



# The Beacon

February 2026

Vol. 42, No. 2

40 DAYS CHARITY +  
ALMSGIVING  
L E N T P E N A N C E  
FASTING P R A Y E R Y  
REFLECTION  
CONVERSION  
G O L D E N C R O S S  
D U M E R C Y



*From the Interim  
Senior Minister's Desk*

*Rev. David J. Wood*

**On the Season of Lent: A Time to be Interrupted**

Ash Wednesday, February 18, begins one of the most important seasons in the Christian Liturgical Calendar: The Season of Lent. I did not grow up observing Lent—I didn't even know it existed until I was in Seminary! Since then, I have come to regard it as pivotal to my spiritual life.

Lent is a 40 day period from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday. It actually covers 46 days on the calendar because the Sundays are “in” Lent but not “of” Lent. The number 40 has some sacred precedent in biblical history: it rained for 40 days in the time of Noah, Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai when he received the Ten Commandments, the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert before he began his ministry. It is a time for turning, for being turned, for preparation, for transformation and renewal.

I have come to think of it as a season of INTERRUPTION...in the sense that it is an interruption to the flow of our lives that is not shared by the culture at large. It is a deliberate, a chosen interruption rather than one that is forced upon us by external events. A self-imposed interruption is what we need from time to time to wake up, to see what we have lost sight of, to recover a sense of agency and possibility, to restore our response-ability.

All of us have notions of what is good for us, of what we value, of what we consider worth doing—but more often than not, we find ourselves being less responsive to such things, as if we don't have time for them. We find ourselves reacting rather than responding to life.

Lent is a time less for raising questions than it is a listening for the questions that are already impressing themselves in on us about the shape of our lives. It is the determined effort to be quiet enough, long enough to discern those areas of disquiet we feel. Sometimes the hardest thing to hear is the sound of something missing...something we would not hear if we didn't pause long enough in the silence.

Lent is a time to deliberately unsettle our lives, our routines in the same way that we unsettle the soil in a garden bed to create the conditions for growth and flourishing.

What might interruption look like in your life?  
What would it mean for you to listen for the questions?

While Lent is a season that is personal—it is to be lived in community. Along with our gatherings for Worship on the Sundays in Lent, we will mark the beginning of Lent with an Ash Wednesday Vespers, I will offer daily meditations over the 40 days, a group will gather to read through the Gospel of Mark, another group will read through Brian McLaren’s book, *Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart*. (More details below)

Don’t let this season pass you by. Enter into the interruption, seize the pause, and move from reactivity to response-ability.

Peace,  
David

**Coming in Lent @ FCC:**

**A Special Ash Wednesday Vespers  
February 18 5:00 p.m.**

Along with the usual meditative Vesper Service,  
the imposition of Ashes will be offered.



**Daily Lenten Meditations by David J. Wood**

Beginning on Ash Wednesday, each morning during the 40 days  
of Lent, a meditation will be delivered to your email inbox.



**A Bible Study on the Gospel of Mark**

**Tuesdays: 4:00 – 5:15 p.m. February 24 – April 7**

**The Pilgrim Room Facilitator: David J. Wood**

Each week we will take a section of Mark and discuss its message  
and meaning for our lives. All are invited to participate in this  
study...even if you cannot be present for every session.



**A Reading/Discussion Group facilitated by David J. Wood:**

***Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage  
for a World Falling Apart*  
by Brian McLaren**

**March 4, 11, 18, & 25 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.**

Brian McLaren is well known for his books that address the  
intersection of religious faith and contemporary culture.  
*Books will be available for purchase at a special price*

**Grappling with Gaza:  
A Conversation on Faith and Rupture  
Facilitators: Wesley D. Avram & David J. Wood**

**Thursday, February 26  
6:00- 7:30 p.m. The Pilgrim Room  
First Congregational Church of Camden**



Holocaust. Genocide. War. Ruptures can awaken us to realities long hidden. They can awaken us to questions left unasked. And they can call us to go deeper, to look again at truths we claim and things we believe. Many writers today—Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Secular observers alike—believe we are living through such a rupture today. Among some of those who believe this to be so, the desolation of Gaza (including how things are unfolding there now) is one of the sharpest displays of the rupture we are living through. For those who believe this, longstanding realities in the Israeli - Palestinian conflict are now in stark relief, demanding a reckoning among both Christians and Jews. They invite us to rediscover deeply rooted religious values and to make clear-sighted commitments to those values, in the service of a humane and just future.

In an open conversation facilitated by David Wood and Wes Avram, we'll engage two thinkers who have called for this kind of reckoning—one Jewish and one Christian. One is Peter Beinart, whose book *Being Jewish After the Destruction of Gaza: A Reckoning*, has garnered intense interest since its publication in early 2025. The other is Bruce Fisk, a New Testament scholar who co-edited a collection of essays by Christian thinkers, called *Being Christian After the Desolation of Gaza*. Our conversation will be open, meant to be an opportunity to consider what it means to claim faith as our guide today—after Gaza, in the face of the violence and uncertainty that dominates our world, and in response to how deeply implicated our faith traditions are in that feels to so many to be a rupture.

Copies of Peter Beinart's book (120 readable pages), as well as photocopies of two essays by Bruce Fisk, will be available on Sunday mornings and through the church office. We encourage participants to read one or all of these before our conversation.

Cost of book: \$15

**'After Gaza': What Role for the Churches  
in Pursuit of Peace?**  
**A Public Presentation by the Rev. Dr. Wesley D. Avram  
from Churches for Middle East Peace**  
**Sunday, March 1 3:00 p.m.**  
**First Congregational Church of Camden**



Following up on this year's Camden Conference, First Congregational Church (U.C.C.), Camden will host a talk and conversation with the Rev. Dr. Wesley Avram, Academic Engagement Director for Churches for Middle East Peace (cmep.org) on Sunday, March 1 at 3:00 p.m. Through providing educational programs, elevating voices in both the U.S. and the Middle East, and promoting positive advocacy, CMEP works toward justice and peace for all peoples in the Middle East with special focus on Israel/Palestine. CMEP is

guided by the thirty-six Christian denominations, communions, and organizations it represents. The United Church of Christ, of which First Congregational Church is a part, is among sponsoring denominations. Dr. Avram will preach at the morning service, at 9:30 a.m., and then offer reflections, followed by conversation, at 3:00 p.m.

Wes Avram is the Emeritus Senior Pastor of Pinnacle Presbyterian Church, in Scottsdale, Arizona. He has served as Pastor in three Presbyterian (U.S.A.) congregations, as the Clement-Muehl Assistant Professor of Communication at Yale Divinity School, and as College Chaplain and Lecturer at Bates College, in Lewiston. Wes has been engaged in reflection and engagement on the Middle East for over 40 years, informed by experiences including ecumenical engagement under the auspices of the Middle East Council of Churches, as a graduate student at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Resident Fellow at the Inter-faith Academic of Peace at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, leading academic and congregational tours, on sabbatical study, and now in this part-time role with CMEP. He holds a PhD from Northwestern University and an MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary.



*From Matt Mainster*  
*Minister of Music*  
[matt@camdenucc.org](mailto:matt@camdenucc.org)

## Music for 2026!

We had another joyful and fulfilling year of music here at FCC, and a terrifically fun start to 2026. I especially loved getting to have one of the best choir directors I've ever worked with, Kathryn Mahan, direct our February anthem "Music in the Air" by Ryan Murphy. And speaking of Kathryn, she was sure to tell me after the service that she heard a "fantastic tenor" sitting somewhere over her shoulder... who are you?? The choir has a glass slipper for you to try on!

For *anyone* who's enjoyed what they've heard from the bells or Sanctuary choir, please know that everything was accomplished in **just one rehearsal!** That means if you were sitting out in the congregation feeling wistful, wishing you could be a part of something like that, you CAN! Anyone can easily participate with zero-pressure and very low-commitment.

Please reach out to me at [matt@camdenucc.org](mailto:matt@camdenucc.org) with any interest in ringing or singing. Our choir rehearsal/service dates this semester are as follows:

- February 9/15:** Christ Whose Glory Fills the Sky — Jason Krug (Choral Bells)
- March 2/8:** O Love That Will Not Let Me Go — Ryan Murphy (Sanctuary Choir)
- March 23/29:** What Wondrous Love is This — Jason Krug (Choral Bells)
- March 30/April 5:** Alleluia from "The King Shall Rejoice" (*Coronation Anthems*) — Handel (Sanctuary Choir)
- April 13/19:** He is Risen! He is Risen! — Cathy Moglebust (Choral Bells)
- May 11/17:** My Hope is Built on Nothing Less — John Carter (Sanctuary Choir)
- May 26/31:** Glorious Praise — Behnke (Choral Bells)

In **Friends of Music** news, we are excited to announce our **2026 concert season!** Reviewers often use the words “vivid” “arresting” and “mesmerizing” to describe the performances of our first artist, the renowned concert organist, **Gail Archer**. She will be followed by “A modern master of classical guitar”, **David Rogers**; the folk band **Alchemy**, known for everything from driving Scottish Reels and gritty French bourrées to sublime waltzes and sweet Irish jigs; flutist, **Robert Cart** (with yours truly at the piano), who has performed under the batons of such luminaries as Bernstein, Leppard, and Zinman; and the internationally beloved concert pianist, **Shelly Moorman-Stahlman**. Those who’ve caught Shelly’s previous Friends of Music performances will know she is not to be missed! We will also feature the **Penobscot Bay Ringers** handbell ensemble in a benefit concert for the church’s Shields fund. As always, we’ll wrap up the season with our annual Christmas By the Sea variety concert in December.

The Friends of Music is so grateful to all our past contributors, and cheerfully welcomes new and continued support via checks payable to “First Congregational Church of Camden” with “FOM Concert Series” in the memo line, donations made on the church website at [camdenucc.org](http://camdenucc.org), or just at the concert door.

With such a variety of passionate musicians and music lovers in our church and community, it’s sure to be another memorable year of music making here at First Congregational Church of Camden!

Happy 2026!



## **Vespers Schedule**

Please join us for 30 minutes of candlelight, peaceful music, prayers, readings, and meditation in the Sanctuary.

**Here are the last 2 Vespers dates.**

February 4

February 18 \* Ash Wednesday \*

(ashes will be offered)



**Shields Fund Administrator**  
*Jeanne Denny*

**Stay in Touch with Real Human Needs**

Late fall/early winter, I had an overwhelming urge to hibernate. When we first moved to Maine in 1978, I learned to look forward to the winter months. Activities slowed down a bit which was a welcome change after the hectic pace of summer. Curling up in front of the fire with a good book and a homemade cup of soup was indeed a welcome opportunity to renew the spirit. I remember reading a delightful book of essays I about Maine and the way things stood still during the winter. Once the snow had fallen, we could stop doing yard work, etc. We could gaze from the window in late January and wonder what that strange lump was in the middle of the yard and know it did not require any action until spring when it would reveal itself. We took long walks in the snow, went cross-country skiing, stacked wood, always engaging with our senses and enjoying nature.

The beauty of the snow after a storm is usually breathtaking. Usually the sun comes out, the sky is clear, the ice twinkles in the trees and we take time to stop and wonder at the beauty of the earth, but now we tend to grumble that we still need to run 3 more errands before we get home and start supper and all is dark. Now we seem to go at the same rapid pace that we did in the summer; there is little chance to catch our breath. Objects aren't hidden away until spring as they once were. The snow comes and goes in relatively rapid cycles.

So, during these challenging times, including the political chaos, I believe one must slow down in order to be truly present in the moment. Somehow, we learned that speed and being busy are the capstones of social success. But the ability to be present in the moment, so that one can truly listen, is a gift that allows us to connect with each other, beyond the superficial in a deeper, meaningful way. Listen to those in need. They can tell you what they want and need. They can also discuss possible outcomes and learn to consider consequences. I recently worked with a family that submitted a Shields application for assistance with car payments. However, as I explored the payment requirements with their case manager, it quickly became evident that the family required alternative housing, one more in line with their financial situation. As I encouraged the case manager to explore options with the family, it became obvious that the family needed a safe housing alternative and with such a resource, the family would also benefit from lower fuel bills and less stress in trying to sustain their previous budget. These types of choices require time and active listening that permits the family to find the best option available under the circumstances they face. Often the first option is not the best but is the option that our society has taught us we need and/or want.

Another family that Shields assisted needed internet services as the single mom was disabled, lacked transportation and needed the internet to access virtual medical services. As businesses are becoming more scam challenged, the internet service required new forms of documentation for account access. It proved to be more time consuming than expected to make the payment, but if we fail to stay with the client (until the necessary service is obtained because we are in a hurry), the mother's health and well-being will be jeopardized as well as the well-being of her 2 preschool age children.

It is easier to give the family the first thing they want, but it often lacks the longevity needed to secure a stable home environment. Each family is unique and as soon as we assume an assembly line or "one size fits all" perspective, we endanger their uniqueness. During the pandemic, we experienced the rapid disbursement of state funds through the rent subsidy. Without time to think the problem through, large rent sums were disbursed to landlords which allowed many to gain huge profits from rents and taught the tenants in need that unlimited funds were available to take care of them. I applaud that the State was able to disburse funds so quickly but the amount of money that was (quickly depleted) was frustrating to watch.

So, as we reach this midway point in the winter, let's remember that listening and helping families focus to problem solve is a huge gift we can offer to the community not just a large check to "fix" their problems. Be patient. Be willing to make adaptations in helping others, not just deciding what you think the individual or family needs. The spirit of Christian giving is not intended to keep pace with the speed and expense of capitalism and political chaos.

With warm regards,

*Jeanne*

P.S. Thank you all for a very successful year, 2025. Be sure to read the Shields Annual Report to appreciate the hard work of the Shields Committee. We sponsored 4 separate fundraisers, received over \$157,000 in donations, shifted funding for the Administrator's salary, streamed some of the proceeds from HT to the Shields Fund for gifting, and can honestly tell all our supporters that 100% of the Shields donations is used to support gifts to individuals and families facing financial challenges! Thank you for your continued support. Hope to see you at the Annual Meeting!

*Shields Committee: Deb Endl (Chair), Jean Forest, David Giansiracusa, Rich Stuart, David Jones, Zella Walker, Natalie Ward, Jeanne Denny (Administrator)*



**News  
from Heavenly Threads  
James Cook, Manager**



**Thoughts about Heavenly Threads**

*“We live in a world, in the real world, that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power. These are the iron laws of the world.”*

I was disappointed to hear these thoughts expressed over the air-waves last month by a former student of mine. In a course he took two decades ago, we reviewed many different forces that govern our world.

To be sure, power is one of them. Defined by Robert Dahl as “the ability of one person to get another person to do what they wouldn’t otherwise normally do,” power has been connected to physical dominance, legal coercion, control of resources, and restriction of alternatives. Since Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, political scientists and economists have advised leaders seeking to prevail in the struggle for power.

But other social forces exist too. One of them, called “generalized reciprocity,” describes a state in which people help others, even when they don’t get anything from the particular people they help. Generalized reciprocity depends on trust among community members, which in turn is fostered through patterns of reliable interaction, transparency of communication, and positive intentions. It turns out that generalized reciprocity is more efficient and productive for communities than force-driven interaction based on raw power.

Another impactful social force is culture, the set of ideas describing our values (what we consider important) and missions (behavioral goals reflecting values). Consolidation of power is just one possible cultural mission among many. While public for-profit corporations are required to maximize power, non-profit organizations have a responsibility to act in alignment with their values and missions.

Because the Heavenly Threads Thrift Shop is a mission of the

First Congregational Church, it is motivated by the church's core values: to be **inclusive** of all, **inspired** in celebration, and **involved** in service to community. Following those values, our mission is not to compete with other shops or to extract the most money possible from customers. Instead, our mission is to care for others in what we do in the shop and to use our proceeds to support acts of caring in the community.

James Cook  
Manager, Heavenly Threads



**How we think of the world shapes how we act in the world. While others pursue power, Heavenly Threads will continue to pursue care.**



## Irish Dinner & Art Auction & Art Show ~ returning by popular demand!

The Men's Group will once again host an Irish Potluck Dinner on Thursday, March 12th beginning at 5:30 pm. This event will be a celebration for Saint Patrick's Day with music and decorations.

*The dinner will also serve as the kickoff for a five day art show at our church.*

We invite artists among our congregation to exhibit their works. We are open to the wide range of art-paintings, drawings, photographs, fiber arts, pottery, models, stained glass, etc. We also ask the artists to consider donating some pieces of artwork for a silent auction to help raise funds for the church to purchase heat pumps.

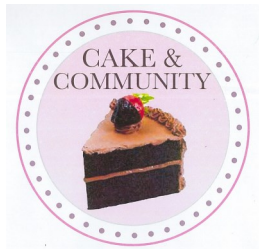
More information will be forthcoming, but please let me know as soon as possible if you would be willing to participate in the art show to help John Hufnagel and me to move forward with the planning.

All our best,

David Giansiracusa on behalf of the Men's Group

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We Are Excited to be  
Offering Season 3 of  
Cake & Community!  
When: Fridays in the Pilgrim Room  
from 12-1pm  
January 9- March 27.

**JOIN US! We're offering small sandwiches and fruit in addition to desserts!**

You're invited for conversation, companionship, and help in chasing away the winter blues. Teams of volunteers will provide sweet and savory treats and hot beverages. You are welcome to bring a brown bag lunch if desired. Spread the word to friends and neighbors, as all are welcome!

**Reiki will be offered on March 27<sup>th</sup>.**

**Special thanks to Lisa Allen for coordinating these sessions.**

Any questions contact Cake and Community coordinator  
Natalie Ward at [wards05@verizon.net](mailto:wards05@verizon.net).

## Jean Sheehy's Trip to the Dominican Republic

*Muchas Gracias* to all of the wonderful members of our congregation who made donations to my mission trip to the Dominican Republic.

The trip was a great success- we saw 365 patients! Your supplies helped ensure we had sufficient supplies for each of these patients.

The attached pictures show a small fraction of the donations we organized once we got to our lodgings---all greatly appreciated!

We took a generous supply of vapor rub! In the other picture I'm standing by the suitcases holding our personal care bags that we fill with soap, toothbrushes, socks, chapstick, and other small comfort items.

*"When you are kind to others, it not only changes you,  
it changes the world"* Harold Kushner



With gratitude, Jean Sheehy

camden  
area  
CHRISTIAN

food  
pantry

Requesting donations  
for February

## Canned Chicken Canned Pasta

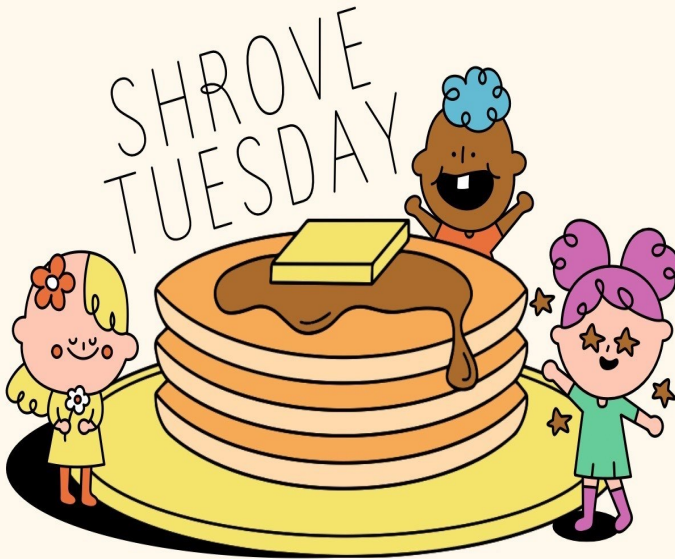
Please leave in the box across from the office, and  
thank you for helping.

## FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

2/1 Rob Edmonds  
2/4 Melvin Achorn  
2/8 Lynn Leclerc  
2/12 MaryEllen Ostherr  
2/14 Ryan Berry  
2/15 Elizabeth Lally  
2/16 Lisa Durkee  
2/18 Tony Bates  
Michael Griffiths  
2/19 Isaac and Eileen  
Garcia-Young  
2/20 Rich Stuart  
2/22 Judy Cucinotta  
2/23 Karin Rector  
2/24 Jane Sigsbee  
Ann Rafferty  
2/28 Rick Cowan



If your birthday isn't listed  
please call the office and we'll  
add it!



# PANCAKE SUPPER

Shrove Tuesday is the last day before Lent, which is traditionally a season of fasting and reflection. In many communities, Shrove Tuesday is celebrated as Mardi Gras or Carnival. It's thought of as our last chance to come together and party before the seriousness of Lenten reflection begins.

**FEBRUARY 17, 2026 AT 5:30PM**  
**PANCAKES & MORE!**  
**WELCOMING TO ALL AGES!**

PLEASE SIGN UP ON THE CLIPBOARD OUTSIDE THE  
OFFICE OR CALL THE CHURCH OFFICE AT (207) 236-4821

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF CAMDEN

FIRST  
CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH  
CAMDEN, MAINE  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

First Congregational Church  
55 Elm Street  
Camden, ME 04843

## **ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF CAMDEN  
An Open & Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

*Inclusive. Inspired. Involved.*

**We are an Open and Affirming Congregation embracing diversity  
and affirming the worth and dignity of every person.**

**We welcome everyone to share in all aspects of our church life.**

***To CONTACT US:***

**Call the Church Office at 207.236.4821, Monday through Friday, 8:30-3:30 pm**

**E-mail the Church Office at [churchoffice@camdenucc.org](mailto:churchoffice@camdenucc.org)**

**Check out our website: [www.camdenucc.org](http://www.camdenucc.org)**