



The Epistle

April 2025

Dear Saints of God,

We are in a season of transformation. Remember those brutally cold arctic temperatures? Well, the earth is once again being transformed. Water and sunlight nourish the plants. We see the crocuses pushing their way through the once frozen ground. Tulips and Easter lilies prepare to bloom, announcing God's glorious creation. Hope and joy fill our hearts as we await the first fruits of our sprouting seedlings. The warmth of the sun streaming through the windows, the lengthening of the days, the sweetness that fills the air all reveal God's great love for us through creation. Though predictable, it nonetheless touches us deeply and reminds us of the beauty in this gift of love.

What was not predictable, nor even imaginable, was God's greatest gift to us. The promise of an alternate reality where death does not have the final say; God's love, justice, and mercy does. We proclaim this alternate reality present and available when we celebrate our resurrection story. A story made even more poignant during Holy Week when we witness injustice, political violence, and betrayal. It is a story that repeats itself all too often. We witness it throughout history, in an unending cycle of intolerance, bigotry, ignorance, misinformation, and power plays.

God gifts us a way of stepping out of the unending cycle. Throughout Lent, we dig deep in unflinching courage seeking to uncover our part in the unending cycle. We do so, knowing that our God yearns for us to stand in our truth and promises mercy and forgiveness through Christ. As we name and repent of those thoughts, words, and deeds, we carry our cross and walk alongside Jesus. Jesus willingly, lovingly takes our cross from us, liberates and guides us to a better way. Christ's resurrection transforms and transcends our limits and offers a way from the darkness of our past into a new and blessed life. This is God's off ramp to the endless cycle.

This, the Church proclaims on Easter morning. In him, we are saved from death to new life, for life eternal with our infinitely just, merciful, and loving Creator. This is the Good News, that through Christ we live again. Therefore, let us shout for joy, Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Blessings,

Pastor Russ

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Call to Meeting

You are hereby notified that there will be a special meeting of the First Congregational Church of Westminster to be held on Sunday, April 6th 2025, in the Sanctuary immediately following the service.

On the agenda are two voting items to revise the approved 2025 budget.

Anyone may attend and participate, but only members may vote.

Ellen Holmes, Moderator



Palm Sunday:

April 13: 9:30 AM Palm Parade with Children and Parents, Reading of the Passion

Maundy Thursday Lenten Recital for Flute and Organ

April 17: 6:30 PM Flute and Organ Concert with guest flutist, Emma Barry
7:00 PM Service of the Shadows (Tenebrae)

Good Friday:

April 18: 3:00 -7:00 PM Silent Prayer, Meditation and Stations of the Cross

Holy Saturday:

April 19: 7:30 PM Service of the Easter Vigil and Reaffirmation of Baptism

Easter Sunday:

April 20: 5:45 AM Easter Sunrise Service at Academy Hill
9:30 AM Easter Sunday Worship Service
with organ, piano, trumpets, flute and timpani

APRIL EPISTLE INPUT – March 12' 2025



**Update from
Trustees**

The Trustees would like to update the congregation about various financial information:

The pledges have come in at about \$112,000 versus the \$100,000 that was budgeted. If the church realizes this \$12,000 increase, this is a VERY positive event! Thanks to the Generous Giving Committee and all of those who have pledged in FY2025.

The budget calls for using about \$80,000 in endowment funds to balance this year's budget. During the first three months of FY2025 the trustees have only used \$6,600. The trustees will be looking at our cash flow very closely this fiscal year. Our church treasurer, John Aalto, gives the trustees a two-month projection of anticipated income and expenses. Without John's cash flow efforts the trustee's actions would not be as factually based. Thanks John!!

If anyone has looked at the income amounts through the March 5th accounting reports, you might think we are in a better position than what really exists. The truth is that several pledgers give their annual pledge in one lump sum that the church generally receives in January and February. These amounts make our income percentages look better than they really are. In about July these annual pledges are starting to smooth out which brings the income more into line with what you would expect to see at the six or seventh month point in the fiscal year.

The IMPACT production was underwritten by the Music Committee through their restricted funds. They fronted \$2,000 and received all but about \$135.00 back. This investment brought something new and exciting to our church. I'm sure that even more events will be presented over the rest of FY2025!! Hold on to your hats!!!

The church has received two donations recently that you may not be aware of. We received \$800 from the Food Pantry and \$1,000 from Chair City Oil, our heating oil vendor. Thanks to both organizations!

The church has also received a grant for \$1,000 which is earmarked for video equipment. This will allow us to stream our services once again. Thanks go to Karen Reitter for all her work spearheading this grant.

Thanks to Matt McGee's persistence, we have two MASS SAVE projects that are in various stages of approval. The first project is for weatherization/insulation at a cost of about \$21,000; the total cost will be borne by National Grid and should pay us back at about \$600 per year. The second project is for lighting. The total cost for this project is about \$11,000 with \$4,500 provided by the church. Use of endowment funds has been requested for our portion of the total costs. This project will have a payback period of about two years.

CHRISTIAN OUTREACH

The winter weather this year has made it difficult for us to get to church, but our mission to the Food Pantry is an important one. We are still asking for soup which is always needed. This can be put in the plastic bins that can be found at both entrances to the sanctuary.

After talking with those in charge of the Food Pantry they had a few other needs that are listed below.

- * Cereal
- * SpaghettiOs
- * Bottles of juice
- * Canned fruit

As the need arises, we will try and keep you posted.



“If every person offered just one act
of kindness every day, we could change
the world.” Let this be our goal.

Continued thanks,

The Outreach Committee

Would You Rather?

by [Jennifer Ruth Lynn Garrison](#) | published on Apr 1, 2025



Some years ago, a youth group I traveled with played a version of “Would you rather?” “Would you rather be a bald eagle or a grizzly bear?” “Would you rather eat only broccoli or only liver?” “Would you rather listen only to babies crying or [this was, as I said, a few years ago] listen only to the music of Justin Bieber?” Each question brought laughter and eager answers. Then, “Would you rather regret the past or worry about the future?” The whole car groaned. People who had cheerfully, if hypothetically, chosen a lifetime of eating liver or listening to baby cries refused to choose either regret or worry. We moved on to the next question. In real life it feels as if I don’t choose either worry or regret. Too often, alas, as with the psalmist, in the middle of the night they choose me. When regretful, I am also “troubled”: thoughts spinning back over years, lamenting the actions never taken, the words hastily spoken. With worry, I also spin out, but this time over what is to come, what is unseen and unknown. Regret and worry seem to choose me at first, but how do I respond? Invariably, I choose them back. Like the psalmist, I let my mind circle around whatever unresolvable thing has been placed before me by worry or regret. Maybe it’s time to try something different. Maybe like the kids in the car, I can moan once and then move on to the next question. Maybe then I will find that God’s love hasn’t “ceased” at all. Maybe then I will recognize the steadfastness of God’s presence with me the whole time.

Prayer

You are God, and I am not. To you be all the glory.



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The Diaconate is pleased to coordinate Easter tulips in our church for Easter Sunday, April 20th. Please complete this form and return it to the church no later than Thursday, April 10th, either in person or by mail:

First Congregational Church of Westminster
PO Box 477
Westminster, MA 01473

Questions? Contact Robert Hoyt or Lisa @ (978) 874-5790

I would like to order _____ Easter tulips at **\$12.00 each**
Make checks payable to **First Congregational Church of Westminster**.



Given in **honor of** _____

Given in loving **memory of** _____

by (please print either your name or anonymous if don't wish your name printed in the bulletin) _____

____ I **will take my tulips** after the 9:30 am Worship Service on April 20th.
____ **The church may have my tulips for distribution.**

Name: _____

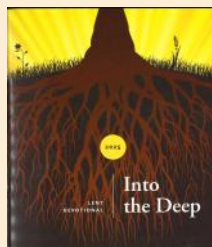
Telephone: _____ **Email:** _____

Into the Deep: 2025 Lenten Devotional

Mirroring the 2025 General Synod theme, "Into the Deep," our 2025 Lent Devotional invites reflection on God's mysterious depths. As Mary Luti writes in the introduction, "God inhabits the depths of life, love, loss, ecstasy, and pain, God dwells in the profundities of prayer, in sighs too deep for words. God loves the deep." What courage, what faith, what reckoning, what wonder might find us as we go deep into God's depths this Lent?

Devotionals are available in the church office. Please email fccw.westminster@gmail.com or call the office at 978-874-5790.

To help defray the cost, a suggested donation of **\$10/devotional** is welcomed.



HELP WANTED!

As our church grows, we invite you to consider how God might be calling you or someone you know into deeper relationship with God and the church by sharing your God-given gifts of time and talent in service to others.

Currently, our church seeks to fill these critical roles:

- Clerk
- Receipts Clerk
- Assistant Treasurer

For more information, please contact

Ellen Holmes
eholmes.fccw.moderator@gmail.com



Prayer List

For our members, family and friends hospitalized, ill and in need of prayers, may God bless and watch over you:

Amelia L.	Bob A.
Kierman W.	Lorna D.
Ellie G.	Steve C.
Amanda A. & her family	Bryan C.
Sally C.	Marcia M.
June & Brian C.	Bobbie D.
Jan G.	The Walker family
Peter R.	Pam L.
Paul (Denise's brother)	Ted G's brother
Louise J.	Andrea B's friend
Gloria H.	Mary M. and family
Emma B's friend	The House Fire Victims

"Prayer List"

If you added somebody to the prayer list, please email Pastor Russ:

fccw.pastorruss@gmail.com

Thank
you

Dear Friends,

It's been a while since I've been in contact. First of all, I appreciate all the care cards phone calls. I miss the camaraderie and the church and the activities. I'm doing well and I'm feeling good. I'm eager to get back home on my own; It's the therapies that are holding me back.

Blessings to everyone and a huge thank you.

Love,
Gloria

P.S. A special thank you to Pastor Russ

Bible Study

Wednesdays at 11:00 AM

Let's get together to study the readings for the upcoming week.

April 2

Isaiah 43
Philippians 3:4b -14
John 12: 1-8

April 9

Psalms 118: 1-2, 19-29
Luke 19:28-40
Isaiah 50: 4-9a
Psalm 31: 9-16
Philippians 2:5-11

April 16

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
1 Corinthians 15:19-26
Acts 10:34-43
John 20 20:1-18

April 23

Acts 5:27-32
Psalm 118:14-29
Revelation 1:4-8
John 20: 19-31

April 30

Acts 9:1-6, (17-20)
Psalm 30
Revelations 5:11-14
John 21:1-19

Pastor Russ's office hours:

Wednesdays 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

After hour meetings may be arranged upon request. For Pastoral Care Emergencies, please contact Pastor Russ directly at 774-764-1025.

Pastor Russ will be out of the office following Bible Study on Wednesday, April 23. Returning on Tuesday, April 29.

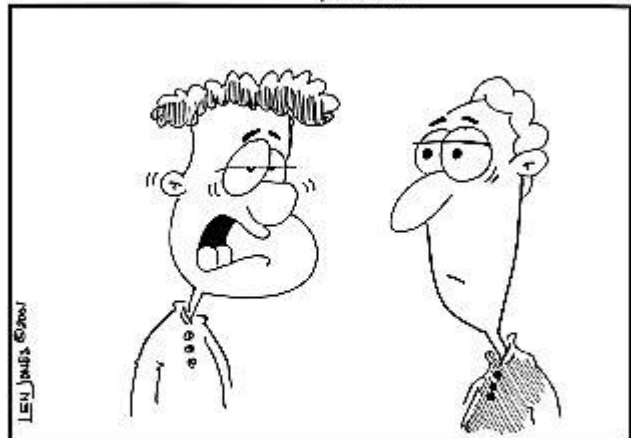


2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 8:00am Yoga (FH) 10:00am WF Painting Class (CH) 6:00pm Deacons (Parlor) 6:30pm Bear Den (FH)	2 10:00am Staff 11:00am Bible Study 1-3pm Pastor Russ open hours 6:00pm Troop 33 (CH) 7-8:30pm PPRC	3 6-7pm Webelo's Den Meeting (CH) 6:30-7:30pm Food Pantry (Side Entrance)	4 <i>Office closed</i>	5 5:00-10:00pm Girl Scout "Twilight" Campout (FH) 10am-noon Scout Troop 33 Prep. for Scouting event
6 Family Worship 9:30am Worship Service 10:45am Special Meeting in Sanctuary 11:30am Lenten Recital Rehearsal	7 8:00am Meditation (zoom)	8 8:00am Yoga (FH) 10:00am Staff 7-8:30 pm CE (Parlor)	9 11:00am Bible Study 1-3pm Pastor Russ open hours 6:00pm Troop 33 (CH)	10 3:00pm Trustees (FH) 6-8pm BSA Troop 33(CH) 6:30-7:30pm Food Pantry (Side Entrance)	11 <i>Office closed</i>	12 10am-noon Scout Troop 33 Scouting for food event (FH)
13 PALM SUNDAY 9:30am Church School 9:30am Palm Sunday Service Worship 10:45am Children's Easter Practice—last day 11:30am Lenten Recital Rehearsal	14 8:00am Meditation (zoom)	15 8:00am Yoga (FH) 10:00am Staff 6:30-7:30pm Bear Den (CH & FH) 6:30-7:30pm Food Pantry (Side Entrance)	16 11:00am Bible Study 1-3pm Pastor Russ open hours 6:00pm Scout Troop 33 (CH)	17 MAUNDY THURSDAY 6:30-7:00pm Lent & Organ Recital 7-8pm Maundy Thursday Service	18 GOOD FRIDAY 3:00-7:00pm Silent Prayer, Meditation Stations of the Cross 7:00pm Good Friday Service	19 HOLY SATURDAY 7:00pm Easter Vigil
20 Easter 5:30am-6:30am Sunrise Service @ Academy Hill 9:30am Easter Service	21 8:00am Meditation (zoom) MAY EPISTLE DUE	22 8am Yoga (FH) 10:00am Staff 6:00pm Generous Giving (Parlor)	23 11:00am Bible Study Pastor Russ leaves following Bible Study. Returns on 4/29.	24 6:30-7:30pm Food Pantry (Side Entrance)	25 <i>Office closed</i>	26
27 9:30am Worship Service 9:30am Church School	28 8:00am Meditation (zoom)	29 8:00am Yoga (FH) 10:00am Staff Pastor Russ returns	30 11:00am Bible Study 1-3pm Pastor Russ open hours			



ALTAR EGO. by Len Jones



"I was just fine with the concept of sharing my faith until Pastor said we actually had to talk to people."

UCC CONFERENCE HAPPENINGS

On March 8th Pastor Russ, Karen, Richard and I attended a truly Super Saturday meeting at the First Congregational Church of Shrewsbury. Super Saturday is an annual event sponsored by the Southern New England Conference, United Church of Christ. The day was filled with worship, singing, the keynote speaker (nationally known Rev. William Barber), fellowship over lunch, and workshops.

I would like to share a few of the things I gleaned from my workshop, The Confetti Church. This workshop focused on how to make our church more visible and inviting to our community as well as the wider community, as we promote who we are. As the presenter said, “THIS IS MODERN DAY EVANGLISM”

Take pictures of happenings during the service, at coffee hour, any event and post these for all to see the excitement of our congregation. Seize every opportunity! Remember to get signed authorization from folks to have their photo posted.

Have someone who loves to take pictures and others in the congregation who have taken an occasional picture and put them together to make an annual video to share with all.

Create a catchy phrase for our church such as, JOIN THE JOY or THE HEART OF WESTMINSTER.

Include this at every opportunity.

Buy flashy, colorful banners for the front of the church to draw attention to our building and activities. We have the perfect location for car traffic to see what is happening. He suggested getting one of the teardrop holders then have a banner that has the saying, TODAY, then place it out front on any day that something is happening.

He said the church should be on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok.

If you feel like any of these ideas are something you might have expertise with or be interested in, please let Pastor Russ or me know. Any comments, questions please feel free to speak to any one of us about our Super Saturday experience.

Food for thought from one of your conference delegates.

Kathy Miller

First Congregational Church – Westminster
Spring Organ Recital



Featuring

Kristjon Imperio

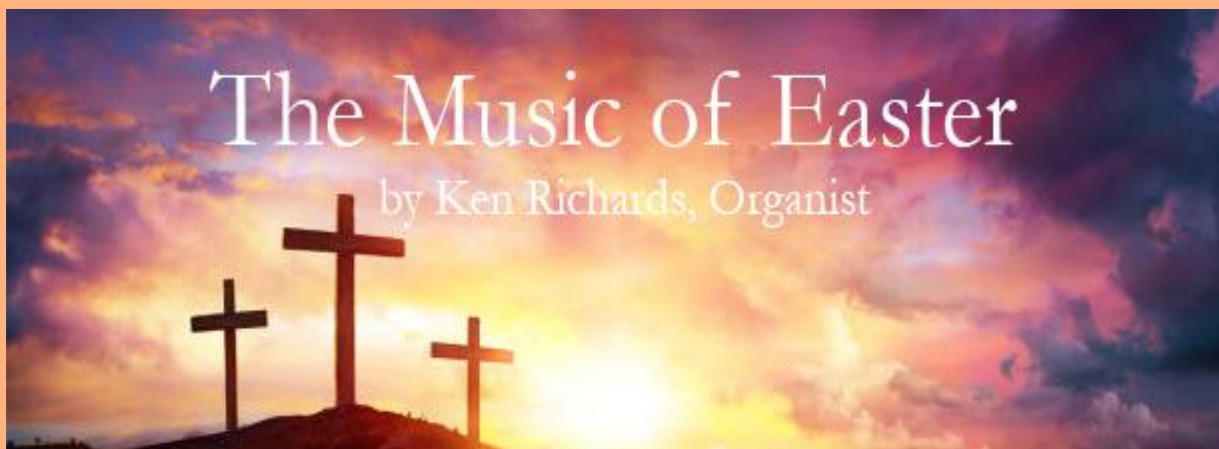
Principal Organist

Director of Worship & Development at Village Church in |
Wellesley and Weston

Sunday, May 18 at 4:00 p.m.

First Congregational Church

**138 E Main Street
Westminster, MA**



We have a particularly exciting Easter awaiting us this year, musically that is! During this Lent we will have heard the music of masters like Johann Sebastian Bach, Léon Boëllman, Charles Callahan, Emma Lou Diemer, Herbert Howells, Felix Mendelssohn, George Oldroyd, Alec Rowley, Louis Vierne, and Wilbur Held, among others. But wait! There is more to come.

On Maundy Thursday at 6:30 p.m., immediately prior to the Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Service, the church will offer a 30-minute *Lenten Recital for Flute and Organ* featuring our own Emma Barry on the flute, and yours truly accompanying her on the organ and piano. Emma and I have been working on this recital for the past month; I think you will find it at times soothing and reflective and other times thought provoking.

The recital begins with the organ-flute duet, "A Lenten Prelude for Flute and Organ," by national-composer treasure Charles Callahan. While technically challenging, this wonderful piece is heartwarming, featuring familiar hymns of the season in a hauntingly and embracing way. The moment the flute is introduced I feel captivated. And closing out the recital is Callahan's "A Prelude to Easter," which to this day intrigues me. It offers Easter hymns executed in a Lenten-like fashion – reflective and in my case, reminding me of my childhood's Easters. Midway through the recital you will hear a composition by Carson Cooman, Composer in Residence at Harvard University's Memorial Church, entitled "Rainbow." I liken it to a tone-poem on the crucifixion. One can hear the cacophony, the pounding of nails, the agony of the moment in this piece. A thought-provoker if ever there was one. Another highlight of this recital is Emma's rendition of "Amazing Grace," which begins with her *a capella* solo of the famous hymn followed by a surprising, if not evocative, accompaniment on the piano. Each time I play this piece, which Emma and I have improvised in large part, I get chills. I confess, it moves me. In fact, that was our goal: to find a piece of music traditional in Lent that moves us. It is Emma's and my hope that this recital leaves you in a different place than when you entered the doors of First Congregational that evening. Together, we hope you will join us.

But, wait, there's more. On Easter Sunday, I on the organ and piano will be joined by David Cady and Patrick Bobkowski on trumpet, Emma Barry on flute, and Phil Andrews on timpani and cymbals, to bring the congregation a truly exciting and revitalizing Easter Sunday worship service! While we begin with a medley of traditional Easter hymns beginning at 9:25 a.m. At 9:30 the service begins with a triumphant rendering of "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today," with trumpets sounding, cymbals crashing, and the organ carrying us through this wonderful hymn and hair-raising experience. During Communion you will hear a fascinating version of "Near the Cross," quietly played by our two guest trumpeters. And following the sermon we will stand and sing mightily, "The Strife Is O'er, the Battle Won." For our Offertory, Emma will join me at the piano where we will perform from G. F. Handel's *Messiah* the aria, "I Know that My Redeemer Liveth," which he premiered in 1792 – somewhere around the beginnings of our first Sunday School at First Congregational! We will close this year's Easter Sunday service with two glorious musical works, ones that exceed the triumph expressed in the opening hymn: first, the hymn "Crown Him with Many Crowns" and the postlude, Ludwig van Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." It will be an Easter Sunday to remember.

SILVER LAKE

Camp & Retreat Center

**Spring
2025**



Upcoming Events

MARCH 11 6:30-7:30PM	Information Session - Summer Volunteers
MARCH 13 6:30-7:30PM	Information Session - Summer Camper Families
APR 5 10AM-4PM	1-Day Women's Yoga & Music Spirit Retreat
APRIL 13 6:30-7:30PM	Information Session - Summer Camper Families
APRIL 25-27	Spring Action Weekend
MAY 2-4	Women's Yoga & Music Spirit Retreat Weekend
MAY 10 10AM-4PM	1-Day Women's Yoga & Music Spirit Retreat
MAY 13 6:30-7:30PM	Information Session - Summer Camper Families
MAY 17 11AM-3PM	Open House
MAY 23-25	Spring Family Weekend



Southern New England Conference
United Church of Christ
Living the Love & Justice of Jesus

www.SilverLakeCT.org/CampSessions

Summer Camp 2025

SILVER LAKE

Camp & Retreat Center

Standard Program* Tiered Pricing: \$940 | \$850 | \$760

**Some programs may have slightly different pricing, or an additional program fee.*

	JUNE 22	23	24	25	26	27	28
WEEK 1			Family Camp • all ages				
				Just Camp • grades 4-12			
	29	30	JULY 1	2	3	4	5
WEEK 2				God Song • grades 4-6			
				TBD • grades 7-10			
				Leadership Development • 16- & 17-year-olds • 2-week session			
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
WEEK 3				Bring on the Monsters • grades 4-6			
				Sing Praise • grades 7-9			
				Leadership Development • 16- & 17-year-olds • 2-week session			
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
WEEK 4				All A Board! • grades 7-12			
				Leadership Development • 16- & 17-year-olds • 2-week session			
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
WEEK 5				Silver Lake Sampler • grades 4-6			
				Fun in the Sun • grades 7-9			
				Leadership Development • 16- & 17-year-olds • 2-week session			



SCAN TO LEARN MORE

Dear Parents and Friends in Christ,

We are forming a Kid's Easter Choir for children in grades 1 through 8 for this year's Easter service. Beginning Sunday, March 9th through April 13th, for six weeks we will hold a children's choir rehearsal in the Choir Room from 10:45 until 11:30 a.m. – only 45 minutes each week. We're going to have fun! We'll learn some new songs. How to bang a drum. I know from my experience, as a child I learned more about scripture from singing in choirs than anywhere else!



Emma Barry, who is a public school teacher currently working on her Master's Degree in Education, Doris Forte, who for years has led children's programs at the church, and Sue Christ a member of the Christian Education Committee will join me in conducting these rehearsals.

Realm/Connect: Super User Update

Realm/Connect are "apps" that help churches improve church management, communication, and ministry. Church Council approved a feasibility study focused on how these apps might help us. Council asked each committee to appoint a representative to form the core team, the Super Users. They charged this team to study the app and its benefits.

We, the Super Users, have been busy over the past several months getting familiar with the app and talking to our respective committees. On March 31, we met to identify the most common needs across committees and have set the following priorities:

- Volunteer management, recruiting, and scheduling
- Calendars - Public, Church-wide, Committee specific, and Integration with other platforms (i.e. website and Google)
- Communication - Public, Church-wide, Inter and intra-committee, (i.e. website, social media, email, text, chats, and post)
- Custom forms and reports - (i.e. flower orders, Poinsettias/Tulips, Mailing lists)

Our next steps will be to get a deeper understanding and start to develop strategies for a roll out to committee members. As we proceed, we hold these guiding principles in mind:

- Access to confidential information will be limited to a need to know basis.
- The implementation plan will consider all levels of technical skills and offer traditional alternatives.
- Ease the impact of change by promoting open dialogue and welcoming diverse perspectives.

We encourage your curiosity and are delighted to share what we know. Please feel free to ask questions and share your thoughts with any one of us.

Here's to moving forward!

Super Users

Pastor Russ, Karen Brighenti, Cindy Brown, Sara Frank, Candi Hitchcock, Matt McGee, Heidi Puutio, Karen Reitter, Lisa Roberts



**The First Congregational Church
of Westminster
United Church of Christ
138 Main Street • PO Box 477
Westminster, MA 01473**

The Epistle

April 2025

Phone: 978-874-5790

Church office Email:

fccw.westminster@gmail.com

Visit our Website: www.westcong.org

Don't Miss the
DEADLINE!

**Monday
April 21, 2025**

Please email your articles to
fccw.westminster@gmail.com