

FEBRUARY 2025

# Steeple Notes



## Minister's Corner

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our first learning module is in the books! We got our sea legs as a learning group and tried out new ways of thinking. I'd like to follow up here with a few takeaways and resources.

First, though, a big THANK YOU to everyone who prepared food! What a delicious and varied spread we had due to many caring shoppers and cooks. A major thank you also goes out to Richard Jesionowski, Eric Fila and Nicole Sirignano who provided behind-the-scenes planning and support for our hybrid success. And thank you to everyone who logged onto Zoom, engaged in breakout groups and were patient as we ironed out the tech.

The slides have been sent via email. They might be a helpful reference.

Rev. Jeffrey  
MacDonald



Upon review, I hope these ideas also took root:

- 1) Spiritual formation isn't a program to do now and then. It can happen everywhere in church life, from washing dishes to folding bulletins or praying for neighbors. Everything we do feels more appreciated and meaningful in this framework.
- 2) We don't need experts or professionals to lead us every time. If we use models, ordinary Christians can do this in every season. All it takes is open hearts and a known process.
- 3) Which model to use in which situation depends on what we're working with, just like ice and snow require different tools at different times (shovels, scrapers, salt, snowblowers, plows, etc.). Examples:
  - a) If we have an *activity*, such as running the Thrift Shop on a Saturday, then use Act First. The *action* that goes into running the store is the *raw material*. Follow up with theological reflection on the values that made that day's work a witness to Christ. Bring scripture, prayer & listening into the conversation. Templates can help if you want to explore using this.
  - b) If people come yearning to feel connected and valued, then use Love First. Here *our lives* - namely what we choose to share about the ups, downs and looming decisions - *can be the raw material* for conversation. Follow up with reflection and simple activity that makes participants feel appreciated and feel that they've appreciated others. This is derived from a children's ministry but can be adapted for all ages.
  - c) If we have a learning endeavor, then our common *engagement with that content is the raw material*. Follow it up with reflection on what each is learning and what it means for our development. Find ways to act visibly on what's being learned. That's Learn First.
- 4) As we gain confidence with integrating spiritual formation, we won't feel as much need to cling to ministry, revenue or governance models whose original premises are no longer tenable. We'll know that we can make faithful progress while experimenting. That counts for a lot.

I'd encourage you to learn more about all models that seem promising for FCCR. Keep in touch with others who express a shared interest and are learning more. Here are two books on topics that resonated last time and one that will undergird Module 2.

- 1) *Love First: A Children's Ministry for the Whole Congregation* by Collette Potts.  
Free preview: [LoveFirst i-xxii,1-138.indd](#)  
Get the book: [ChurchPublishing.org: Love First](#)

- 2) *Becoming A Welcoming Church* by Thom Rainer. Several tables said they'd like FCCR to strive to be more welcoming. This book has practical insights worth considering.

[Becoming a Welcoming Church: Rainer, Thom S.: 9781462765454: Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com/Becoming-a-Welcoming-Church-Rainer-Thom-S-9781462765454/dp/B000000000)

- 3) *Part-Time is Plenty: Thriving without Full-Time Clergy* by G. Jeffrey MacDonald

[Part-Time Is Plenty Paper - G. Jeffrey MacDonald: Westminster John Knox Press](https://www.westminsterjohnknoxpress.com/part-time-is-plenty-paper-g-jeffrey-macdonald/)

Let's keep talking about models that are gaining traction in your hearts and minds. Speak up about what you need or crave to learn. See you on Feb. 16 at 11:00 for Module 2 on part-time ministry models.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Jeff MacDonald





# Southern New England Conference

## United Church of Christ

*Living the Love & Justice of Jesus*



### **Sister Churches to Share Practical Knowledge in Feb. and March**

Several priorities in First Congregational Church of Rowley's strategic plan will be among the topics discussed at regional UCC events in February and March.

In February, the "Growing in Vision Together" event comes to our Northeast Area. Together with other UCC churches, we'll hear what's been done to achieve growth and innovation in the wake of the pandemic. The event begins at 9:00 AM Saturday, Feb. 8 at Reading Congregational Church. **Learn more and register at [sneucc.org](https://sneucc.org).**

Then on March 8, Super Saturday workshops in Shrewsbury will cover even more FCCR-relevant topics at a hybrid event. Presenters will cover, for example: "Revising Your Church's Bylaws: When, Why and How?"; "Simplifying Church Structure and Governance"; "Sharing the Story with and for All Ages"; and "Planned Giving: Start the Conversation."

Super Saturday registration closes Feb. 17. Be sure to sign up before then as either an online or in-person participant. In-person sessions will be at First Congregational Church of Shrewsbury. **Visit [sneucc.org](https://sneucc.org) to learn more and sign up.**



# CHALKING THE DOOR

As we entered the new year, many of us chaked our door to welcome blessings into our lives and our homes! Check out these smiling faces!



# MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

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## After Church Fellowship Assignments

January – Compassionate Care Network  
February – Thrift Shop  
March - Diaconate  
April – Missions  
May – Music Committee and Inspirational Singers  
June – Finance/Trustees  
July – Thrift Shop  
August - None  
September – Missions  
October – Finance/Trustees  
November - Diaconate  
December – Music Committee and Inspirational Singers.



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## Steeple Notes Entry Schedule



January -Compassionate Care Network  
February - Missions  
March - Deacons (including Christian Ed.)  
April - Finance/Trustees  
May - Music Committee  
June - The Thrift Shop  
July - Pastoral Relations Committee  
August - Getting to Know You  
September - Golf Tournament & Flower Committee  
October - Old Tyme Country Fair  
November - Community Dinner Team  
December - Pancake Breakfast Team

***Welcoming additional entries as needed!***



# Missions Committee

The Missions team's mission is to provide outreach and fellowship to the church and the community. We support organizations in Rowley and surrounding towns who are serving people in need. We have also continued to facilitate events and activities that bring people together in the community.

We are currently a team of just two people – Pam Sanford and Ellen Barrett – having bid a fond farewell to Holly Ardito during 2024. We are grateful for the frequent assistance we have received from Angie Estevez and others in the congregation who step forward to help support our events – we couldn't do it without you!

During the past year we have:

- ⇒ Revived the Bookworm Café – an annual event featuring guest appearances from local authors, used books for sale and home-cooked food. The March 2024 event was a big success, and plans for March 2025 are well underway.
- ⇒ Hosted a Community Café on the last Wednesday of each month.
- ⇒ Supported a local immigrant family who had recently resettled here in Rowley from Haiti. Ellen provided tutoring to help the family learn English. When they were able to secure a lease on an apartment in southeastern MA, we coordinated the efforts and contributions from the wider congregation to help them move, obtain needed furniture, and reunite them with a daughter who had been living in Florida.
- ⇒ Supported a senior citizen that was identified through outreach to the COA during the church visioning process; Pam has continued to meet with her weekly.
- ⇒ Sponsored 10 children and teens in our local community for the holiday Giving Tree.

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# Missions Committee

*...CONTINUED*

- ⇒ Collected modest amounts of non-perishable food items for the Rowley Food Pantry. We have been working with a Logan Mysliwy, an Eagle Scout candidate from the Rowley scout troop, on his project to create a larger, more visible collection bin. This should help increase interest in this ministry in the future!
- ⇒ Collected warm hats, mittens, scarves, and hats for Emmaus House ministries.
- ⇒ Sponsored "Mission Walks" as we were able – gentle strolls in nature where we can commune with nature and with each other. We have renamed them "Fellowship Walks" and look forward to more walks in the warmer spring weather!

This year we will likely be continuing many of the same activities. The next Bookworm Café will be in March – stay tuned for details

We are always looking for new ideas on how we can be of support to the congregation and the community. We welcome your suggestions.



# Happy Birthday

- ✦ AMY HANSON 2/2
- ✦ GIDGET ROBERTS 2/2
- ✦ ALEXANDRA FLODMAN 2/11
- ✦ PATTI CUMMINGS 2/13
- ✦ HANNAH CONRAD 2/14
- ✦ JAMES SOMERS, III 2/14
- ✦ JOANNE BLOUIN 2/19
- ✦ MARIE GROVER 2/21
- ✦ KEN SANFORD 2/21
- ✦ NANCY HILL 2/22
- ✦ DEDE TODD 2/28





HAPPY  
*Anniversary*

*February 18th  
Gale and Bobby Penton*

*February 22nd  
Nicole and Alex Sirignano*



# EVENTS



## **FELLOWSHIP WALK - FREE**

**FEBRAURY 2ND 2025 - 1:00 PM**  
ROUGH MEADOWS DOWN  
STACKYARD ROAD ROWLEY MA



## **PANCAKE BREAKFAST**

**FEBRUARY 7TH 2025 8:00A - 9:30A**  
\$10.00 PER PERSON  
UNDER 12 FREE!



## **COMMUNITY CAFE - FREE**

**FEBRUARY 26TH 2025 8:30A - 10:00A**  
FREE MONTHLY EVENT TO HAVE  
COFFEE, TREATS, AND CONVERSATION  
WITH AMAZING PEOPLE



## **BOOKWORM CAFE - FREE**

**MARCH 15TH 2025 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM**

- 3 AUTHORS TO MEET
- BOOKS FOR SALE
- FREE TO ATTEND - LUNCH FOR SALE

SEE FLYER FOR MORE DETAILS

# PROGRAMS AND TIMES

## PROGRAMS



- **COUNCIL ON AGING FITNESS**  
MONDAYS & THURSDAYS 9-10:30A
- **COUNCIL ON AGING LINE DANCING BEGINNER**  
MONDAY 4:30P - 5:15P
- **COUNCIL ON AGING LINE DANCING INTERMEDIATE**  
MONDAY 5:30P - 6:15P
- **GETTING TO KNOW US**  
WEDNESDAYS 10AM - 12P
- **ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**  
SATURDAYS 7-8PM
- **AL ANON**  
FRIDAYS 7-8:15PM

## THRIFT SHOP



### Hours

Thursdays 3- 6PM  
Saturdays 9- 1PM

## NICOLE'S OFFICE HOURS

Tuesdays and Saturdays  
9:00A - 1:00P

Remote hours daily, reach out  
any time!

[firstchurchrowley@gmail.com](mailto:firstchurchrowley@gmail.com)

# SNOW CANCELLATIONS:

SNOW CANCELLATIONS WILL BE ANNOUNCED ON OUR WEBSITE, BY EMAIL, AND ON FACEBOOK BY 7:00PM ON THE SATURDAY PRECEDING THE SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE



TO SUPPORT THE PEOPLE IN NEED AND THE FIRST RESPONDERS AFFECTED BY THE CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES, DONATIONS CAN BE MADE BY

- VISITING [REDCROSS.ORG](https://www.redcross.org)
- CALLING 1-800-RED CROSS (800-733-2767), OR
- TEXTING CAWILDFIRES TO 90999



MONTHLY

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# COMMUNITY CAFE

We welcome new and familiar faces to our community cafe where we gather to enjoy coffee and a treat!

Sponsored by the First Congregational Church of Rowley's Missions Committee. Treats provided by the Fellowship Thrift Shop!

WEDNESDAY  
FEBRUARY 26TH  
8:30AM - 10:00 AM

Contact us at



(978) 948 3993



[firstchurchrowley@gmail.com](mailto:firstchurchrowley@gmail.com)



[www.firstchurchrowley.org](http://www.firstchurchrowley.org)



EST. 1639

# First Church of Rowley

*...A voice of hope serving the community*

## PANCAKE BREAKFAST

SATURDAY

FEBRUARY 8TH 2025

8:00AM - 9:30 AM

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**\$10.00 PER PERSON**

**CHILDREN UNDER 10  
ARE FREE!**

**Our pancakes are served  
with coffee, toppings, and  
other sides!**

Contact Us  
(978) 948 3993  
firstchurchrowley@gmail.com  
www.firstchurchrowley.org



ANDRE DUBUS  
12-2

DIANNE C.  
BRALEY & L.S  
LENTZ  
10-2

Saturday

March

15

2025

10am - 2pm

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175 Main St  
Rowley MA 01969

# Bookworm Cafe

Join us at the Bookworm Café for a special day of literature and food. Meet authors, explore their works, and enjoy a curated book selection with a delicious meal. The cozy atmosphere fosters lively discussions, making it a perfect outing for readers.

Don't miss this chance for inspiring stories and delightful flavors! See next page - "Meet the authors"

**Free Admission**  
**Menu available with prices during event**



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# MEET THE AUTHORS



**DIANNE C. BRALEY**

**10 AM - 2 PM**

A gritty New Englander, Dianne C. Braley found love for the written word early on, reading and creating stories while trying to escape hers, growing up in the turbulent world of alcoholism while living in the tough inner city. After putting her pencil down for a time, she became a registered nurse, finding strength and calm in caring for those who couldn't care for themselves. Still, she never lost her drive to write. Seeing a painting and remembering a visit to Martha's Vineyard as a girl and falling in love when her bare feet first stepped on the sand, she moved there for a time, caring for ailing Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist William Styron until he passed. He not only was her patient but soon became her friend and motivator. He and his books helped her realize she missed crafting stories, and she had some to tell.



**L.S. LENTZ**

**10 AM - 2 PM**

First-time author, L. S. Lentz, has been an educator for over fifteen years. She is a wife and the mother to two adult children and one large mastiff mutt, Stella. After their move to a rustic farmhouse in Massachusetts, Stella struck up an unlikely friendship with a turtle, Shell. This inspired L.S. to write *Stella and Shell*.

Coming Soon: *Stella and Sarge* and *The New Adventures of Bacon McBean*



**ANDRE DUBUS III**

**12 PM - 2 PM**

Andre Dubus III's nine books include the New York Times' bestsellers *House of Sand and Fog*, *The Garden of Last Days*, and his memoir, *Townie*. His most recent novel, *Such Kindness*, was published in June 2023, and a collection of personal essays, *Ghost Dogs: On Killers and Kin*, was published in March 2024. He is also the editor of *Reaching Inside: 50 Acclaimed Authors on 100 Unforgettable Short Stories*, (Godine, 2023.) Mr. Dubus has been a finalist for the National Book Award, and has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, The National Magazine Award for Fiction, three Pushcart Prizes, and is a recipient of an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature. His books are published in over twenty-five languages, and he teaches at the University of Massachusetts Lowell.