



The Epistle

October 2025

Dear Saints of God,

As we stand at the threshold of change, I want to acknowledge what many of us feel but may hesitate to say aloud: change is uncomfortable. It stirs up uncertainty, challenges our routines, and often brings with it a quiet anxiety that whispers, "I want things to be just as they were" and "What if I'm not ready?" These feelings are not signs of weakness—they are signs of growth. They remind us that we are stepping into something new, something sacred, something that requires courage.

In this season, we are being called to reimagine how we serve, how we lead, and how we love. The goal is not simply to do more, but to do what matters most. We are seeking the intersection of our passion, our skills, and our energy—where our God-given gifts meet the real needs of our church and our wider community. This is not a solo journey. It is a collective movement, one that asks each of us to listen deeply to the Spirit and to one another.

Jesus, in His infinite wisdom and compassion, knew the weight of change. Before His ascension, He promised us the Holy Spirit—not as a distant force, but as a present guide, a comforter, and a source of divine assurance. "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). We are not navigating this transition alone. The Spirit walks with us, nudging us forward, whispering peace into our fears, and illuminating the path when it feels unclear.

Let us not be paralyzed by the discomfort of change but propelled by the hope it carries. Let us trust that God is already at work in the spaces we are being called to enter. And let us remember that transformation—both personal and communal—rarely feels easy, but it always bears fruit.

Starting Wednesday, October 1 at 7:00 PM, and for five consecutive Wednesdays, we will gather in Fellowship Hall to discuss Paul Nixon's *I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church*. The title is intentionally provocative with the goal of stirring conversation. Many have read the book; some are excited, and some are anxious. I encourage all who can, join as many discussions as you are able. Lean into the discomfort. Embrace the questions. And above all, listen for the Spirit's voice.

Together, we will discover new ways to be the hands and feet of Christ in a world that desperately needs His love.

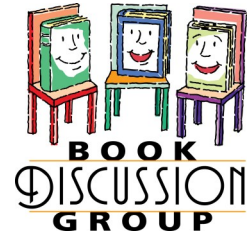
With faith and anticipation,

Pastor Russ

Upcoming Events

Book Reading and Discussion Group (details on page 7)

DATES: Oct. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29



Blessing of the Animals: October 5th at 1:30pm

Honoring the feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi, patron saint of animals and the environment, Pastor Russ and Fr. Juan will join together for a special service for our pets. All God's critters and their caretakers are invited to gather outside at the parking lot of St. Edward the Confessor, 10 Church Street, for a special blessing of the animals.

Art Show

A group of talented local artists will be displaying their work on October 18th in our very own Covenant Hall. Come visit the Circle of Artists Art Show.



First Congregational Church Trick or Treat Event

When: Friday October 31st 4:30-7pm

Where: Church parking lot



The Christian Education committee needs your help!

Candy donations: Trick or Treating is in the center of Westminster and each year we have about 800+ kids come visit the church. We need individually wrapped candy which you can drop off at the church in Fellowship Hall.

Volunteers: We need people to help hand out candy and run small games for the children. Please contact Sue Christ at susan.christ@gmail.com if you can volunteer. come join in the fun!



Christmas Swag Making: November 27th - Details coming soon.

Christmas Swag Sale: November 28th - Details coming soon.



Church School News



Our October curriculum is the story of *Joshua*.

Come and discover why God chooses Joshua!

The Outreach Committee would like to thank everyone who continued to support our local food pantry throughout the summer months. This is an important mission of our church and one that is needed more than ever. As we all know the price of groceries continues to keep going up monthly, it seems. There is still the convenient box that is labeled outside the side entrance, of your church.

The Outreach Committee would like to bring back the labeled bins that we had in the spring at both entrances to our sanctuary. If there are special food items that are needed, we will try and post them there as well.

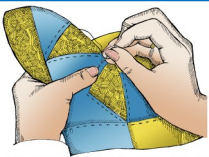


"If every person offered just one act

Of kindness every day,
We could change the world."

Continued Thanks and Blessings,

The Outreach Committee



Quilt Raffle

The Women's Fellowship is holding a raffle for a beautiful lap quilt created and donated by Jan Whittman from our congregation.

Tickets can be purchased, one/\$1 or five/\$3, at Coffee Hour and at the Christmas Swag Sale on November 28th at the church.

The drawing will take place on
November 28th.





MANY WOMEN TOGETHER MAKE MANY APPLE PIES!

On September 25th the church kitchen was filled with the sounds of laughter, conversation and rolling pins as well as the aroma of apple pies baking! The pies were made with ingredients donated by many of you as well as apples donated by Sholan Farms in Leominster. Thank you to all who donated ingredients and purchased a pie. The funds raised when the pies were sold at the Westminster Farmer's Market will be used to support our church budget and other missions.

Thank you also to LeeAnn, Karen B., Bobbie, Debbie, Peg, Chris, Carole, Ginny, Donna, Kathy, Sandi & Sammi who together baked 41 pies!





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



Pastoral Letter to the Faithful Lay Leaders

8/7/2025-by:Darrell L. Goodwin

A Pastoral Letter to the Faithful Lay Leaders of the Southern New England Conference from Executive Conference Minister the Rev. Darrell Goodwin:

Grace and peace to you, beloved ones,

Across our congregations, I see signs of resurrection breaking through, moments of deep connection, renewed imagination, and faithful action. I see churches building gardens where food insecurity once had the final word. I see worship teams blending tradition and innovation. I see leaders daring to try something new, to radically welcome, and to lead with love.

These glimpses of renewal are not accidental, they are a direct result of your labor, your vision, and your unwavering commitment to God's church. You are the hands and feet of transformation, and it is because of your faithfulness that we can say, even in uncertain times, that hope is alive and well in the Southern New England Conference.

This letter is also a reflection born of relationship. Since beginning my ministry among you, I have had the profound gift of being in fellowship with nearly 100 of our churches, worshipping together, celebrating church anniversaries, witnessing baptisms and funerals, laughter and longing, fear and fierce faith. What I've seen in these sacred encounters is a church that is very much alive.

Oscar Romero, a witness to both deep suffering and divine possibility, once said:

"We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise...

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own."

(Continued on page 6)

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This is the sacred work you are doing every time you chair a meeting, pray over a budget, welcome someone new, or ask your church, “What’s next?” You are planting seeds in faith, even if the harvest comes after you. You are helping to birth a church that is more just, more generous, more Spirit-led than we’ve known before.

I know the work can be heavy at times. But don’t let the weight of what still needs to be done overshadow the glory of what is already becoming. You are not alone in this labor. God is with you. Your Conference and Associations are with you. And the cloud of witnesses, past, present, and future is cheering you on. Together we are one Church In many locations.

So I urge you: keep going. Keep dreaming. Keep leading. You are helping to shape a church worthy of our deepest hopes and holiest callings.

A Prayer for the Journey:

God of seeds and seasons,

Thank you for the faithful ones who lead with love and live with courage.

When our energy wanes, renew us.

When our vision dims, remind us we are prophets of a future not our own.

Let the work of our hands be rooted in you,

and let the fruit of our labor bless generations to come.

Amen.

With deep gratitude and hope,

Rev. Darrell Goodwin

Executive Conference Minister and President

Southern New England Conference, United Church of Christ



Author: Darrell L. Goodwin

As the chief vision-keeper, communicator and strategist, Rev. Goodwin is responsible for guiding the Conference in its positive and transformative impact in our world. He also represents the Conference in ecumenical, interfaith and public gatherings.



Southern New England Conference

United Church of Christ

Living the Love & Justice of Jesus

Book Reading and Discussion Group

DAYS: Wednesdays at 7 pm

DATES: Oct. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29



Study Series Outline: "I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church" by Paul Nixon

Duration: 5 Weeks

Start Date: October 1, 2025

Format: Weekly 60–90 minute sessions (discussion + reflection)

Location: First Congregational Church, 138 Main Street, Westminister, MA: Fellowship Hall

Week 1 – Typical Lifecycles of Programs and Church Organizations

Theme: Assessing our stage in a typical lifecycle

Focus: What are the characteristics of our church?

Discussion Points:

Where are we?

Where do we imagine going?

Where do we see God in this?

Reflection: What might change look like?

Week 2 – Choosing Life Over Death

Theme: Embracing vitality and growth in ministry.

Focus: What does it mean to choose life in a church context?

Discussion Points:

Signs of life vs. signs of decline.

Biblical foundations for choosing life.

Personal and congregational renewal.

Reflection: Where is God calling us to breathe new life?

Week 3 – Choosing Community Over Isolation

Theme: Building authentic relationships and radical hospitality.

Focus: Moving from inward focus to outward connection.

Discussion Points:

The role of community in spiritual growth.

Overcoming barriers to connection.

Outreach and inclusion strategies.

Reflection: How can we become a more connected and welcoming church?

Week 4 – Choosing Fun Over Drudgery

Theme: Rediscovering joy in ministry and worship.

Focus: Reframing church as a place of celebration.

Discussion Points:

Joy as a spiritual discipline.

Creative worship and engaging ministry.

Avoiding burnout and embracing play.

Reflection: What brings joy to our church life?

Choosing Bold Over Mild & Frontier Over Fortress

Theme: Courageous leadership and missional innovation.

Focus: Taking risks and stepping into new territory.

Discussion Points:

Boldness in preaching, outreach, and vision.

Frontier thinking: new models of ministry.

Letting go of fortress mentality.

Reflection: Where is God calling us to be bold and adventurous?

Week 5 – Choosing Now Over Later

Theme: Urgency in responding to God's call.

Focus: Acting decisively and faithfully in the present.

Discussion Points:

The cost of delay in ministry.

Living in God's kairos time.

Practical steps for immediate action.

Reflection: What is one thing we will do *now* to lead with life?

Prayer List

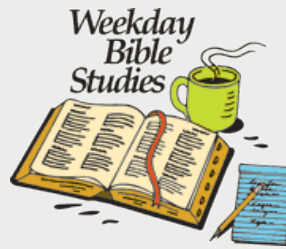


For our members, family and friends hospitalized, ill and in need of prayers, may God bless and watch over you:

Melissa C.	Bryan C.
Mary D.	Peter R.
Eunice A.	Paul (Denise's brother)
June and Brian C.	Ted G's brother
Jan G.	Gloria H.
Keith D.	Eddie H.
Tom M.	Kieman
Peter R.	Brody
Paul (Denise's brother)	Family of Theresa D.
Bob A.	All those dealing with health concerns
Lorna D.	
Steve C.	

"Prayer List"

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



Bible Study

Tuesdays at 11:00 AM

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

October 7

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7
2 Timothy 2:8-15
Luke 17:11-19

October 14

Genesis 32:22-31
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8

October 21

Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
Luke 18:9-14

October 28

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18
Ephesians 1:11-23
Luke 6:20-31



Office Hours

Monday—Thursday
Time: 9 am—noon

Sunday, November 9th

10:45 AM

Community Room

Church
COUNCIL

Pastor Russ's office hours:

Wednesdays 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

At The Vice

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

FROM THE HISTORY ROOM



Last month I promised to follow up on the old parsonages of FCCW. However, I don't have enough definitive information to give you, so I am going to switch to another topic for October.

"What's *past is prologue*" from Shakespeare reminds us that we can learn from the past, apply it to our present and shape our future. I firmly believe in that premise and have applied it to my genealogical research during my lifetime. I believe the same is true for our church. We have a treasure trove of information at our fingertips, waiting for us to examine, digest and apply to our church activities today. These treasures are available for all in the congregation to read and reflect.

Beyond the mundane filing of committee meeting records, we have many photos which are being scanned by Bob Hoyt and will be placed in albums. We also have recollections and transcriptions of tapes of various church members from the past: names such as Teen Adams, Ann Howard, Carrie Minott, Hazel Havener, Porter and Dolly Dawley, Harriet French and others which are fascinating to read and reflect on life 50 to 100 years ago in our town. We have three large notebooks full of memories of many who have gone before us. I started this project about 12 years ago.

Among the many archived boxes are ones containing files on each of our Pastors on whom I have information. We also have an archived box of sermons from some of those clergy which the Diaconate has found to be helpful. We have the Epistles which date back to its beginning in the 1960s when Sandy Fasth was Pastor and we have a box of Community Heralds which was written by another Pastor in the early 1900s.

Have I tempted you yet to come and browse? I have only scratched the surface of what the History Room has to offer. Bob and I are there most Wednesday afternoons or you can make an appointment with me. (978-632-4031)

Another thought is that we can always use help if this is something that would interest you. The Photo project could use someone who is more innovative than I am. Just a thought.

Till next month-----

Deenie Burgess, Historian



New Church Members

Pastor Russ will hold a new member class for those who would like to become members of the church. Two class meetings will be held:

Tuesday October 21 at 7pm

Thursday October 30 at 7pm.

Those people will be recognized as new church members during our Sunday worship service.

Sunday November 9th



November 23, 2025

(after Worship)

Annual Election

and

Budget Adoption Meeting

Ways you can SERVE

We have so many opportunities for you to get involved! If you would like to join a committee or get more information, contact Ellen Holmes at eholmes.fccw.moderator@gmail.com.

Moderator

Vice Moderator

Clerk

Treasurer

Assistant Treasurer

Financial Receipts Clerk

Assistant Financial Receipts Clerk

Church Historian

Trustees

Deacons

Christian Education

Music Committee

Christian Outreach Committee

Generous Giving Ministry

Financial Advisory Committee

Nominating Committee

Pastor Parish Relations Committee

Welcoming Committee

Church Librarian

Conference Delegates

Audit Committee

Memorial Giving Committee

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ... (Romans 12:3-13)



Please remember to turn in your pledge card by October 12th.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18. The wealth or "abundance" of our lives is a gift, not just a given. That is, no more than with life itself do we have this as something we can earn or deserve. It is not entitlement but blessing in which others are meant to share.

Survey Says...

A few different surveys have been prepared to gather your thoughts and hear your voice on a variety of topics. Please be sure to watch your email for these upcoming mailings. Printed copies will always be available if you prefer. Just stop by or call the office at 978-874-5790.



You fed me when I was hungry.... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

(Matthew 25:40)

The Food Pantry is looking for someone to lead this critical community service.

For more information please call
Dorcas Hurd at (978) 874-2350.



Construction Update

No official update from the builder, but as you can see from our parking lot, the work is progressing. The front of the building has been painted.





Women's Fellowship took a trip to Hollis Farm on September 5th. They cut their own flowers then arranged several bouquets, including some that were placed on the altar for our Sunday service that weekend.



Neighbors in Need (NIN) is a special mission offering of the UCC that supports ministries of justice and compassion throughout the United States. One-third of NIN funds support the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM). Two-thirds of the offering is used by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) to support a variety of justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects through grants. This offering will be received on World Sunday, which is October 5, 2025.

Truly, much has changed in the world since the Neighbors in Need Special Mission Offering of 2019. Justice issues — from women's rights to racial bias to income gaps — continue to be laid bare, making the Neighbors in Need Special Mission Offering on October 5, 2025, even more critical.

Please take a moment to learn more about some of the wonderful programs funded by this worthy cause. Envelopes will be in the church bulletin on the first Sunday in October or can be put in the offering plate during the month in a labeled envelope.

The Outreach Committee

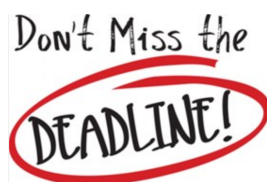
**The First Congregational Church
of Westminster
United Church of Christ
138 Main Street • PO Box 477**

The Epistle

October 2025

Phone: 978-874-5790

Church office Email:
admin@westcong.org



October 22, 2025

**For November
Submissions**

