication*

III. *So now as we Journey, aid our weak endeavor*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: The world is full of the glory of God, yet so often we walk through it with our eyes squeezed shut.

People: Lord, we are here to see. Open our eyes to the beauty we have overlooked.

Leader: Jesus of Nazareth passes by today—the one who smears the clay of the earth on our blind spots and tells us to wash and be whole.

People: Lord, we are here to be healed. Touch the places in us that have grown hard and dark.

Leader: The Holy Spirit is moving like a fresh wind through this sanctuary, making old things new and dead things breathe.

People: Lord, we are here to live. Let us worship the God of light and life!

***HYMN 80** *The King of Love My Shepherd Is* ST. COLUMBA

Based on Psalm 23
Henry W. Baker, 1821-1877

ST. COLUMBA 8.7.8.7
Ancient Irish Melody

5 Thou spread'st a table in my sight,
Thy unction grace bestoweth,
And O what transport of delight
From thy pure chalice floweth!

6 And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house forever.

CCLI # 3034682

***OPENING PRAYER (Unison)**

Holy God, You once commanded light to shine out of darkness, yet we confess we often prefer the shadows where we can hide our true selves. We have mistaken our own narrow perspectives for the whole truth. Today, wake us up. Like those who have slept too long, let the Light of Christ startle us into goodness, compassion, and truth. Do not let us settle for a dim faith, but lead us into the radiance of Your presence. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the one who brings the dawn. Amen.

GREETINGS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS (Unison) Rev. Nancy Haynes

We welcome you with joy as partners in the common life of this church. We promise you our friendship and prayers as we share the hope and labors of the church of Jesus Christ. God grant that together we may continue to grow in God's knowledge and love, and be witnesses of our risen Lord.

ANTHEM *God So Loved the World* (2019) B. Wolaver

JOYFUL NOISE *(*1958)*

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURE LESSON **John 9:1-41**

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They

said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.
People: Thanks be to God.

GRATIA TIBI *Thanks Be to Thee* T. Tallis
STAFF SINGER QUARTET *(1505 – 1585)*

SERMON "In the Meantime" Rev. Dr. Andrew W. Armstrong

***HYMN** *Jesus, Remember Me* TAIZÉ

- Everyone in unison
- Men in unison
- Women in unison – (S)
- Women in parts – add Alto
- Women in parts & Men – add Tenor
- Women & Men in parts – add Bass
- Everyone SATB

"Jesus Remember Me" Text by Taize Community, Tune by Jacques Berthier. © 1981 Les Presses de Taize (admin. by GIA Publications, Inc.).

*** RESPONSIVE PSALM** (A Narrative Version of Psalm 23)

Leader: The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need, though I often act as if I have nothing.

People: He settles us down in the tall grass and leads us beside the quiet pools where the soul can finally catch its breath.

Leader: He puts us back on the right track, not because we are so clever, but because His name is at stake.

People: Even when the shadows grow long and the valley looks like a dead end, we aren't shaking with fear.

Leader: Why? Because You are right there, God. Your shepherd's crook and Your walking stick—they give us a strange kind of courage.

People: You throw a feast for us right under the noses of those who wish us ill. You treat us like honored guests, pouring oil on our heads until our cups are a beautiful mess, running over the brim.

All: It is settled: Your fierce goodness and Your relentless mercy will chase us down every single day of our lives, and we're going to spend the rest of our days right here, in the house of the Lord.

RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD

PRAYER CONCERNS

SILENT PRAYERS and PASTORAL PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done,
On earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day, our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE

OFFERTORY *Surrender* (2025) H. Sorenson

FIRST FOLK *(*TBA)*

Take my life and let it be an offering unto Thee an offering for my King
Take my gifts and let them be the light of Christ to see.
Take my sickness and my health, my poverty and wealth and use them for Thy good.

Take my hands, unclench my fist holding dreams that I insist are mine alone to keep.
Take the failures I confess; redeem them to Thy righteousness.
Take these objects I possess, trite measures of success, given me on loan.

Take my wounds that never healed, Thy lavish mercy to reveal.
Take desires not yet fulfilled and align them to Thy will.

Take my life and let it be an off'ring unto Thee, an offr'ing for my King.
Take my gifts and let them be the light of Christ for all to see, (to see).
Take this song to fill my heart, my praise through humble art, a melody of love
Take my accolades and fame; take any honor I might claim
And shine them back on Jesus' name. – On Jesus' name.

CCLI # 3034682

*LENTEN DOXOLOGY OLD HUNDRETH LM

Lord Christ, throughout these Forty Days;
Thy sacrifice our voices praise;
Through thy temptation, victory won:
Eternal life, Eternal Son. Amen.

*PRAYER OF DEDICATION (Unison)

Holy God, take these gifts, offered not out of a sense of grim duty, but with the "light hearts" of those who have seen the sun come up. Use this money to clear the vision of the world—to feed the hungry, clothe the cold, and remind us all that our real security isn't locked in a vault, but held in the strong arms of Christ's saving love. Amen.

***HYMN 319** *Just As I Am* WOODWORTH

Charlotte Elliott, 1789-1871

WOODWORTH L.M.
William B. Bradbury, 1816-1868

CCLI # 3034682

***BENEDICTION**

POSTLUDE *In reverence to the solemn season, remembering Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, a postlude will not be played during Lent.*

Flowers in the pulpit are given in loving memory of Fred McManus from Judy McManus.

OUR WORSHIP HAS ENDED; OUR SERVICE BEGINS

AV TEAM: Dale and Craig Neth

LICENSING: CCLI (print) 3034682; CCLI (streaming) 20119862; CCS 12820; OneLicense A-736284

SCRIPTURE: NRSV reprinted by permission of the National Council of the Churches of Christ.

STAFF SINGERS: Janet Poisson-soprano; Abra Mueller-alto
Joshua L. Gore-tenor; Mark A. Cleveland-bass

YOUTH MUSIC ASSOCIATE: Emily Hoover

HEARING AIDS AND LARGE PRINT BULLETINS
ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

PLEASE USE THE VARIOUS CARDS IN THE PEW RACKS TO HELP KEEP THE STAFF INFORMED OF YOUR PASTORAL NEEDS. YOU MAY ALSO SUBMIT PRAYER CONCERNS ONLINE. FIND THE 'PRAYER REQUEST' BUTTON ON THE WORSHIP PAGE FOR ANY PRAYER CONCERNS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH REV. NANCY.

NOTES FROM THE CHANCEL

Our **PRELUDE** this morning is based loosely on themes from *Ave Maris Stella*, a popular liturgical hymn of unknown origin. It can be dated back to at least the 9th century for it is preserved in the *Codex Sangallensis*, a 9th century manuscript now in the Swiss Monastery of St. Gallen. Though the true author is unknown, it has been attributed to writers Venantius Fortunatus (+609) and Paul the Deacon (+787). **Marcel Dupré** was a French organist, composer and teacher. He served as professor of organ performance at the *Paris Conservatory* from 1926 to 1954. He is known for an opera of 65 works (*many containing multiple pieces, such as his "79 Chorales"*). A renown improviser, his *Le Chemin de la Croix* (Stations of the Cross) have been heard here in Nashua in both concert on *First Music*, and select movements within worship (mostly on Maundy Thursdays). He succeeded Charles Marie Widor at *St. Sulpice* in 1934 and was widely known for his concert tours throughout the United States; he is responsible for being part of the great Bach-revival in the Americas, offering memorized concerts of Bach's complete works!

JOYFUL NOISE is back on the worship roster this morning, led by our *Youth Music Associate*, **Emily Hoover.** Today they offer a Lenten meditation on the mystical passage found in the **Gospel of John, Chapter 3, verse 16.** Composer **Bill Wolaver** set this text to a contemporary melody, composed for children's voices. Known as a composer and arranger in Nashville, he is represented by multiple publishing companies. He and his wife, Robin, are also established in contemporary Christian music circles for over two decades. They have received an ASCAP Award for '*Inspirational Song of the* Year' and Bill serves as the pianist/composer/arranger for the *Annie Moses Band* (for whom the children's choral music Series is named).

FIRST FOLK offers a new anthem by **Heather Sorenson**, internationally known composer, orchestrator, pianist, and songwriter. With hundreds of compositions in print, Heather is a recognized name in modern church music. Her composition style and lyrics are formed to specifically connect with congregations, to aid in bringing prayer and praise unto God through music. Although her career is international, Heather's heart is leading the Church in worship; she feels that her greatest calling is using her music to connect people with God. We re-print her lyrics to this anthem in the bulletin today, for further reflection and prayer.

Our **CHANCEL CHOIR** is concentrating in the coming weeks on preparing the beautiful **Afternoon Vespers on March 22 at 3PM** (Dubois *The Seven Last Words of Christ)* and for our **Festival of Easter** on **April 5, at 9 and 11AM** (joined by **First Brass**). This anchor choir of the ministry had a *very* heavy and enriching music roster in January and February, all the way through Communion Sunday in March, culminating with the *Three Eucharistic Motets* of **Gerald Near**.

So in the coming weeks, we will experience other choirs of the **Music at First** ministry in regular rotation, leading us in weekly worship. – After today's **Joyful Noise** and **First Folk**, come the **Decibells** (handbell) choir on March 22, the **Staff Singer Quartet** on March 29 (*Palm Sunday*), the **Staff Singer Octet and chamber orchestra** on April 2 at 7:30PM, offering the complete **Bach Cantata 78** *Jesu, der Du meine Seele* (Jesus, Saviour of my Soul) during our *Maundy Thursday* service of Communion and Tenebrae. – **Music at First** is a lively and varied ministry here at *The First Church of Nashua. – Soli Deo Gloria!*

Worship Schedule

SUNDAY, MARCH 15TH
8:15 am Worship in Shaw Chapel
10:00 am Worship in the Sanctuary & Livestream
Radio Broadcast on WSMN FM 95.3 & AM 1590
Sunday School and Nursery Care available

Christian Formation Corner

March 15, 2026 - Today is the third Sunday of Lent, and the liturgical color is purple.

Nursery News – The nursery school is open and staffed. Parents can check in at the Welcome Center and then proceed to the nursery. The Welcome Center staff can also assist in providing directions.

Children's Bulletins are available at the welcome center for when children choose to remain in worship.

Church Happenings and Outreach - New/Current

MESSAGE FROM OUTREACH – In 1944, Dan West, a Church of the Bretheren relief worker during the Spanish Civil War, was inspired to outline a simple but groundbreaking plan to tackle hunger around the world. He'd seen firsthand that giving people food was a short-term solution, whereas providing them with animals offered a steady supply of food for an entire family. This philosophy morphed over the years into principles that guided families and communities into self-reliance, developing effective ways to build inclusive and resilient economies. While the handoff of livestock remains a fixture, the idea has blossomed to encompass far more than livestock. Whether by passing on tangible gifts such as animals, training, or knowledge, this transforms *recipients* into *donors* and produces a profound sense of accomplishment. The intangible benefits are opportunity, dignity and acceptance.

NEWS FROM THE CHRONICLERS - Church Archives: If you have items that should be saved for our church's history (newspaper clippings, photos, etc.), please include information about the item, such as the date, activity, publication, names of people in the photo, etc. Documents with more than one page should have page numbers - mark in pencil if not already printed on the document. Items without this info are very difficult to classify and file and may end up being discarded as they lack historical reference. Please place the items in the **Chronicler mailbox** next to the church office. For items too large for the mailbox, contact Chroniclers Jean Lyons or Jim Stone. Thank you

SPRING RETREAT 2026- Rev. Andy leads our upcoming retreat guided by insights from Christopher Lowney's "Heroic Living." We'll enjoy spring time on **Cape Cod at Craigville Retreat Center from April 24-26th.** Visit their website at https://www.uccr.org/craigville to explore the Craigville Retreat Center. The cost for the weekend is $280.36 and includes all meals. You may bring your own linens, or a pack will be provided at the Retreat Center for $15.00/pp. **https://forms.gle/AoCpNJmjMs2N6XX56**

MARKETING/COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR- We are pleased to announce that Jim Ferguson started this week as the Marketing/Communication Coordinator. This is a new part-time position. Some of you may know Jim as he works with Joseph on music licensing. Jim will be in the office on Tuesdays and has a First Church email **jferguson@tfcucc.org** Please be sure to welcome Jim.

Choirs in Worship Next Week
Sunday, March 22, 2026 – Fourth Sunday in Lent
8:15 Organ
10:00 Decibells

THIS WEEK AT FIRST CHURCH

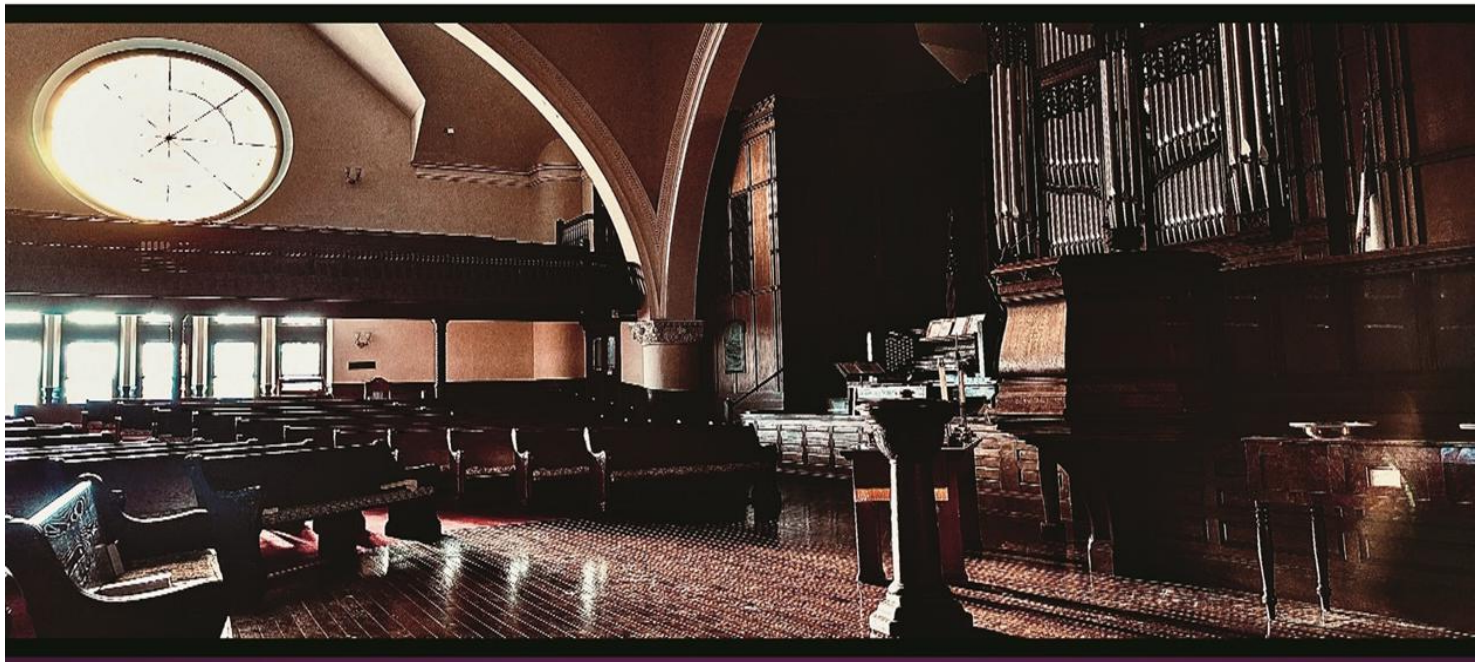
SUN MAR 15	8:15 am	Worship (Chapel)
	9:00 am	Lenten Study (Nauss Hall)
	9:15 am	First Folk
	10:00 am	Worship, Livestream
		Radio Broadcast, First Church Kids
	11:30 am	Board Chairs (room 10)
MON MAR 16	9:30 am	Bible, Friends & Coffee (Ladies Parlor)
TUE MAR 17	4:00 pm	Nashua Soup Kitchen & Shelter
	4:30 pm	Joyful Noise
WED MAR 18	8:30 am	Men's Group
	12:00 pm	Lenten Study (online)
	6:45 pm	Chancel Choir
THU MAR 19	10:00 am	Thrift Shop
	12:00 pm	Chamber of Commerce (dining room)
	6:45 pm	Decibells
SAT MAR 21	10:00 am	Chancel Choir
	10:00 am	DAR (rooms 14&15)
	11:00 am	Sisters in Sobriety (Nauss Hall)

FIRST MUSIC
FM
CONCERT SERIES 2025 – 26 SEASON

SEASON XVIII
100th Birthday Bash
BRINGING the JOY of MUSIC to the GATE CITY

SEVEN LAST WORDS
A LENTEN VESPERS

CHANCEL CHOIR OF THE FIRST CHURCH
POISSON • WILSON • CLEVELAND • OLEFIROWICZ



SUNDAY MAR 22

FREE ADMISSION
ALL ARE WELCOME

3:00 PM

THE FIRST CHURCH

1 CONCORD STREET • NASHUA, NH
FIRST-MUSIC.ORG • 603.882.4861

THE FIRST CHURCH

STAFF

Senior Minister, *Rev. Dr. Andrew W. Armstrong*, aarmstrong@tfcucc.org
Associate Minister, *Rev. Nancy Haynes*, nhaynes@tfcucc.org
Minister of Music, *Joseph R. Olefirowicz- MA,CAGO*, jolefirowicz@tfcucc.org
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Communication/Copyright/Marketing Coordinator, *Jim Ferguson III*, jferguson@tfcucc.org
Sexton, *James Halstead*, jhalstead@tfcucc.org

Pastors Emeriti, *Rev. James S. Chaloner and Rev. Dr. Jeffrey C. Evans*

WELCOME

A warm welcome is extended to all who are attending this worship service. A special greeting to those who are visiting or worshiping with us for the first time. Please sign the guest book in the back of the sanctuary or fill out the **visitor card** found in the pew racks. Fill out the back of the card, and put it in the offering plate or hand it to a minister, Usher or Deacon so we may acknowledge your visit. Join in the time of fellowship, in Fellowship Hall, following worship. If you have any questions about the life and ministry of The First Church, please seek out the individuals wearing colored nametags; they are members of the various boards and committees.

INFORMATION

First Church was gathered on December 16, 1685 as The Church of Christ in Dunstable. On the same day Thomas Weld was ordained and settled as minister of the church. The current building, built in 1894, is the tenth building to house the First Church community. In 1961, the church entered fellowship with the United Church of Christ. We welcome into our membership any who will own the covenant of First Church and seek to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ in the community and world. Those interested in joining the church should contact the church office for information. The Sacrament of Communion is celebrated on the first Sunday of the month and the Sacrament of Baptism on the last. First Church is supported almost entirely by pledges. Every member is expected to make a financial pledge according to their ability.

PASTORAL CARE

Pastoral Care is available to all in need. Please keep the ministers informed of occasions of sickness, sorrow, and joy. Let the church office know if you or family member or friend is hospitalized.

COMMUNICATIONS

If you have a change of address, phone number, or email address, please let the church office know so that we may keep our records current.

All information for the weekly bulletin must be in the office by noon on Tuesday. All information for the monthly newsletter must be in the office by 4:00 PM on the second Monday of the month.

<u>All use of the building must be scheduled by the Office Manager.</u>

One Concord Street - Nashua, New Hampshire 03064 - 603-882-4861
Office Hours: Monday-Thursday, 9:00am-noon and 1:00-4:00pm
Friday 9:00 am - noon
www.tfcucc.org

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