



VILLAGE SPIRE

February 2025

Congregational Meeting:

Preliminary Budget Meeting

Sunday, February 9
after worship



The Budget and Finance Team will provide an update on the current financial status of the church, as well as a preliminary budget overview for the next fiscal year (FY26).

This meeting will be held in the community room after worship, and a Zoom link will be available for those unable to join in person. All members are encouraged to attend; childcare will be available. The Zoom link and password for online participation will be emailed to members.

This meeting is for informational purposes only; we will not be voting on anything.

Good Stuff Sale Donations

This year's Woman's Association's "Good Stuff Sale" will be held on May 2 and 3. It's not too early to look around your home for things you might want to donate to this fundraiser to support the church and community organizations. The sale includes clothing and accessories, jewelry, household items, toys and books and much more. Questions? Contact Sally Bowkett, sbb46@hotmail.com or 603-673-7409, or Alicia Wight, wightalicia@gmail.com or 603-345-0155.

The Practice of Being Present to God

Rev. Maureen Frescott, Senior Pastor
February 2025

How often do you converse with God? Having a conversation with God implies that we are actively speaking and listening, just as we do in any conversation. We may converse easily with those we know and love – sharing what is on our minds and hearts as we make space to then hear what is on their minds and hearts. Yet with God, we may experience stumbling blocks to having such a conversation. Especially when we label that conversation as "prayer." Prayer assumes a level of formality, or reverence, or appropriateness that we don't often apply to our everyday conversations. And therein lies the problem.

Prayer is a central practice within the Christian faith, yet outside of formal worship we may struggle to embrace prayer as a regular practice, or even as an irregular practice. It's the how, what, where, and why questions that often leave us restricting our practice of prayer to Sunday mornings, when those questions are much easier to answer. How do we pray? What do we pray? Where do we pray? Why do we pray?

On Sunday mornings, most of the prayers we say in worship are scripted. We join in a unison prayer of invocation, as we acknowledge God's presence among us. We say a prayer of dedication over our offering, and a prayer of thanksgiving after we receive Communion. During Lent, we add a prayer of confession to our worship, to shift our focus onto the ways in which God calls us towards healing and wholeness. And every Sunday, we recite the Lord's Prayer together – the prayer that Jesus taught us to say, which is a bundling together of many prayers in one: praise, thanksgiving, confession, contrition, submission, and intercession on behalf of the needs of others.

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Serving Neighbors Near and Far

Our church mission statement contains the phrase "Serving neighbors near and far." Following is a summary of our efforts to fulfill that mission for the last four months (September - December). Where relevant and available, website information is noted for those who would like to know more about the organizations to which we have made donations.

The **Home Starter Program** (ccamherst.org/homestarter/) continues to help newly housed individuals and families with donations of furniture and household goods. Many members of the congregation volunteer time, energy, compassion and muscle to coordinate donations and make deliveries to people in need. Referrals for the Home Starter Program exceeded 100 for the year.

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VILLAGE SPIRE

A Parish Newsletter

The Congregational Church of
Amherst, NH, United Church of Christ
11 Church Street, Amherst, NH 03031

***"No matter who you are or
where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here."***

Sunday Worship Service 10:00 a.m.

Church school available.

How to reach us:
Office Phone (603) 673-3231,
(603) 673-6848
www.ccamherst.org
[Facebook.com/ccamherst](https://www.facebook.com/ccamherst)
[Instagram.com/ccamherstnh](https://www.instagram.com/ccamherstnh)

The church office is open
Monday, Wednesday and Friday
from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and
is available by telephone and email
Monday through Friday.

Send in all newsletter articles
by the fifteenth of the month.

Items for the Sunday bulletin
are due Thursday morning.

OUR CHURCH STAFF:

Rev. Maureen R. Frescott
Senior Pastor
pastormaureen@ccamherst.org

Rev. Charlotte E. Y. Bell
Associate Pastor
pastorcharlotte@ccamherst.org

Sara L. Phelps
Director of Music
kalben1@comcast.net

Michael Havay
Organist
michaelh117@gmail.com

Larissa Riley
Director of Youth Ministries
churchschool@ccamherst.org

Andrea Cyr
Church Office Administrator
andrea@ccamherst.org

Blankets for Bruce— Blanket the World in LOVE

Blanketing the world with love becomes a beautiful reality when people of faith unite through the Church World Service (CWS) Blankets special appeal. Together, we can bring comfort, hope, and warmth to our neighbors during their most challenging times.

Again, we have launched this special appeal, **Blankets for Bruce**, in memory of Bruce Beckley, a beloved member of our congregation. Bruce had a deep passion for outreach, and this initiative was close to his heart. By supporting this appeal, you honor his legacy while making a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

Each blanket is more than just a practical item—it is a tangible expression of God's love. These gifts provide warmth on a cold night, relief in the midst of crisis, and a powerful reminder that someone truly cares.

Just \$10 can provide a single blanket that offers not only physical comfort but also hope, warmth, and the reassurance of God's love. Your contribution to the CWS Blankets program helps supply essential resources to those in need while reminding them they are loved and cared for. Because of the generosity of donors like you, CWS was able to respond swiftly to the devastation caused by Hurricanes Helene and Milton, distributing 26,536 CWS Blankets to families beginning their long journey toward recovery.

As a church family, let's join as we take up a Blankets for Bruce offering. You can donate using the Blankets pew envelopes, mail a check with Andrea, with 'blankets' on the memo line or donate online at our custom CWS Blankets secure donation page: <https://cwsblankets.org/virtual/ccamherst/>.

Thank you for continuing to make this life-changing work possible. Together, we are sharing God's love and making a world of difference.

"And now faith, hope and love abide, these three: and the greatest of these is love." ~1 CORINTHIANS 13:13



A Few Words About the Weather...

Church Closings Due to Bad Weather: As many know, New England weather is ever changing and at times can be quite unpredictable. In the case of bad weather and the need to cancel an in-person worship service, we will post announcements on WMUR Channel 9 television, and on our website and Facebook pages.

Of course, that doesn't mean you will miss out on Sunday morning worship. Our live streamed service will still be available for folks to tune in to at 10:00 a.m. on our Facebook page, and we will continue to upload the recorded service to our website by noon.

Beware of Falling Snow and Ice: During the winter months, we want to remind everyone that snow and ice may fall from our roof at any time. Please use caution when in our driveway, and do not walk too close to the building.



The Practice of Being Present to God, continued from page 1

The lifting up of our joys and concerns during worship is our opportunity to share unscripted prayers (i.e. prayers composed by the people rather than the pastor). But not everyone feels comfortable sharing such prayers in public. Some choose to submit written prayers (on average 3-5 prayer cards are collected during our Sunday service). Others prefer to lift up their joys and concerns privately during the time we allot for silent prayers. Yet, what to pray and how to pray it may escape us in the moment. Which is why I suspect there are a good number of us who use that time to think about what comes next in the service, or where we're going afterward, or any number of things that our minds may wander to in the minute or so of breathing space we're given.

Outside of Sunday morning worship, we may not have much breathing space at all, for prayer or any formal faith practice. With all the coming and going and doing and checking the next thing off the list, that occupies our time outside of Sunday mornings. Let's pause here and stress that naming this struggle is not about shaming. To even make time for a communal worship service on Sunday morning is to swim against the current of our culture. The hour or two we give to God on Sunday morning is evidence of our desire to keep that relationship on the front burner. And when we add the hours of "giving to God by giving to others" that we may do outside of Sunday morning, we have reason to resist any suggestion that we're somehow not doing "enough" when it comes to practicing our faith.

Yet, we have much to gain if we create just a bit more breathing space that allows us to be more present to God. Let's set aside the word "prayer" for a moment and go back to what we already know how to do well: engaging in conversations. What would it look like if you adopted a practice of talking to and listening to God that was as informal and effortless as talking and listening to a beloved member of your family or a good friend? Instead of immediately reaching for the phone or sending off a text to those you know and trust when you're struggling with something, or feeling anxious or angry, or even feeling thankful for some good fortune, what if you reached out to God first? What if in that moment you said, "Hey God....Thanks!" or "Help!" or "Wow!" or "Whoops!" or "Why?" What if you then shared what is on your heart, as if God were sitting across from you at the kitchen table, nursing a cup of tea and nodding along as you speak. What if you then took the time to listen to God's response. Which, like a good friend, may be just to say, "I hear you, I'm with you, and I love you."

Developing a "practice of being present to God" in this way may not feel like prayer in a traditional sense, but it truly is. On Sunday, February 16th, during our monthly worship where we focus on building "An Altar in the World," we'll explore the practice of prayer. We'll acknowledge the struggle we may have with adopting such a practice and give voice to the how, what, where, and why questions that often leave us stumbling and fumbling in our effort to build a relationship with God outside of Sunday morning. If you're like me, you may already have a practice of talking to yourself. Wondering aloud as you go about your daily duties. Asking yourself, "What am I doing?" "How am I feeling?" "What is wrong with this world?" and "What can I do to make it better?" Those are big questions to ask, even of yourself. What would happen if you invited God into the conversation?

Peace and blessings,
Pastor Maureen



An Altar in the World Worship ***The Practice of Being Present to God***

February 16 - 10:00 a.m.

On the third Sunday of every month, our 10:00 a.m. worship celebrates our church-wide theme - AN ALTAR IN THE WORLD. Each month we'll focus on a different practice to inspire us to live our faith in the world and in our everyday lives.

In February, we'll explore "The Practice of Being Present to God." Prayer is said to be a central part of the Christian life, yet many of us struggle to embrace it in a practical way outside of Sunday morning. We'll explore the big questions many of us have about prayer: How do we pray? What do we pray about? And why do we pray? Our children will participate in the beginning of the service before heading off to Church School to engage the theme in their class time. We hope you can join us, either in-person or online!

Family Game Night

Saturday, February 8

5:30 to 8:00 p.m.



CCA's annual Family Game Night and Potluck Supper is Saturday, February 8, 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. **All ages, friends and family are welcome.** We will have Bingo, cards, board games and trivia, and attendees are encouraged to bring their own favorite game to share with others. Prizes will be awarded too!

Supper is potluck style: pizza and beverages will be provided, and folks are asked to bring a side/salad/dessert to share.

A voluntary donation is welcome: \$5 for individuals/\$10 for families. RSVP is always helpful, contact Meredith Dart at m_getler@hotmail.com.

SHARE Food Pantry

The SHARE Food Pantry continues to be busy. Please know your donations are needed and truly appreciated.

February Pantry Requests:

canned ham, canned meats/tuna/chicken, mac and cheese, pasta (all sorts), Progresso and Chunky soups



Donations should be brought directly to the SHARE Center in Milford; if you are unsure where, please call their office at 673-9898. Many thanks for your continuing support!

Serving Neighbors Near and Far, continued from page 1

The **Church School** prepared and served a luncheon to residents of the Mill Apartments in Milford, an annual tradition the residents thoroughly enjoy, both for the meal and for the company of the children.

Senior Youth Group helped with Breakfast with Santa and the Lions Club Spaghetti Supper.

Through the **Diaconate** and donations from the congregation, Thanksgiving gift cards were provided to 10 families this year.

World Service coordinated Christmas gift donations from the congregation which were distributed to residents of the Crestwood Nursing Home and to children of families being served by Family Promise of Southern New Hampshire. Christmas gifts were also provided for the refugee family who are being supported by the Messiah Lutheran Church and whom the congregation met in October.

The **Woman's Association** has made the following donations:

- \$500 - American Red Cross Hurricane Relief
- \$100 - Home, Health & Hospice, in memory of Mary Howe
- \$300 - Holiday Toy Store - For 35 years the Holiday Toy Store has given families experiencing financial difficulty in Milford, Brookline, Mont Vernon, and Amherst the opportunity to choose holiday gifts.
- \$500 - SHARE Outreach (sharenh.org)
- \$500 - NH Food Bank (nhfoodbank.org)
- \$300 - Bridges Domestic & Sexual Violence Support (bridgesnh.org)
- \$300 - Souhegan Valley Rides Blue Bus (souheganvalleyrides.org)
- \$250 - Meals on Wheels (hcmow.org), in memory of Dot Ulrich

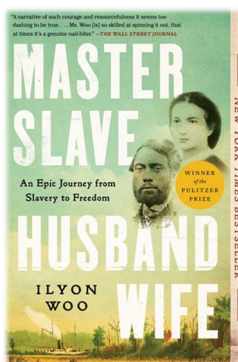
Through the Mission Fund, the World Service Committee recommended and Church Council approved the following donations:

- \$500 - End 68 Hours of Hunger (end68hoursofhunger.org) A Nashua organization working to fill the food gap experienced by some children between school lunch on Friday and school breakfast on Monday.
- \$500 - Muso Health (musohealth.org) \$500 Training and empowering first-line medical providers in rural areas in Africa.
- \$500 - Reach Out and Read (reachoutandread.org) Providing children with a new book per visit through pediatricians' offices.
- \$1000 - fitnh.org – Providing housing options to low-income families and individuals experiencing homelessness
- \$1000 - SHARE (sharenh.org) Providing emergency and ongoing support to individuals and families in need in Milford, Amherst, Brookline and Mont Vernon for 40 years
- \$2000 - UCC Disaster Ministries (ucc.org) Aid in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene

Our outreach attempts to address many persistent needs in the world, and we do far more as a faith community than we could as individuals. If you have projects, events or donations you would like included in future updates, please contact Mark Baddeley in person or via email at mbaddeley@comcast.net.

True Love Leads to Freedom

Ellen was a talented seamstress in the mid-1800's who was enslaved by a Master who was also her father. She fell in love with William, an enslaved cabinetmaker from a different household in Macon, Georgia. Both Ellen and William had experienced traumatic separations from loved ones – Ellen was given to the Master's daughter and thus separated from her own mother while William saw his only remaining sibling sold at a public auction when they were only children. Ellen and William met secretly whenever they could such as on their trips to the market and while engaging in other activities for their masters. Over many months they concocted a daring and courageous plan that eventually allowed them to live a free life as husband and wife, and to raise their children in freedom as well.



Master Slave Husband Wife: An Epic Journey from Slavery to Freedom by Ilyon Woo is a true story about Ellen and William Craft's remarkable journey from their life of bondage in Georgia to the free states of the north and eventually to England. It is a story of love and commitment as well as grit and determination to escape the life of slavery they were originally destined to endure. Since Ellen was a light-skinned Black woman, she decided to play the role of a well-to-do white gentleman who was an invalid. William, who was a dark-skinned Black man, acted as her 'slave' and attended to her needs on their journey north. As they prepared for their

journey, Ellen used her skills as a seamstress to fashion clothing befit for an aristocrat, including a handsome stove pipe hat. She swept up her hair under the hat, donned the britches of the day, wrapped her arm in a sling and placed bandages on her face and hands to further justify her medical needs.

Ellen, now posing as a wealthy disabled man, booked travel all the way to PA, then to Boston, and on to Canada on a series of trains, steamboats, and carriages. Along the way, steamboats were sometimes canceled and carriages were delayed, requiring quick thinking on the part of the Crafts. They were often required to find overnight housing to wait for the next mode of travel, all the while continuing to enact the roles they had selected as Master and Slave.

The Crafts had hoped to stay in Boston, as Massachusetts was considered a free state where Black people could live freely. However, at this time the Fugitive Slave Law was more strictly enforced; if an escaped slave was caught in any state, the pursuers were allowed to return the enslaved person to their rightful owners and receive compensation. So the Crafts moved further north to Canada and eventually gained passage to England where they could truly be free.

Along their journey the Crafts met many of the people who paved the way for all people to be free and pursue happiness in the United States. They enjoined hands with such abolitionists as Wendell Phillips, Frederick Douglass, Lewis and Harriet Hayden, and Robert Pervis. William and Ellen joined with William Wells Brown, another abolitionist and orator, to tell their story throughout New England and then overseas of enslavement and their daring escape. This story encouraged many people of the times to protest slavery, eventually leading to the Civil War and ultimate freedom for those enslaved. The Crafts eventually returned to Macon, Georgia, and Ellen was reunited with her mother.

Submitted by the CCA Racial Justice Group



What is Small Group Ministry?

Small Group Ministry is where 8-10 people meet with the intention of establishing deeper connections with each other and with God.

Small Groups allow for deeper conversations that we can't always have in committee meetings or during coffee hour. The groups meet once a month from October to June, and are led by our pastors. The group meetings run 1.5 hours and include a check-in, a short topic reading, discussion of the topic, and closing prayer.

Choose a Group!

First Tuesday 1:30-3:00 p.m.

First Sunday 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

All groups will meet in-person or on Zoom as needed.

How To Get Involved

You may join a group at any time of the year as long as your choice is still open. Each group is limited to ten members.

Sign up online at ccamherst.org or contact Pastor Maureen at 603-673-3231 x11, pastormaureen@ccamherst.org

This year our Small Groups theme is "An Altar in the World." Each month we'll focus on a different practice to inspire us to live our faith in our everyday lives.

Remaining Schedule for 2025

February:	Being Present
March:	Getting Lost
April:	Walking on the Earth
May:	Feeling Pain
June:	Saying No



**Banned, Burned,
and Buried:
The Books NOT
in the Bible**

Wednesdays, February 5 and 19
10:00-11:30 a.m. on Zoom

Join us for this video lecture series as we continue to delve into the “lost” books of the Bible.

In our February session we’ll explore the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary, which offer alternative understandings of traditional Christian beliefs about God, Jesus, and Creation itself. In each session, we’ll watch a video together as a group and then have a discussion facilitated by Pastor Maureen. The class will meet every first and third Wednesday at 10:00 a.m. on Zoom All are welcome!

Email pastormaureen@ccamherst.org to receive the Zoom link, or to receive links to the videos we’re watching if you’re unable to participate in the class.

**SCOUT SUNDAY
is February 16**

All current and former scouts and scout leaders (including Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, and Scouts BSA) are encouraged to wear their uniforms to worship. Contact Larissa Riley if you/your scout would like to participate as a greeter, usher, or other role.

A Heartfelt Thank You!!

THANK YOU to all who participated in our tenth Christmas in Amherst Village house tour. It was a big success—both the planning and the actual tour were enjoyed by many members of the congregation and the community. The almost 500 folks who toured the five historic homes and the church were very enthusiastic and grateful that we had once again sponsored a tour after a seven-year hiatus. The luncheon at the church was delicious. Many really enjoyed learning about our church’s history from Pastor Maureen; and some said they had no idea how storied our history is.

The tour has always been a true collaboration between the church and the community. Dozens of church members volunteered on various aspects of the project. Five local businesses sponsored the tour. Please thank the following when you have the opportunity: Amherst Garden Center and Farm to Market, Artistic Tile, Deb Farrow & Ingrid Michaelis of Coldwell Banker, Dovetail Dental Associates, and Elisabeth Larson of Edward Jones. Talented local florists lend their flair: Bedford Fields Home and Garden Center, The Garden Party, Purple Finch Floral Design, and Woodman’s Florist.

The tour would not have been a success without the efforts of Chair Sally Hooper, who led the committee through many months of planning. Thanks also go to all who volunteered on the luncheon committee, liaisons and docents in the homes and drivers of the vans, shuttling ticket holders between houses.

The tour was possible because of the efforts of many good and generous people. There are too many to name, but we appreciate every effort. We also deeply appreciate the support of all those who purchased tickets and went on the tour. It was heartwarming to see church and community members strolling through town together, enjoying a holiday event in our town that our church sponsored.

The CAV committees have always sponsored the house tours to promote the sense of community and have strived to make our tour “the best.” We are delighted that our \$20,000 profit will contribute to the continued mission of the Congregational Church.

Thank you one and all---and we look forward to our next tour in December 2025!



Financial Summary
(as of December 31, 2024)

	YTD <u>Actual</u>	YTD <u>Budget</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Income	\$277,680	\$268,719	\$ 8,961
Expenses	\$242,232	\$247,389	\$(5,157)
Net Income	\$ 35,447	\$ 21,330	\$14,118

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest whole dollar; as such, some columns may not appear to total correctly. We hope you are finding this information helpful. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to anyone on the Finance Team: Ken Bell (Treasurer), Paul Spiess, Doug Topliffe, and Todd Whitney (chair).

The Senior Youth Group is Planning a Mission Trip



Youth Volunteers at Breakfast with Santa

On June 22nd, fifteen members of our church's Senior Youth Group, along with their adult advisors, will fly to Asheville, North Carolina to participate in a six-day mission trip. They will be assisting with disaster recovery in the western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee area, which was badly damaged by Hurricane Helene last fall. The group won't know ahead of time exactly where they will be working or what particular project they'll be working on until they arrive. Group leader, Larissa Riley, gave the group several options for places to go on this year's mission trip. The teens agreed that helping with Hurricane Helene recovery was their first choice. *Experience Mission*, a faith-based organization, will coordinate the details for the group once they arrive in Asheville.

This mission trip will be a new experience for most of the group. A few of the older teens had fun volunteering on the mission trip our youth group took to

New Orleans two years ago. On that trip the youth volunteered at several different places in the city, but on this year's trip they expect to work on one big project for their entire stay. The accommodations won't be luxurious. They'll spend nights sleeping on the floor of a school or church. Each evening they'll meet for worship and debriefing and they'll also connect with other volunteer groups.

One of Larissa's goals, as our church's Director of Youth Ministries, is to encourage the youth to participate in the life of our church. The Senior Youth Group has been very active recently helping at several church events, such as Breakfast with Santa, the WA Holiday Fair, and the CAV House Tour luncheon. They also volunteered at the Amherst Lions Club Spaghetti Dinner. By helping at church and community events and traveling hundreds of miles to do hurricane relief, the SYG is carrying out our church's motto, "Serving Neighbors Near and Far."

In order to finance this mission trip, the group kicked off their 144 Envelopes fundraiser on January 19th. Envelopes are posted on a bulletin board in the Community Room. Anyone who would like to donate to the cost of the trip should take an envelope and return it with the monetary amount that matches the number on the envelope. Donations can also be made using the church website. Any amount would be greatly appreciated.

Written by Adrienne Topliffe

Thanks to Larissa Riley and the Senior Youth Group for assistance with this article.



Youth Volunteers at the Lions Spaghetti Supper

Youth Ministries February Schedule

Church School: Regular Church School classes Feb. 2, 9, and 16. No church school class on Feb. 23.

Confirmation Class: Thursdays, Feb. 6 and Feb. 20, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.

Junior Youth Group (JYG): Sundays, Feb. 2 and March 2.

Senior Youth Group (SYG): Saturday, 2/8: Game Night: Instead of a Sunday night meeting this weekend, join your SYG friends and the rest of the congregation for dinner and games! Sunday, 2/16: SYG Meeting 6:00 - 7:30 PM

Save the Dates for special events with Youth Ministries this spring and summer...

March 28th: Senior Youth Group Overnight Lock-In!

All 8th - 12th grade teens are invited to spend the night at the church for a night of fun and learning. We will work on community building activities as well as participate in *Experience Mission's* Service Training program. We will discuss the "7 Healthy Service Principles" to help us make the most of the upcoming Mission Trip and all community service activities. Watch your email for more details.

April 18th: Combined Youth Group Outing to Jesus Christ Superstar!

We have reserved a block of tickets for the 7:30 PM show at The Palace Theater on Good Friday. We will start by offering tickets to students in our Youth Groups and Confirmation Classes along with their advisors and mentors. If there are remaining tickets, we will open it up to families and others. Ticket Cost is \$40 for ages 13 and up, \$25 age 12 and under. Please let Larissa know if you would like to attend.

August 4th - 8th: Vacation Bible School (VBS)!

More information will be coming soon, and registration opens in the spring. For now, mark your calendars so you don't miss out on VBS 2025!



The Congregational Church
of Amherst, NH, UCC
11 Church Street
Amherst, NH 03031

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
P A I D
PERMIT NO. 4
AMHERST, NH



“But I say to you that listen,

Love

your enemies,

do good

to those who hate you,

bless

those who curse you,

pray

for those who abuse you.”

Luke 6:27-28, NRSV