

EST. 1639



# First Church of Rowley

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

# March

## Steeple Notes

175 MAIN STREET  
ROWLEY MA 01969

# Minister's Corner

## No More Bowing to What Diminishes Us

Easter comes early this year: April 5. It's apt to sneak up on us. One day we're shoveling Spring snow and the next we're awash in baskets, bonnets and new beginnings.

But let's remember that Easter follows something. It follows a Lenten season of turning inward and releasing what truly burdens our minds, hearts and lives. The holiday is so much sweeter if, when it arrives, we're not still stuck in the same old behavioral and relational ruts because we've turned.

This year, we have the whole month of March to lay down what weighs wrongly upon our lives and leave those things in the graves where they belong.

Lent affords us a special, holy block of time, meant for shedding habits that keep us from living as our true, whole selves before God. Expect these oppressive habits – the ones keeping you diminished – to have tantrums when you kick them to the curb. They want you to believe that you'll be miserable without them. They hope you'll remember them so fondly, so cravingly that within a day or two, you're running back to them for comfort... Even though what they have to offer is not true comfort but enslavement... These deceptive, soothing habits of heart, mind and body will not go quietly.

Let them go anyway. They don't deserve to be your masters. The season for declaring your freedom in Christ has come.

We build on this assurance: "If anyone is in Christ, that one is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). With that in mind, we can understand our life-draining habits as mere vestiges. They don't belong in our lives anymore. Their authorization has already been revoked. They just haven't been expelled yet, but now with spiritual discipline they will be.

# Minister's Corner

## No More Bowing to What Diminishes Us

Imagine freedom from paralyzing rumination, from ingesting things that breed physical or emotional dependency, from chronic distractedness, from self-disdain or from something else that needlessly and unjustly shrinks you. What is it? Release it. Replace it. Step into freedom with the power of Christ inside you and a faithful congregation around you.

As you take those steps, be grounded. Lenten gatherings at church help us make this journey together. In Sunday worship, we'll reflect on letting go and receiving new life in Christ. In Life Group (6:30 to 7:45 Mondays March 9, 16 & 23), we'll share from personal experience and leave feeling known, connected and authentic. Our Life Group theme this month is personal spirituality and how we develop it. In screenings of "The Chosen" (Sundays at 3:00; Exception: March 8 at 6:30), we ponder who Jesus is for this world and for his followers. Attend any or all of these and you'll have a stronger grip for your next step of freedom in Christ. All are welcome, and newcomers can jump in anytime.

Blessings, friends, as you release your unworthy masters in Lent 2026 and embrace the liberating Way of Jesus.

Your brother in Christ,  
Rev. Jeff

## THE DIACONATE

I know the purpose of this article is to discuss what the diaconate has been doing or plans to do. I thought, it would be helpful first to give you a little background on what deacons (a.k.a., the diaconate) responsibilities are. Currently, we have 6 positions for deacons (of which only 3 are filled) with additional roles for the Emeritus. Each deacon is voted in typically for a 4-year term. Getting someone to serve for 4 years has been challenging. An Emeritus deacon is nominated and voted in after 3, 4-year terms are served. They are welcome to attend meetings and support the deacons serving terms as needed or as able. Currently, we have 3 regular deacons who serve and 6 Emeritus that have fortunately been very involved. Sadly, 2 of our regular deacons have been unable to serve for several months due to illness. We keep them in our prayers. Consequently, that leaves one regular deacon, which right now is just me. I rely heavily on our Emeritus deacons to help. We have a saying, "Once a deacon, always a deacon!" ...which means if you have served, we may need your help on an occasion (or currently - more frequently) to help us out. I mention this because the deacons have a lot of responsibility. We are in charge of the worship service; ensuring we have deacons on duty to serve communion (this includes buying juice and bread, administering communion, cleaning up, etc.), light and de-light the candles, collect the offering, greet parishioners, hand out bulletins, make sure there is water for the minister, keyboardist, and lay reader and ensure the pews have the necessary envelopes and notices. We also have microphones ready so that everyone can be heard. when responding to the minister We support the Rev. Jeff. This is what we do just on Sunday.

Prior to Sunday, we also make sure the correct layments are hung, candles are ordered and placed in the holders, and make plans for special Sunday occasions, such as Heritage Sunday, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Lent, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Easter. In other words, we serve both our Savior, and our church. You might say, all of these things we do are our "chores.", but in fact, they are much more. It is how we help our church run smoothly. The deacons also give a helping hand when needed, serve communion to shut ins, give warm smile, a gentle touch and words of welcome and comfort. We consider this position to serve in this way a privilege and we thank you for the opportunity.

## THE DIACONATE

As most know, our structure will be changing with the Governance pilot starting in June. I look forward to the implementation. I know a lot of hard work has been put into it developing this new model and there may be some tweaking that needs to be done, but we need to give it a chance. Change is never easy, but necessary for growth.

We are currently busy preparing for Lent, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday (one of our most reverent and moving services) and our Easter celebration! We hope you will join us!

Hallelujah, Our Christ is Risen! Hallelujah!

Submitted with the excitement of the season,  
Patti Cummings  
Senior Deacon



# Megan In Ukraine

Winter 2026

Hello friends! What an intense season of survival. It is in these harsh conditions that I deeply covet your prayers. I am so grateful for your support, prayers, and care. I often wrestle with what to write in these letters. I strive to be both honest and uplifting, but I find it so difficult to explain, and to adequately share what is happening. Putting into words and even remembering the circumstances and events of the last few months feels like an insurmountable task. I have to continually remind myself that it is okay to not have all the right words, that I do not speak for everyone here but it is okay to share my thoughts and experiences. So I hope these words will be both honest and uplifting, I hope I can portray the vileness of the current situation and also the goodness of our God evenso. I pray that I will be able to adequately put into words what is happening without sugar-coating but also without being too pessimistic. Lord, help me! These winter months have been intense to say the least. I don't think I can stop long enough to reflect or look back without freezing. It has been extremely cold and the attacks on our energy plants have been brutal. Two weeks ago they destroyed the thermal energy plant that gives heating to both my apartment and to our school building. February 3rd was a dark and loud night, I awoke to my building shaking, loud explosions, a bright light out my window. I was shivering and my phone kept buzzing but I could not get up for fear of freezing. Eventually I got up put on a coat, hat, gloves and a scarf, responded to people that I am still alive, and heard that a co-worker had the windows blown out of his apartment. This hit to the thermal energy plant makes it so we will be without heat for the rest of winter. We have been living without electricity for months and for years, but now with these temperatures, so many are in absolutely unlivable conditions. I'm amazed at how easily we adjust, and how quickly we forget what yesterday was like. Now without heat, electricity, water and internet, having a schedule with 4 hours of electricity (like we did last month) feels like a dream. I have learned what it is to live without and I am grateful for the goodness of God in how he still provides for every need even when everything is gone. The more they take from us and try to kill us off, the more united and resourceful people become. I thought I knew survival mode, but each new day I understand it on a new level. There have been nights I was not sure I would make it until morning. Thankfully some people have heat and I have been able to go to friend's places to shower or get warm by their fireplace. I think of the elderly in my building and all across Kyiv. I wonder how they survive. Many have left their apartments and gone to the villages, but many are stuck. I think of the kids, the sick, the hospitals, the soldiers. This is pure evil. It is inexcusable. This is genocide. Yes, I trust that God will make all things right. Yes, I know (and have struggled at times to believe) his sovereignty and his promised justice. I live very close to this enemy. I see and feel its terror every day. Its horrific. But being near it is a gift because it has helped me live in complete reliance on Him. I praise him for the chance to pray with students who so deeply cry out for their fathers, uncles, and all those who are protecting them, I praise him for the lady I met on the street who shared her story with me, who asked for help and that God allowed me to pray for her, to take her to the store and buy warm socks and groceries for her and her young daughter who lost their husband/father and their home in the East to the war. What a gift it was to meet her, cry with her and remind her of God's love for her. I praise God for the way he leads me and the places he brings me, that I have the opportunity to walk through memorials, look into the eyes of those who gave it all to protect us, and remember their sacrifice and pray for their families. I praise God that after a night of wondering if I will make it till morning, I can come to school hug my dear students, and learn vowel sounds with them, even in our coats and hats, even in the dark, even in the basement. Such gifts- I treasure each of these moments and though of course I pray for an end to the suffering and the evil, I somehow also wish I could freeze time and cherish it all for a little longer because I know how quickly everything changes, and how valuable the tiny moments are. We are not guaranteed tomorrow and how this makes me appreciate today!



A few moments from teaching, include the weight of saying "goodbye and see you tomorrow!" The little ache in my heart as I put tomorrows date, and schedule on the board, so unsure but trusting that we will meet tomorrow. One student was going to the afterschool program and said "Miss Megan, see you in what hour!" I couldn't hear her well and replied "One hour?" She said "No, not one hour! What hour... because I do not know what hour I will see you next!" What a sweetie. Another instance from my classroom that really struck me was before Christmas break we were learning question words and story elements and were reading The Grinch. The kids and I had a really good discussion about the heart of the Grinch and the heart of the Whos. The Grinch tried to take everything away from the Whos, just as our "neighbor" is trying to take everything away from us. I was almost in tears as these kiddos understood the message of this so deeply. "They try to take away our dads, our land, our electricity, our homes, our lives, but they will fail every time because we have more than what they can take away- we have a Savior, the Light of the World and they can never ever take this away from us." It is these conversations with my students that make my heart swell but also break me. I love that they understand this, and that they do not let the enemy take their Light or their childhood from them, but in some ways they still are robbed of their childhood. I pray their hearts will always be so honest, so open and so giving. I wish those in leadership would hear these kids hearts. <3 We have been learning about the attributes of God in chapel, with a handmotion to go with each. Every day while we line up we practice them all and it is so life giving for me and the kids to remember these attributes of who God is. They are quick learners of big English words like "omnipotent" and also are memory whizzes when we learn our Bible verses each Friday. I love hearing them hum the tunes and repeat the verses- A fan favorite is "Fear not for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name you are mine." One student says she sings this every night as she goes to bed. God has shown up over and over, as Shepard, as friend, as guide. I was in a very dark place in December and through friends, through the Word and through time in the village he has restored my soul in many ways. One thing he has been teaching me is how he is a PERSONAL God but not a private God. This enemy of this physical war has highlighted ways in which the Enemy works at twisting truth, and convincing me that God is not big enough or that I need to try to keep him to myself. Reality is that he IS bigger, and he has enough love for us all. I tend to be a private person and hesitate to share with others but trying to keep Jesus to myself is doing the oposite of what he commanded. God is so deeply personal and knows us better than we know ourselves. I have been astounded at the ways he has prepared me for these very days, the ways he intricately answers prayers and the ways he meets me in my mess, caring for my every need. He not only leads me beside quite waters but also leads me on epic adventures which I am so grateful for. I encourage you to read Psalm 23 today and look for ways you see God at work around and within you. At school we survived intense weeks of freezing, with creative ways of staying warm. We had handwarmers the last few days, started a little bit later than usual and Kindergarten had a big tent in their room. We turned on space heaters when electricity was present, but now having about 2 hours a day, it didnt make much of a difference. Friday was 100 days of school. It was freezing and we had no internet all day but we still managed to have fun. We made 100 day necklaces in 2nd grade and we wrote about being 100 years old in 1st grade. I don't know if I've ever laughed so hard, as we came up with and acted out what we will do when we are 100. Such sweet moments in the midst of such horrible circumstances. This week is a break week from school and I am blessed to be in the village with my friend. As much as I had hoped to stay at home, I knew it would be impossible for me to survive there. Even as I write this in the village (about 6 hours west of Kyiv) we have no electicity, no internet, and no water for 20-22 hours a day, but atleast there is a fireplace! :) Please be in prayer for me, for the school, for the families as we seek to continue in our service but also are finding ways to survive. Pray also for the cold, the sick, the elderly, the young, the soldiers, the electricians/service workers who work tirelessly. We are heavily relying on your prayers here as circumstances get more and more dire. Thank you!



#### Prayer Requests:

- Praise that Petro is off the front lines and with his family! Pray for
- those who are suffering, the elderly, the sick, and the weary Pray for
- the families of soldiers and the families who have lost loved ones to this war Pray for our school, for wisdom and strength for the staff,
- and for guidance for each family Pray for Oksana and her 3 year old daughter Sonya- refugees who lost their home and husband. Pray
- for protection for the soldiers and a just end to this wicked war

-

1st graders working hard!



100 days celebration in our freeezing building

2nd grade Grinch projects



1st grade fun



My dear friends and neighbors



Recess fun in the Snow!



Visiting Aunt Katya outside of Kyiv



In the village with my friend and her family



Walking to church on New Years



# Happy Birthday

3/4 Don Thurston

3/6 Madison Butler

3/8 Barbara Friend

3/15 Heidi Somers

3/15 Chard Stevens

3/22 Donna Warren

3/25 Jessica Nickless

3/27 David Irving

3/28 Kirsten Merry



*Happy  
Anniversary*

March 6<sup>th</sup>

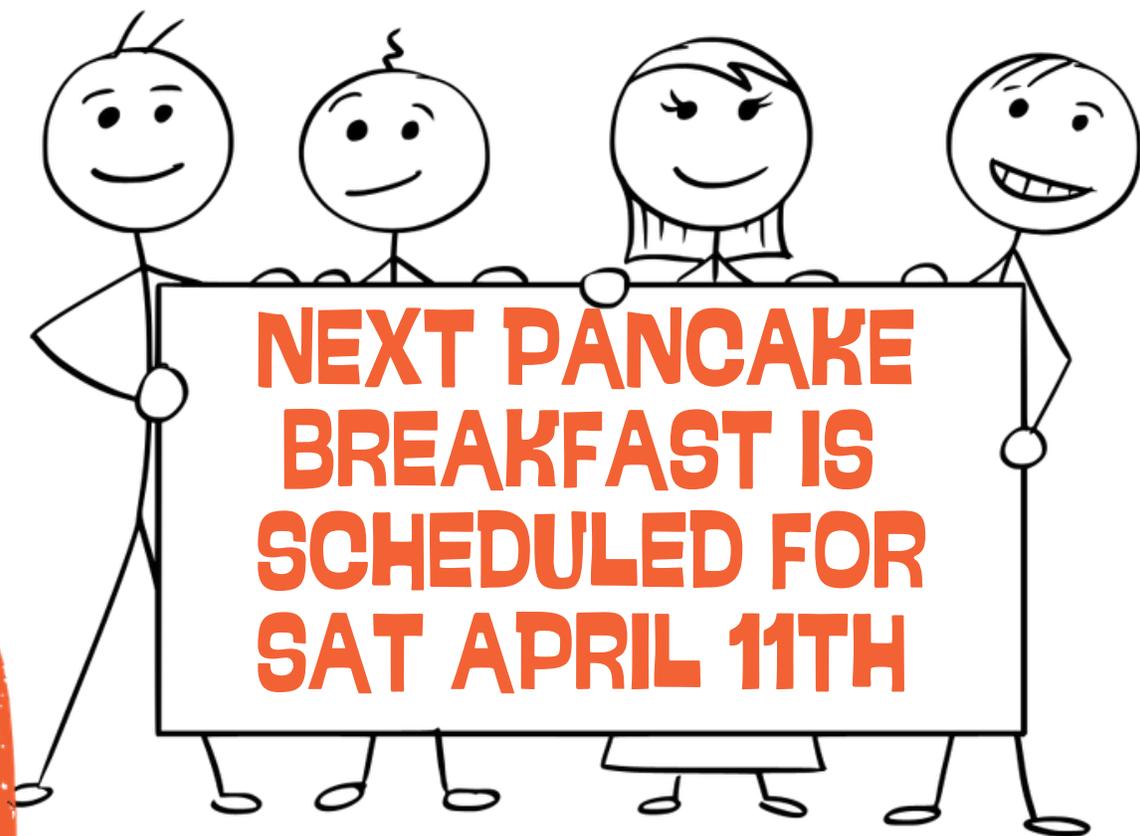
Les and Donna Warren

March 19<sup>th</sup>

Deb and Neville Fate



# **CANCELLED** **MARCH PANCAKE** **BREAKFAST**



**NEXT PANCAKE  
BREAKFAST IS  
SCHEDULED FOR  
SAT APRIL 11TH**



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ROWLEY

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 Us  
September - Golf Tournament & Flower Committee  
October - Old Tyme Country Fair  
November - Community Dinner Team  
December - Pancake Breakfast Team



*Welcoming additional entries as needed!*

# EVENTS

## AT A GLANCE

MON 2ND

**Congregational/Cabinet Meeting**  
6:30 PM

WEDS

**Getting to Know Us**  
10:00 am - 12:00 pm

SUNDAYS

**“The Chosen”** viewing & discussion  
*1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th*

MON  
9<sup>TH</sup> 16<sup>TH</sup> 23<sup>RD</sup>

**Life Group**  
*Exploring What Gives Our Lives Meaning*  
6:30 pm - 7:45 pm

TUES 24TH

**Community Cafe** (*special guest!*)  
9:00 am - 10:30 am

SUN 29TH

**Death Cafe**  
5:00 pm - 6:30 pm

MAR 29<sup>TH</sup> -  
APR 5<sup>TH</sup>

**Holy Week**  
Palm Sunday, Maudy Thursday, Easter

**First Congregational Church, U.C.C.**  
**Rowley, Massachusetts**

February 12, 2026

To: The Members and Friends, First Congregational Church, U.C.C., Rowley  
Rowley, Massachusetts

There will be a Congregational/Cabinet Meeting of the church, called by the Clerk, on Monday, March 2, 2026 at 6:30 p.m. This meeting will be held in the Fellowship Hall and also by zoom.

Items on the agenda for the meeting are:

1. To vote on the minutes from the December Congregational/Cabinet Meeting.
  
2. To receive reports from the Governance and Social Enterprise Task Force.
  
3. To discuss and vote on a timeframe for the launch of the Governance Pilot.
  
4. To hear reports and updates from Cabinet Leaders, as time permits.
  
5. To hear and act upon any other business which may properly come before the church membership.

Respectfully submitted,

*David E. Irving*

David E. Irving, Clerk



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ROWLEY

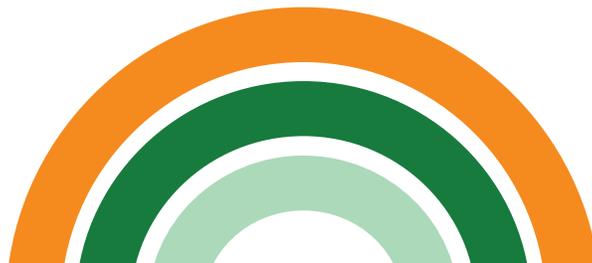
# GETTING TO KNOW US



## WEDNESDAYS

CORINTHIAN ROOM  
175 MAIN STREET ROWLEY MA 01969

10 AM - 12 AM  
ALL ARE WELCOME





# **THE CHOSEN - SEASON 1**

## **A LENTEN SERIES**

### **VIEWING & DISCUSSION**

**First Church Rowley**

175 Main Street

Rowley, MA 01969

**Facilitated by Eric and Angie**

For more information, email

Angie:

[angie@illstandbyyou.net](mailto:angie@illstandbyyou.net)



**Every Sunday During Lent**  
**at 3:00pm**

Feb 15, Feb 22, Mar 1, Mar 15,  
Mar 22 & Mar 29

**Exception**

Sunday March 8th - we will  
meet at 6:00pm

Hi Friends! As we prepare to enter the season of Lent, we invite you to join us for a special Lenten viewing

and discussion series on The Chosen — Season 1. This series offers a fresh, relational way of encountering the life of Jesus and those who met Him, and we hope it will be a meaningful companion to your own Lenten journey of reflection, repentance, and renewal.

We will gather on Sundays according to the schedule below. Each session will last approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, and we will meet in either the Parish Hall or Everett room (As space allows).

## Schedule

2/15/2026 @3pm 02/22/2026 @3pm 3/1/2026 @3pm

Episode 1 — I Have Called You by Name — ~54–55 minutes

Episode 2 — Shabbat and Episode 3 — Jesus Loves the Little Children

Episode 4 — The Rock on Which It Was Built - 50 minutes

**03/08/2026 @6:30pm Episode 5 — The Wedding Gift — (Often ~50–57 minutes)**

3/15/2026 @3pm Episode 6 — Indescribable Compassion — (Around ~45–50 minutes)

03/22/2026 @3pm Episode 7 — Invitations — (Around ~50–60 minutes)

3/29/2026 @3pm Episode 8 — I Am He — (Around ~55–60 minutes)

## What to expect

- We will watch each episode together. Afterward, we'll make time for conversation and
- reflection. You will receive a simple handout each week with scripture and reflection
- questions to help you prepare for the next session. Using the handout is completely optional, it's simply a tool for those who want to go deeper during the week (Week 1 attached).

## Why this for Lent?

Lent is a sacred season of drawing closer to God. Some of us do this through prayer, scripture, repentance, and intentional spiritual practices. The Chosen invites us to slow down, to see Jesus through the eyes of those who knew Him, and to reflect on how His life and love shape our own. Whether you are new to faith, returning to church, or looking to deepen your walk with Christ, this series can be a meaningful way to journey through Lent together.

You are welcome to come to all sessions, or to join whenever you are able. We hope this will be a warm, reflective, and enriching time for FCOR and the greater Rowley community.

We look forward to sharing this season with you.

Eric and Angie 😊

# Life Group

*Exploring What Gives Our  
Lives Meaning*

Mondays

6:30 pm - 7:45 pm

March 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 23<sup>rd</sup>

Hybrid Format:

Corinthian Room at Church or Zoom

*(link available on our website calendar to click)*

First Congregational Church of Rowley  
175 Main Street Rowley MA 01969  
(978) 948 3993  
firstchurchrowley@gmail.com

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ROWLEY

SPECIAL GUEST:  
ROWLEY'S NEW  
POLICE CHIEF  
MICHAEL BALSLEY!

# Community Cafe



TUESDAY  
MARCH 24 2026  
9:00 - 10:30 AM

FREE TO ALL

17 5 MAIN STREET ROWLEY MA 01969

**ROWLEY'S**

**DEATH**



**CAFE**

**COMMUNITY  
CONVERSATIONS**

*Death, Grief, Living & Loving  
Cake too!*

Location:

First Congregational Church of Rowley  
175 Main Street, Rowley, MA

**MAR 29, APR 26, MAY 31,  
JUNE (NO DEATH CAFE IN JUNE)  
JUL 26, AUG 30, SEPT 27, OCT 25**

**LAST SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH  
5-6:30PM**

Info: [Angie@IllStandByYou.Net](mailto:Angie@IllStandByYou.Net)  
IG & FB: Community Conversations  
#CommConvos





EST. 1639

# First Church of Rowley

...A voice of hope serving the community



## Holy Week Schedule

*All are welcome to join together as we  
reflect and rejoice*

### PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 29TH 2026

- 9:00 AM: Worship service

### MAUNDY THURSDAY - APRIL 2nd 2026

- 7:00 PM: Service of Communion & Tenebrae

### EASTER - SUNDAY APRIL 5TH 2026

- 6:00 AM: Outdoor sunrise service at Rowley Town Landing
- 9:30 AM: Easter worship service at Church

(978) 948 3993

firstchurchrowley@gmail.com

175 Main Street Rowley MA 01969