



EST. 1639

First Church of Rowley

...A voice of hope serving the community

November

STEEPLE NOTES



Pastor's Corner

Living with Awareness that Life Ends

Last month, we lost a beloved friend and leader of this congregation. David Irving was a steady presence in everything from worship to Bible study, task forces to community events. He was always in the mix – until one day, he wasn't.

The suddenness of Dave's passing, even at age 83, took many of us by surprise. What can surface in such times are instructive feelings. We might wish we'd had more time to share a word or gesture of appreciation. We might be shaken by the all-too-close reminder that we too could be here one day and gone the next. We might be led to reflect on the fragility of life and the fact that death might arrive when we aren't expecting it.

Being ready to die at any time is a staple of Christian spirituality. The early church fathers and mothers knew the importance of having no unfinished business. As Augustine of Hippo wrote in the fifth century: "Care for your body as if you were going to live forever; and care for your soul as if you were going to die tomorrow." Later, the 19th-century preacher Charles Spurgeon put it this way: "To be prepared to die is to be prepared to live."

How would we live if our deaths could be imminent? What long-postponed plans might come off the back burner and become urgent? Here are a few to consider:

- Make amends. Not every situation feels reparable, but some rifts do. Mend what can be mended now. Don't carry around unfinished personal business for months or years. Make yourself do it before taking Communion each month. This honors the Sacrament, which is a sign of our participation in God's grace and peace.
- Forgive yourself. Don't withhold grace where God has bestowed it. Receive it and live going forward as a sign of grace and hope for the world.
- Be renewed. "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NRSV)
- Express appreciation. Every day, tell somebody what you value or admire about them. Time yourself and spend 60 seconds doing it. To special people in your life, write handwritten notes. They're apt to cherish and save them forever.
- Get your affairs in order. Update your will; or make one if you don't have one yet.
- Make a living will, too, that designates health care directives in case you become incapacitated. That's being a good keeper of what you've been given.
- "Know well the condition of your flocks and give attention to your herds; for riches do not last forever." ~ Proverbs 27:23-24
- Heed advice of the late Margareta Magnusson in *The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning*. In this compassionate and often funny book, a grandmother helps readers appreciate how to donate, dispose and declutter as acts of love...because unmade decisions are burdens waiting to happen for someone else.

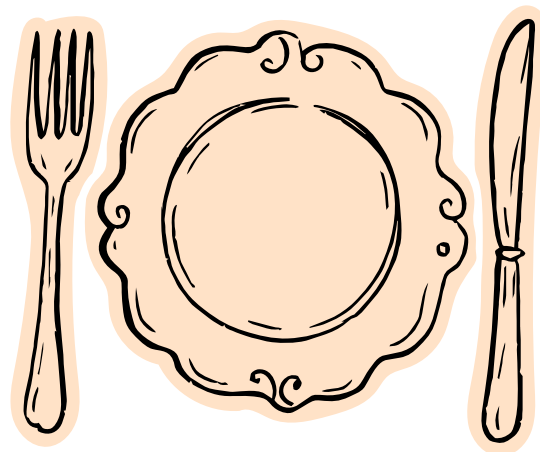
In this material world, caring for souls involves finding peace with God, neighbors and the things we're responsible for. With mortality on the mind, let's bring fresh vigor to act accordingly, i.e., with plenty of compassion for ourselves and the people in our lives.

Your brother in Christ,
Rev. Jeff MacDonald
Designated Pastor, First Church of Rowley

Community Dinner

Dinner time continues to be our favorite time of day! Enjoying the delicious food Neil cooks is the best. Our family is growing and we always love the time to catch up and enjoy each other's company. With the amount of snowstorms and winter illnesses last year, we were unable to host a dinner for the community we are a part of. This year we will begin our dinners with our Thanksgiving Community Dinner, held on Thanksgiving Day at 1 pm. All are welcome to join!

We do ask for you to RSVP so we can make sure we have enough delicious food for everyone. We will be offering pick up and delivery as well! We really enjoy this dinner as it is a time to be grateful for all we have. Sharing a meal together has so many health benefits and is an excellent way to be a part of a community! No matter where you are when you enjoy your dinner, may you feel blessed and loved!





Megan In Ukraine

Fall 2026



Dear friends-

I find myself sitting down yet again to write this letter. This is my seventh attempt to write to the end and send it. I hope this attempt will actually be completed. It seems almost impossible to sit down and accomplish anything these days. In September alone, in Kyiv, we had 235 air alerts and spent an average of 8 hours a day under attack. It is been a heavy and hard month in constant survival mode.

We just completed five weeks of school. What an intense beginning to the year. God was faithful and is faithful as we prepared for the beginning of the year and welcomed about 120 kids to school. This year started differently than others as the situation in Kyiv has only intensified. We have spent more time in the basement than in our classroom, which is quite the challenge when trying to teach basic routines to first graders. One day we were upstairs in our classroom, bracing ourselves for an air alert, only to not have one- how strange! These kiddos are troopers though and I count it a privilege and a joy to learn with and alongside them through every obstacle. Some moments in the midst of the chaos of up and down to the basement, I have these thoughts- "I wonder if Jack Hartman, Eric Carle or the author of Clifford would ever have guessed that their song or book would be used to teach English in a bunker during a full blown war in 2026?" My guess is probably not.

Adjusting to constant new challenges that arise is not easy. Living in survival mode for so long really takes a toll on a person. When there is electricity or sunlight or a break in the air raids I am grateful and try to savor it, but also with a constant fear of how in the next moment it will be taken away. In the last few months there have been so many air raids, so many attacks, lasting for so long (like 12 hours at a time), that it feels unsettling when there is no air raid. In the spring, the sirens and attacks were moreso at night but now we are constantly being bombarded. During the school day we are up and down to the basement and have spent many prolonged periods of time down there. Our basement was full of belongings of the owner of the building. Tons of old furniture and pieces of wood, tools etc. We crammed 25 first and second graders into a room full of this junk surrounding them. We carried on lessons, me teaching in English and my co-teacher teaching in Ukrainian simultaneously. It was noisy and crowded and difficult to breathe. Thankfully the owner finally agreed that we could take all his stuff out and put it in storage. So one Saturday families came and moved all of the stuff and now first grade and second grade have their own seperate tiny rooms and a new air filter so its easier to breathe. What a gift! It makes teaching down there a bit more doable, as tables are not falling on us and we can hear eachother.

This winter is projected to be even harder than last and people have been preparing. I am not sure how it could get any worse but I guess after these intense September attacks I can see and fear the winter months. Kyiv is being brutally attacked. Train stations, trains, schools, hospitals, universities, gas stations, clinics, power lines, homes- all targets. Living in terrorist attack after terrorist attack day and night. They made some new rules and systems to help adjust to these relentless attacks. We have a new color alert system where yellow means drone attack and red means missile attack. So some stores can continue working with the yellow alert and some public transport as well. It is always a gift to be able to accomplish something in between air raids.

Some families from the school wait until the air raid ends to bring their kids to school, some families bring them no matter what. We all are desperately trying to not have to go online, as we value being in person. Some parents have pushed to go online but for now we do everything to make learning happen in person despite every challenge. This is a huge gift as most schools are online now and can not continue learning or have to go home for all these air raids.

We have had a few events at school in which I have gotten to chat with families- first bell (the first day of school) and the ice cream social were special times of reconnecting and connecting. What a gift each of these families are. Many whose family members are on the front lines and parents faithful in their work and ministry and raising kids and continuing life amidst horrible circumstances. I am so blessed to be able to spend my days with these sweet kiddos.

Normalcy is such an abstract idea these days. After almost 5 years of war (and really 12 years), adjustments happen so fast and the way of life that continually changes just becomes normal. I used to react moreso to huge explosions and shaking earth, now I barely notice. Conversations continue and no longer do I react, though maybe it is affecting me more than I realize.





Things that currently feel so normal that maybe are not: Going for a run and being blown off my feet from nearby explosions. Students losing their first teeth in the basement. Going up and down to the basement with kids and supplies and science experiments in hand. Kids reassuring me the sound is of the nearby tram when we are out at recess and my head lifts up to hear what that sound was. Getting stuck on one side of the city across the river and having to walk for hours to get somewhere because bus routes change or stop and the metro stops during the air raids. Bridges being blown up and wondering if you can get home. Celebrating getting to use the oven to cook. Grocery store shelves laying bare and not being able to find items because destroyed warehouses. Waking up, (or never having gone to bed)- to the new death toll and finding out what the got hit. People leaving or preparing for winter by installing generators and batteries. Surviving the coldest months with no heating. Having no clue where you are because GPS stops working during air raids. Blowing out your birthday candle in a bunker. Kids having indoor recess underground. Walking by completely destroyed buildings. Nobody wanting to live in the apartments on the top floors. Asking each other if our windows are still in tact. The list can go on and on.

A friend of mine had her wedding a few weeks ago. It was SUCH a needed and beautiful time of celebration in the midst of chaos. I went by taxi with another friend and the driver struggled to find the location because his GPS wasn't working. On that carriage my friend read to me the report of over thirty deaths that morning. We arrived and I greeted another friend who told me about her morning and how her building was hit and her and her family are ok but obviously shaken up. While eating appetizers these were the conversations we were having. Then during the ceremony air alerts went off again and again but we continued. An empty table was set for those who lost their lives and could not be with us. It was a miracle to even have the wedding as the groom is a soldier on the front lines but was able to get enough time off to have a wedding ceremony. When we could hear drones we simply turned up the music, and the festivities and celebration of a new family continued amidst the sounds and tactics of the enemy. This wedding was a small glimpse into the current realities of life-beauty amidst war and trial.

Long story short, I am okay and not okay. I long for the world to see the horrors and the realities of what is happening. I long for eyes to be opened, for more people to see, listen, call this what it is, not "a conflict", not "a situation happening in a far off place", not "none of my business", not "someone else's issue" but a terrorist state that is brutally destroying, starving, killing, and attempting to obliterate a whole nation. I myself, even living in it, have allowed things to become normal. But nothing about terrorism is normal and I am not sure how we have allowed this to continue. Living in war is no joke but it also reminds me of the deeper war we are all fighting every day. Paul reminds us of this in Ephesians 6:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

I read recently in a devotional about how the enemy is not creative. That line hit me. He doesn't think of new ways to attack but rather he continually uses our weak points and threatens us. But we do not need to sit in fear and shame and in the threat of the enemy- whether an earthly enemy or the spiritual forces of evil. We already have victory in Christ and therefore we have hope.

Today is Defenders Day here in Ukraine and everyday we walk and live in the realization that we could not be here this day if it were not for our defenders. I thank the Lord also for defending us and for offering us life, life abundant in him. I think I will be pondering and marveling at the meaning of this mysterious miracle for a long time. And as I do so I will strive, not in my own strength, like I so often slip into, but in the strength of the Lord, to put on the full armor of God and I challenge you to do the same. As you fight your own battles, I ask that you would remember to pray for Ukraine, for the defenders, for the tactics of the enemy to be thwarted and for victory over this wicked evil. We are still standing, though weary and wounded, and we covet your prayers and support. Thank you for not turning a blind eye, for listening, caring, praying and acting. I am grateful and am lifting every reader now up to the Lord. May He be our daily bread and overwhelming peace. In the words of my 5 year old student sitting in the basement eager to pray "God, thank you for family and for food (lunch). Amen."

Prayer Requests:

- For my students-most of whom have fathers on the front lines
- For the hearts and minds of the students and their families
- For protection and for the presence of the Lord
- For those who have lost everything
- For the resources needed to continue to fight the enemy
- For the plans of the enemy to be thwarted
- For endurance for our team as we try to teach under these conditions
- For a mild winter and survival skills to endure it
- For an end to this wicked war

*3 For our
mercy*





Letter and name writing practice in the basement

Students made us mud borsch during the icecream social



First Bell with my 2nd Grade class



The wedding celebration



Gathering mushrooms in the village



1st graders enjoying a game upstairs



In between air raids we did a science experiment outside with chlorophyll



Singing and leading K-2 on a rare morning not in the basement

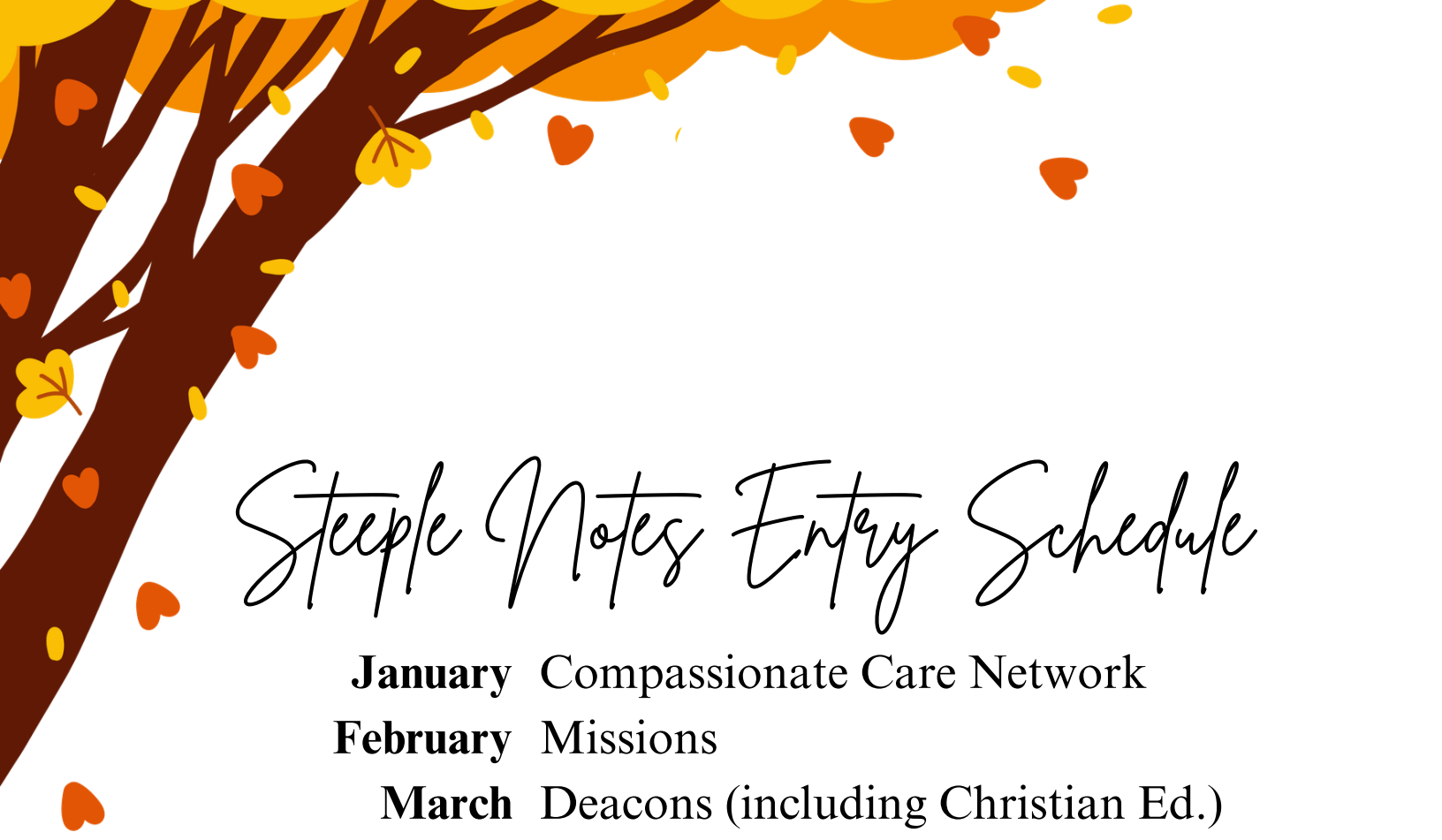


Harvest day at church with my sweet student

HAPPY *Birthday*

11/1 Janine Balistreri
11/5 Bob Mulkern
11/7 Jonathan Sanford
11/18 Adam Hanson
11/20 Grace Fyrberg
11/20 Brian Pyburn
11/21 James Kay
11/28 Jeremy Schmidt
11/29 Ashli Pyburn





Steeple Notes Entry Schedule

January Compassionate Care Network

February Missions

March Deacons (including Christian Ed.)

April Finance/Trustees

May Music Committee

June/July The Thrift Shop & Pastoral Relations
Committee

August/September Getting to Know Us, Golf Tournament
and Flower Committee

October Old Tyme Country Fair

November Community Dinner Team

December Pancake Breakfast Team

Welcoming additional entries!

*please submit all entries by the 20th of the preceding
month to firstchurchrowley@gmail.com*





EVENTS

at a glance

GETTING TO KNOW US
WEDNESDAYS 10A - 12P

GUITAR LESSONS
WEDNESDAYS 5-6PM

LIFE GROUP - AWARENESS
MONDAYS OCT 26, NOV 2, NOV 9

SEMI ANNUAL MEETING
SUN NOV 1ST AFTER WORSHIP

COMMUNITY GIVING TREE
NOV 1ST - 26TH

PANCAKE BREAKFAST
SATURDAY NOV 14TH 8A-9:30A

OLDE TYME COUNTRY FAIR
SAT NOV 21ST 9AM-2PM

COMMUNITY DINNER
THURS NOV 26TH 1PM

BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE
SUN DEC 20TH 6PM

Happy
Thanksgiving



LIFE *Group*



**THEME:
AWARENESS**

**LOCATION:
CORINTHIAN ROOM**

**MONDAYS
6:30-8:00 PM**

OCT 26TH

NOV 2ND

NOV 9TH

**FIRST CHURCH OF ROWLEY
175 MAIN ST
ROWLEY MA 01969**



WEDNESDAYS

GETTING TO KNOW *Us*



CORINTHIAN ROOM
WEDNESDAYS
9:30A-11:30A

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ROWLEY
175 MAIN ST ROWLEY MA 01969



THE STRUMMING BROTHERS



FREE LESSONS - ADULT ONLY

**ALL LEVELS OF GUITAR EXPERIENCE, SPECIALIZING
IN BEGINNER/ENTRY**

LED BY AN EXPERIENCED GUITAR PLAYER

WEDNESDAYS 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM

LOCATED IN THE EVERETT ROOM

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF ROWLEY
175 MAIN STREET ROWLEY MA 01969



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

October 1, 2026

To Members and Friends,
First Congregational Church, Rowley

The 2026 Semi-Annual Meeting of the church membership will be held on Sunday, November 1, 2026. The meeting will open with a worship service starting at 9:30 a.m., with a short break after worship for coffee. The business meeting will start no earlier than 11:00 am that same morning.

Items on the agenda for the business meeting are:

1. To hear and act on recommendations from the Finance Board on the church budget for 2027.
1. To hear an update from the Moderator on Pulpit Supply/ Ministerial Search..
1. To hear any other business which may properly come before the church membership.

Respectfully submitted,

David E. Irving

David E. Irving, Clerk

A Community Giving Tree of Thanks

Novembers 1st - 26th

see next page for more details



A Community Tree of Thanks

Cultivating gratitude, hope, and connection

**“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” -
Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)**

1

This November, the Outreach Team, in collaboration with **Community Conversations**, invites you and our neighbors to participate in **A Community Tree of Thanks**, an interactive community activity designed to cultivate gratitude and strengthen connections throughout the Thanksgiving season.

The tree will be displayed at First Church of Rowley throughout **November**, leading up to Thanksgiving on **Thursday, November 26, 2026**.

How can you participate?

It's simple! Stop by, take a colorful leaf, write something or someone you're thankful for, and hang it on the tree. Invite your children, grandchildren, friends, and neighbors to participate. All ages are welcome!

Why Gratitude?

Since 2024, Community Conversations has partnered with our church to opportunities for open conversations about life, death, and loss. Together, we launched the Rowley Death Café and have continued developing new ways to bring people together and support our community.

We recognize that the holiday season can be especially difficult for those experiencing grief or significant life changes. Yet **grief and gratitude are not mutually exclusive**. We can experience sorrow and joy, loss and hope, and sadness and thankfulness simultaneously.

Practicing gratitude doesn't diminish our grief or require us to ignore life's challenges. Instead, it can help us recognize the blessings that remain, even during difficult seasons.

Practicing gratitude can contribute to our well-being in several ways:

- **Spiritually:** Encourages reflection, thankfulness, and recognition of God's faithfulness.
- **Emotionally:** Helps us notice positive experiences, cultivate hope, and strengthen resilience.
- **Physically:** May support better sleep, stress management, and overall well-being.
- **Relationally:** Strengthens connections, encourages kindness, and deepens our appreciation for others.

Our hope is that this simple activity will bring generations together and remind us that there is always room for gratitude, even in life's most challenging seasons.

As we continue our community outreach efforts, we also look forward to our **Blue Christmas Service on Sunday, December 20th**, offering a special time of reflection and hope. More information will follow.

We invite everyone to help us fill the tree with gratitude throughout November!
Questions? Please contact **Angie, Pam, or Penny** from the Outreach Team.

First Church of Rowley — A voice of hope serving the community.



Pancake **BREAKFAST**

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14TH

8:00 AM - 9:30 AM

**\$10 PER PERSON
CHILDREN UNDER 12 FREE**

**175 MAIN ST
ROWLEY MA 01969**



A Rowley Holiday Tradition!

SAT NOV 21ST 2026
9 AM – 2 PM

Delicious baked goods
Beautiful handcrafted items
Festive holiday greenery
Unique attic treasures
Visit from Santa

Zeke's Country Store
Silent Auction
Savory homestyle lunch
Games and puzzles
Books and more!

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 **COMMUNITY • GRATITUDE • TOGETHERNESS** 

FREE THANKSGIVING COMMUNITY DINNER

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2026

1:00 PM

First Congregational Church of Rowley

175 Main Street • Rowley, Massachusetts

TO-GO DINNERS

& DELIVERIES AVAILABLE TOO!

PLEASE RSVP TO RESERVE YOUR SEAT

RSVP by email: butlerel76@gmail.com

RSVP by phone: 978-580-0695

RSVP BY QR CODE



Sponsored by...Fed by Faith • The First Congregational Church of Rowley



Blue Christmas

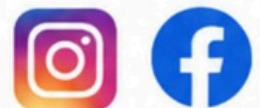
The Longest Night

Hosted by Community Conversations
in collaboration with First Church of Rowley

First Church
of Rowley
175 Main Street
Rowley, MA



Follow
Community
Conversations
for updates



A Christmas service for those who
are carrying grief or are just feeling weary...

— ★ —
“When others rejoice, rejoice with them;
when they grieve, do not let them grieve alone.”

— Inspired by Romans 12:15