



The Steeple

February 2021

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As the restrictions imposed to curtail the spread of Covid-19 are eased, please watch your email for Constant Contact updates about church services and activities. The Board of Deacons publishes a Constant Contact e-mail newsletter periodically to the congregation. If you do not currently receive this and would like to, please e-mail news@nmchurch.org to be added to the mailing list, or call the church office with your updated e-mail address.

Regular services and events continue to be postponed or cancelled, as we all keep a safe distance. Many members of the congregation and community have been watching our **10am Sunday worship** services **live-streamed** from our newly repaired sanctuary. Find the link at www.nmchurch.org

Your continued support for our church is critical while attendance at services is restricted due to COVID-19. Please visit the main page of the church web site and click, "Donate to the Church!" to find out how you can keep your regular pledge or donation to the church current.

Please see the link below to review guidelines for community/faith organizations regarding COVID-19. Please visit the CDC website for updates; information can also be found by dialing 2-1-1.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>



Prayers

Anyone wishing to submit a prayer request during the week is asked to send an email to prayer-requests@nmchurch.org or call the church office.

Pastor's Page

Ash Wednesday, marking the beginning of Lent, comes early this year: February 17th. This date will approximately mark one year of being in Covid lock-down. I invite one and all to have a very significant, meaningful journey through Lent 2021. Our souls are thirsty for connection with God.

Ash Wednesday is about redemption, preparation, and cleansing from wrong doing, as individuals, as a nation, as a congregation. In Joel 2:12-13 we read: "Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing." These words remind us that the day of the Lord is coming so we are called to return to Almighty God whose steadfast love will sanctify and bless all generations.

This theme of repentance also runs through other passages of the Bible. Consider Psalm 51:1-12: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit." This cry of the psalmist underscores that our spirit must be ready for purification in order to have reconciliation with God.

In 2 Corinthians 5: 20-21, Paul picks up the importance of being reconciled to God. "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

Finally, turn in your Bible or Google Matthew 6:1-6;16-21, and reflect upon how Matthew prepares us to pray with humility, seeking only the treasure we store in heaven. You will find the Lord's Prayer in this passage, too.

Let us enter Lent knowing that God's mercy and grace flow through the scripture, leading toward the hope of salvation by faith with the firm promise of Christ's love.

*Grace and peace,
Rev. R. Randy Day*



Deacon's Bench

It's January and we're heading into the middle of winter. In a typical year, we'd be hunkering down and getting ready for the dark, cold winter and accepting that it's just what we do in New England. This year, though, things are different. We have been hunkering down for ten months and it has been hard to see the light in the darkness on many days this past year. We need the light more than ever right now. While we wait for the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel when the virus is under control and our lives feel more normal, let's be the light for one another that Matthew tells us about in chapter 5:14-16.

At the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

There are many ways we can be the light for each other. We can call a friend or family member to just say, "Hi, I'm thinking of you." We can offer to pick up groceries for someone who cannot venture out to the stores at this time. Or, maybe write a note to someone who you know has been working hard, but might not be getting many kudos right now. Your good works help your light shine so that others may see the glory of God in what you do.

While we all wait for brighter days, let's ask God to help us find ways to shine His light in this world. I know this congregation has a lot of light to shine!

*Allen Holcomb
For the Board of Deacons*

Amanda Gorman, the nation's first-ever youth poet laureate, read her poem, "The Hill We Climb," during President Biden's inauguration on January 20. It is too lengthy to include in this newsletter, but it is worth finding and reading in its entirety.

It begins:

"When day comes we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?"

And it concludes:

"When day comes we step out of the shade,
afame and unafraid.
The new dawn blooms as we free it,
for there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it,
if only we're brave enough to be it."

Board of Trustees

The Trustees have been busy getting the parsonage ready for sale after the departure of Mike and Eileen on December 21, 2020. While the rule of thumb is to leave a house "broom clean" when vacating a home for sale or as a renter, Mike and Eileen hired a professional cleaning crew that scrubbed and polished everything. As a result, it was "show ready".





The realtor handling the sale for the church is our very own Lisa Briscoe. We were and remain in incredibly competent hands and we owe her our deepest gratitude. As of this report, the sale is going to contract for \$344,085 which is net of all fees and considerations. It's my sincere appreciation to be part of the selling team with members Susan Chapin and Ken Papp.

Just because the house showed so well did not mean that we were saved from performing any additional remedies beyond cleaning. Trustee Bill Jackson and I personally tackled or arranged for professionals to:

- Rent a 10 yard dumpster and split the cost for our "church stuff" in the garage and Mike and Eileen's no "longer needed treasures".
- Remove old, broken concrete, leaves and debris, and wood piles from the sides of the driveway
- Re-caulk the kitchen counter tops and bathroom surfaces
- Rebuild the cabinet floor under the kitchen sink
- Arrange for professional asbestos testing for existing pipe wraps and suspect floor tile and linoleum
- Contract for the removal of confirmed asbestos material in the basement
- Survey the house for electrical safety and as a result, had our prime church electrical contractor Eagle Electric spend the better part of a day replacing old outlets and covering junction boxes. This preemptive safety work paid dividends during the buyer's inspection
- Engage another one of our prime contractors, Marbledale Plumbing, to address steam boiler issues that were identified during the formal inspection. Marandola Fuel also repaired an oil leak that proved to be a manufacturing defect and one that was easily fixed. Jeff from Marbledale is also coming to identify a no-heat issue with two radiators, which is hopefully a matter of just bleeding them, and to reset a basement toilet after the asbestos abatement.

Two substantial projects this year are done; the church roof and the sale of the parsonage. The Meetinghouse Restoration Committee will be getting together again soon to discuss challenges to complete the remaining long-term goals.

John Wittmann, Chair

Pastoral Search Committee

The members of the Search Committee have spent hours reviewing profiles, interviewing candidates, and viewing online content that candidates and churches have posted. After completing every part of our vetting process, we were in agreement that one candidate was a great fit for the church. We met with the candidate and expressed our interest in moving forward. As the candidate considered our offer, we continued to supply requested information. As requested, we were scheduling a site visit. Unfortunately, after almost two weeks of waiting, the candidate indicated an intention to continue the search for a call. When asked, the candidate did not cite a specific reason for withdrawing. After so much communication and time together, this decision was disappointing and difficult for the candidate and all committee members. We have evaluated all other candidates to this point, and we have not found a good fit. However, we are confident we will find a candidate that will be a good fit for a vital future for our church.

According to communication with the Search and Call Associate and our Regional Minister for the SNEUCC, we expected the holidays to be a slow time for new profiles. Now, we are in the month of January, and it continues to be slow. I have checked other opportunity listings in our region. Most listings are older than ours and still vacant. "Why?" is the big question. For the most part, the answer is unknown. Any of the normal factors that impact a job hunt are possible. The SNEUCC checks minister profiles to be sure they are complete. They also check education and ordination. Other than that, the SNEUCC acts very much like an online employment agency. The decision to approach a church is solely in the control of the minister seeking a call. The decision to withdraw from a search after a minister has applied is complicated, just as the decision would be complicated for any person seeking a job. About a third of our total candidates have withdrawn. Some accepted other calls; while others did not specify a reason. Two individuals specifically mentioned compensation, early in the process. One submitted a profile, and one did not.

The Search Committee remains optimistic and is doing the following:

- Reviewing the Church Profile and making needed changes to reflect the church's status at the end of 2020.
- Communicating with the UCC for advice on our future path.
- Considering ways to attract more candidates.
- Reviewing any profiles that we receive.

From our experience, ministers look for churches that work cohesively together to reach a vision. Stay involved in the church. Love and help each other. Help our neighbors. Certainly, a minister would be impressed by a church congregation that rises to challenges, as we have tried to do in this pandemic. That is a true way to make our church a shining beacon. We also must have faith and trust.

If you have a question or comment, please contact me - I am happy to answer any questions within the constraints of confidentiality.

Doris Papp, Chair

Stewardship Committee

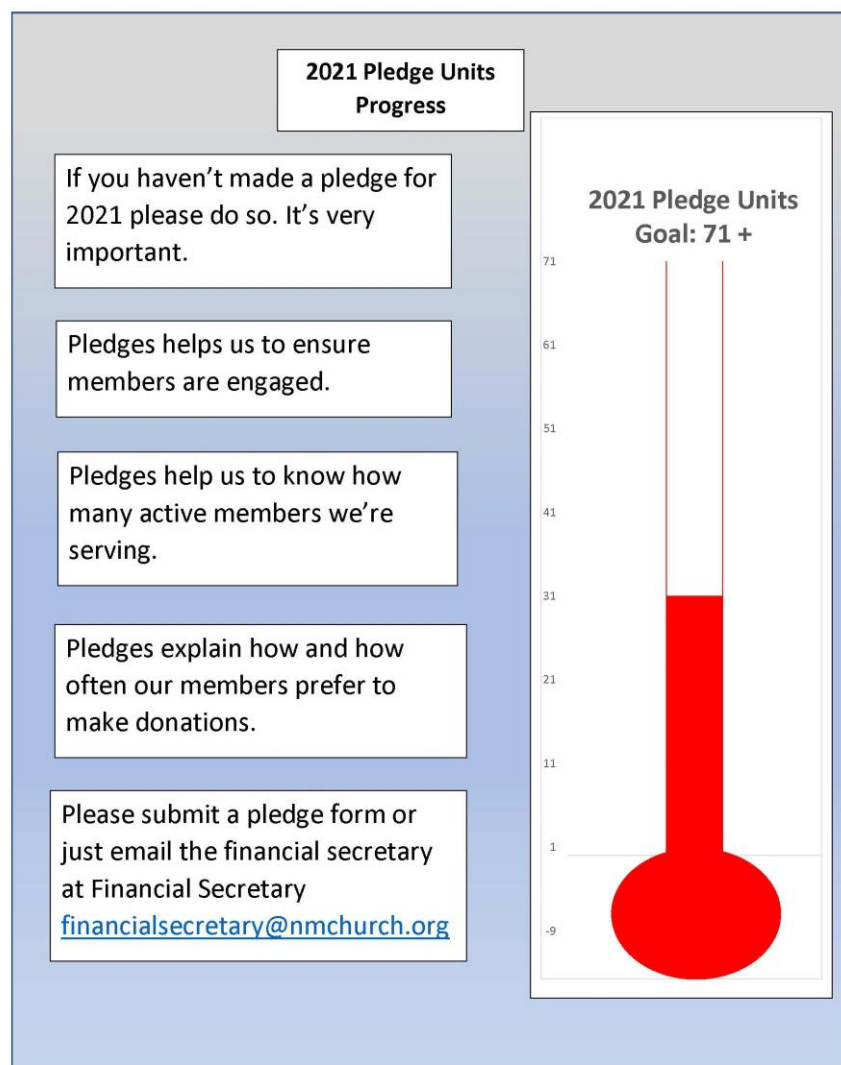
The Stewardship committee was very pleased by the generosity of the congregation during 2020. Despite the Coronavirus and no in-person services, the congregation continued to support the church through financial donations. Total giving last year was right on plan.

However, the committee is concerned about the unusually low pledge receipts for 2021. So far, we've received only about 50% of the normal pledges in units. The dollars pledged thus far are about 60% of what we normally receive. Based on this data, it may be that total giving in 2021 is down significantly. That represents an important challenge, especially as we search for a new full-time pastor.

The committee will remain focused on securing missing pledges and encouraging consistent giving. These activities include modernizing the ways our members can pledge/donate and tapping into various technologies to make them simpler and faster.

If you need offering envelopes, please contact Katie McKay or Nicole Henderson.

Jon Case, Chair



Music Committee

Thanks to the leadership of Sarah and Chris Fay, the church premiered its first ever virtual choir concert on December 13, the second Sunday of December, when the concert is normally presented. Many choir members participated. Each person recorded a video of themselves singing their part (soprano, alto, tenor, bass). Chris Fay edited them together, adding other video segments. The concert included five pieces. It has been viewed 356 times on Facebook and 411 times on YouTube as of January 11, 2021. Thanks to all who participated.

The choir is now meeting virtually to rehearse music for other virtual videos for upcoming services. The bell choir is on hiatus during the church shutdown.

Dave Elmore, Chair



Social Concerns and Missions Committee

- In December we completed our six week virtual discussion series, "Be The Church".
 - We have assembled the topic background material and notes, and are looking at efficient ways to make them available to the congregation
 - We would like to explore another series in 2021
- In December we received a request from New Milford Social Services to help hand out toys to needy families, and we had 10 members help out. It was a long day but much appreciated by the Social Services staff
- In December we also put out a special request to help provide a refugee family in town with their rent. We asked people to consider giving one day's worth of rent (\$33), with the goal of providing one entire month of rent. Our church responded in a magnificent way, and we raised \$2,792, which is more than 2 ½ months of rent! The New Milford Refugee Resettlement group was absolutely thrilled!
- Our January work will be focused on two areas:
 - The Annual Souper Bowl event to collect food and donations to address hunger – please see the following page!
 - Preparing the work plan to begin the Open and Affirming church process.

Dan Martin, Chair



tacklehunger.org

CHECKLIST

☐

BRING YOUR CONTRIBUTION FOR THE FOOD BANK TO THE CART OUTSIDE THE CHURCH OFFICE (OR CALL FOR PICKUP)

☐

SEND YOUR FAVORITE SOUP RECIPE TO NEWS@NMCHURCH.ORG (AND WE WILL SHARE OUR ASSEMBLED COLLECTION!)

☐

SEND A REQUEST TO NEWS@NMCHURCH.ORG FOR THE ZOOM CODE TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR TRIVIA AND SHARING EVENT @11:30 ON FEB 7TH

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. PRINT THIS OUT. PUT ON YOUR FRIDGE.
2. CHECK OFF AS COMPLETED

Church Meetings

The next all-church meeting (Church Night) will be Monday, February 15.

Our annual meeting will be held in mid-March; the exact date and time will be announced.



Communications Committee

The church uses several methods to provide updates on services, meetings, and activities. It is particularly important now, with the necessary restrictions that have been placed on gatherings, that we communicate well. Please use the following guidelines to publicize your group's information: The committee reserves the right to edit submissions.

Sunday Bulletin - Announcements are due to Nicole Henderson nhenderson@nmchurch.org by Tuesday for the bulletin, and should be limited to four lines of text. Let Nicole know if you would like them printed in the bulletin or read at the start of service.

Constant Contact – This email communication can be customized to reach the general public or restricted to church members. Announcements should be brief, and can include links to additional details. Send to news@nmchurch.org at least one week in advance of the desired publication date.

Website and Facebook – Information and photographs are gathered from a variety of sources. Email addresses for the staff, the link to the livestream and its archive, the weekly bulletin, and a directory of committees are all contained on the website. Facebook highlights current events and inspirational quotes. Suggestions may be sent to webmaster@nmchurch.org.

The Steeple – The church newsletter is published ten times a year. News and photographs from committees and groups are welcome, and should be submitted to steeple@nmchurch.org by the 15th of the month prior to publication. The current issue, along with an archive of previous issues, is available on the website.

The Spectrum – Details on events that warrant publication in the New Milford newspaper should be submitted to pappducc4@gmail.com several weeks in advance to ensure inclusion.

Postal Mail - Letters of more than one page directed to our membership with important information. Please give the office one week's notice if you need printing, copies, or mailing labels.

In Loving Memory

Robert S. Rowley December 19, 2020
Ruth Ohmen Baird December 23, 2020



Be strong and courageous.
Do not be afraid;
do not be discouraged,
for the

Lord your God

will be with you
wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9

The Chapel Stitchers

The Chapel Stitchers Prayer Shawl Ministry will meet via Zoom on **Sunday, February 14, 2021**, the second Sunday of the month. Look for a Zoom link on our Constant Contact email newsletter.

All are welcome - beginner and/or advanced stitchers. Our informal meetings are a great place to relax, enjoy friendships, share experiences, and learn from some long-time experts! Join us as we gather for a time of faith and fellowship via this Zoom meeting. If you need a shawl or know someone who does, please call the church office or email Leslie Schlemmer at news@nmchurch.org. Donations of yarn are always welcome.

As part of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, we have been called to donate prayer shawls for conference staff members. On behalf of our ministry and church, three shawls have been sent to conference offices in Hartford. If you would like more information, please go to <https://www.sneucc.org/newsdetail/new-conference-minister-requests-prayer-shawls-14923748>



Investment Committee

2020 was a turbulent year in the stock market but ended with a strong finish. The overall economy has suffered because of pandemic related closings and job losses. The church's investments bottomed out in March but have moved higher, regaining much of what was lost early in the year. At year end the endowment fund was only 3.3% below year end 2019. Some of the smaller funds actually gained a little.

Another bright spot is that the church's donations have held strong during the pandemic. This has enabled the church to avoid using the normal withdrawals from the endowment and SJ Johnson fund. These funds have been put aside for future use.

Dave Elmore, Chair



Rev. R. Randy Day's **Recommended Reading**



Please refer to the past few issues of *The Steeple* for comprehensive lists of recommended books and articles. Here are some recent additions:

Quoted in Sermons

- *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens
- *New Perspectives on the Nativity*, edited by Jeremy Corley
- *Parting The Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* by Taylor Branch
- *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* by Taylor Branch
- *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* by Peter J Gomes
- *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman

General Reading

- *Reading the Bible Again For the First Time* by Marcus J Borg
- *The Heart of Christianity* by Marcus J. Borg
- *Christianity for the Rest of Us* by Diana Butler Bass
- *History of the World: The Last Five Hundred Years*
- *The Spirituality of Mark* by Mitzi Minor
- *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith* by Diana Butler Bass



Sarah Fay and the Virtual Choir
for a beautiful Christmas Concert

Meetinghouse Restoration Committee

- We received our \$100,000 grant payment from the state in December!
- Susan and John signed/executed several required documents with the State of Connecticut, and all but one have been finalized.
 - The 15-year covenant/easement with the State, has not yet been returned to us from the State.
 - The SHPO commissioner and the Attorney General have yet to sign, so we cannot record the document at Town Hall and return acknowledgement to the State that we did so.
- We are extremely fortunate that we were paid because the SHPO guidelines specifically state that no payment will be made until the easement document is finalized.
- We are now meeting to decide how to prioritize and approach our next round of projects!

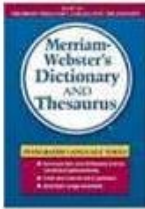
Dan Martin, Chair



The church would like to establish a small team of volunteers to help support audio and video during services and other events. Team members will assist the Deacons with audio and video during livestream broadcasts. You will learn to operate the camera and audio boards and to set up microphones or other audio equipment as needed. This is open to high school age and older.

To learn more about the A/V Team email Dave Elmore (elmored@nmchurch.org)

Stewardship Update



**Epiphany has multiple definitions.
Here are two:**

1. The Church season we are currently celebrating
“We are IN Epiphany”



2. When you realize you forgot to turn in your church pledge!
“I have HAD an epiphany”



***Please consider pledging if you haven't.
It makes a big difference in our ability to plan.***

Celebrate and Renew

Called to Care Ministry

This church has always embraced our mission to reach out and support those in need of caring and assistance. The pandemic and all the related problems it brought has challenged us to all do more to help those in need.

You may not have formerly volunteered to be part of our Called to Care mission, but in the past year so many of you have stepped up and reached out. It is uplifting to hear and see all that is being done to help those in need of food, clothing, heat, and so many other necessary items.

Please keep up your mission. While it is still not possible to give a hug or even see your face – a kind note, phone call, email or social media posting shows we are still connected, and we care. Thank you for all that you are doing and continue to do to keep this congregation and our world connected.

The many facets of our mission include:

- **Parish Friends** – congregants develop ongoing relationships with the other members through regular visits, over the phone or in person.
- **Parish Drivers** – serve the congregation by volunteering to drive those who cannot to church and, in rare cases, to the other crucial appointments.
- **Meal Chain** – church members make and deliver meals to those who have suffered a loss, welcomed a new child, or are in times of transition.
- **Prayer Ministry** – a prayer chain set up to offer prayers on behalf of congregation members and others in times of illness, difficulty, or joy.
- **Condolence Reception** – volunteers bake cookies, make finger sandwiches, and host receptions at funerals and memorial services.

If you would like to be part of our church's Called to Care Ministry, or have any questions, please call the church office at 860-354-8232 and leave a message. If you prefer, you can contact me directly by email jlmcc60@gmail.com or at 860-355-9388.

Jan McCarthy





People are shopping online more than ever, and this will likely increase as we approach the holidays. If you are among this group, did you know that as you make online purchases at Amazon you can support the church at the same time? Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price - there is no additional cost, and once signed up, the donation to the church is automatic.

To shop at AmazonSmile simply go to smile.amazon.com from the web browser on your computer or mobile device. You may also want to add a bookmark to smile.amazon.com to make it even easier to return and start your shopping at AmazonSmile. You use the same account on Amazon.com and AmazonSmile. Your shopping cart, Wish List, wedding or baby registry, and other account settings are also the same. On your first visit to AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com), you need to select First Congregational Church, New Milford, CT to receive donations from eligible purchases before you begin shopping. Your selection will be remembered, and then every eligible purchase you make at smile.amazon.com will result in a donation.

Baby Bundles



We have continued to hold the Baby Bundles distribution on the third Wednesday of each month. Our procedures have been adjusted to follow safety guidelines. With the cold weather upon us, we have met our clients at the door of the Parish House, and handed them diapers and wipes. We have put some of our donated baby items on the porch so they can select any that they need, but it is difficult to put out the baby clothes, blankets, and other small items we have. We are looking forward to warmer weather!

The Baby Bundles program received a donation from our friends at the Brookfield Congregational Church. They have been a strong supporter of our program in past years, and we are very grateful that they were able to help us again this year. Many thanks to the wonderful congregation, neighbors, and friends for their gifts and spiritual support.

Jan McCarthy, Chair

Planned Giving

That's the name that has come to be associated with gifts to your church or other charity that happen after your lifetime. Simply put, you plan now, for a gift that will occur later. In our church, we recognize those who have declared they have arranged for a planned gift by receiving them as members of the Deacon Roger Sherman Society.

There are many ways to make a planned gift, and depending on your unique circumstances, some methods are better for you and for the church than others. Contact the Church Office for more details. The simplest and most direct way to make a planned gift is to include the church as a beneficiary on your life insurance policy. Your insurance agent can guide you on the specific forms and options available from your insurance company. Just tell them you want to add a beneficiary; the agent will take it from there.

When you have arranged your planned gift, be sure to let our Pastor know – no details, just that you made arrangements – so we can appropriately recognize your generosity. For your convenience, you may use the form below.

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THE DEACON ROGER SHERMAN SOCIETY

A gift to First Congregational Church of New Milford is in my (our) estate plans.

☐ *Yes!* **Please count me (us) as a Member of The Deacon Roger Sherman Society.**

Please Print Name(s) as you would like them to appear on recognition documents

✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂



Church Directory

Our church directory is available to view on any web browser! Instant Church Directory — the program we use to build our church directory — has a free website for church members to view our directory online. You will be asked to enter in your email address as it's listed in our directory. If your email address isn't listed in the directory, let news@nmchurch.org know so it can be added.

The first time, click on the "Create a login now" under the Sign In button. Enter your email address and set up a password to be sent an email confirmation. Click on the link inside that email to confirm your email and log in with the password you just created.

Food Bank

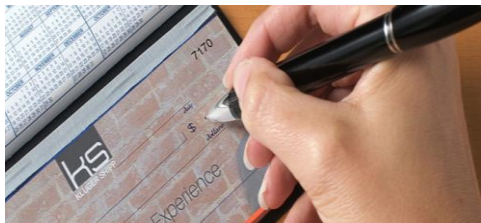
Non-perishable foods are always needed, but other items are also helpful. Government subsidies do not cover the purchase of laundry detergent or basic home cleaning products. Also appreciated are personal care items, and monetary donations.



Laundry detergent
Cleaning supplies



Shampoo
Soap
Toothpaste
Feminine hygiene products
Adult incontinence products



Monetary contributions – make checks payable to FCC, with "Food Bank" written in the memo line. Drop off or mail to the church.

First Congregational Church

Church School News

February 2021

The season of Lent began on;

Wednesday, February 17th, Ash Wednesday.

As with our tradition, Prayer Eggs will be given to adult members of our congregation this year by mail. These eggs contain the name and grade of a child in our church school program. We ask that you pray for this child during the 40 days of Lent. The names and eggs will still be blessed during the regular worship service on February 21, 2021.

Shrove Tuesday is going VIRTUAL!



When? February 25, 2020 6-6:63pm

Where? Your home computer

How? Children in our Church School Program email cedirector@nmchurch.org for the link.

Make your own pancake, sausage, and BACON and enjoy this time of food and fellowship!

Shrove Tuesday is the day before Lent starts on Ash Wednesday. The name Shrove comes from the old middle English word 'Shriven' meaning to go to confession to say sorry for the wrong things you've done. Lent always starts on a Wednesday, so people went to confessions on the day before. This became known as *Shriven Tuesday* and then **Shrove Tuesday**.

The other name for this day, Pancake Day, comes from the old English custom of using up all the fattening ingredients in the house before Lent, so that people were ready to fast during Lent. The fattening ingredients that most people had in their houses in those days were eggs and milk. A very simple recipe to use up these ingredients was to combine them with some flour and make pancakes!



Diaper, Baby Wipes and Feminine Hygiene Product and Personal Hygiene Product Drive

When: February 21 - March 28, 2021

Where: FCCNM

For: Camella's Cupboard

Sponsored by:

The Church School and Baby Bundles

Donations of:

Diapers sizes 3 & 5, Pull-Ups, baby wipes, feminine hygiene and personal hygiene products including: tampons, maxi pads, toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, bar soap, shampoo, conditioner, shaving cream, disposable razors.

*****All items must be new and unopened*****