



THE SPIRIT

The First Congregational Church of Essex (FCCOE)

February/March 2013

From Your Pastor

“Alignment for Lent”

I recently began to read a book on running that was given to me by a friend at Christmas. For better or worse, running has been an activity that I have pursued fairly passionately for over forty years, beginning when the Converse All Stars my daughters now wear as a fashion statement were the basic running shoe of choice! Mercifully, my high school coach soon pointed me to a pair of Addidas that had recently hit the market and my case of shin splints was quickly healed.

Unfortunately, I’ve learned that the word “injury,” and the phrase “quickly healed,” don’t go together as well when one passes the age of fifty, regardless of the fancy new footwear one might try. So, I was interested to read the following assessment, by the author of my Christmas present, a fellow by the name of Danny Dreyer, in the introduction to his book *ChiRunning*. Dreyer’s opening statement, directed to the estimated sixty-five percent of runners who get at least one injury per year that interrupts their training, is this: “*Running does not hurt your body. It’s the way you run that does the damage and causes pain.*” In the rest of the book, Dreyer goes on to talk about what proper running alignment should look like, from your head, down through your spine and hips, and out to your ankles and toes. When all of these various parts are lined up well and working together smoothly, his thesis is that it will enable you to run well and injury free.

It is not my intention to bore you with those details, especially those of you who, like the woman I recently sat next to at a wedding reception, believe that runners are basically nutty to begin with! But I do want to share that as I mused upon these various details of proper alignment, it occurred to me that having a proper alignment is critical, not only to run well but to live well. And to live well, we must focus not only on our physical, but also our spiritual, alignment, an appropriate activity for the season of Lent.

What does healthy spiritual alignment look like? Dreyer, in his subtitle, calls his method for running well “a revolutionary approach.” Over the years, I’ve learned that the most revolutionary approach to living well has been brought to us by that fellow named Jesus. This master summed up his approach with these very aligning words: “repent” and “follow me.” We find them spoken at the very beginning of his public ministry (e.g., Mark 1:15, 17). Since we all need to live well, allow me to put a little flesh on these life-giving words.

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~Calendar Highlights~

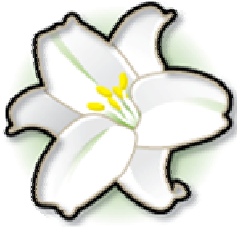
February

13th Ash Wednesday
Soup and Worship

March

2nd Quiet Day
 4th Open Door
 9th Men’s Breakfast
 31st Easter Worship

~LENTEN HAPPENINGS~



Ash Wednesday Soup Supper and Worship, Wednesday Feb. 13, 6:00 p.m.

Come join together for a delicious bowl of fish chowder (and/or a PBJ sandwich), and a time of worship, as we begin the season of Lent together.

Surprised by Hope—Adult Sunday School

Begins February 17th, 9:15 a.m.

How does what we believe about life after death directly affect what we believe about life before death? What does the resurrection of Jesus have to do with working for God's kingdom, bringing healing and hope to our wider world? A 6-week series led by Steve Brown and featuring DVD talks by theologian and church leader N.T. Wright, based upon his book, followed by discussion. Wright seeks to help give us a clearer vision both of the future, and of God's kingdom at hand today.

Storm Related Closing of Church

Please tune to Channel 5 for updates on the closing or

cancellation of church worship or other church related events.

Lenten Quiet Day

Saturday, March 2nd, there will be a directed, silent retreat held from 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., at the church. Come, and make space for the season of Lent.

Men's Breakfast

The next Men's Breakfast will be held March 9th at 8:00 a.m. Doug Brendal will be sharing with us his relief efforts in Belarus.

Worship Opportunities:

Maundy Thursday, 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday, 7:00 p.m.

Easter Services, Sunday March 31st

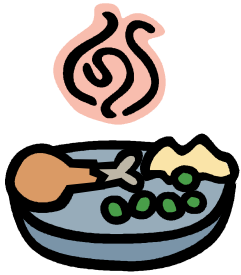
Sunrise Service at Conomo Point

Regular Worship, 10:30 a.m. at First Congregational Church of Essex

Secret Angel

Well, last year we thought we had you! We put our thank you in an envelope and posted it on the bulletin board in the large vestry and waited for it to "disappear". Day after day no one took it...You were on to us. So this year we again post a HUGE thank you! The girls squealed with delight in the back of the car as they opened your gifts Christmas morning on the way to NC. Ok, this angel obviously knows exactly what they love to read! And Tim and I just shook our heads and thought, we are dearly loved. Thank, thank you for the joy and fun you bring each year. Now you have no choice! You have become a family tradition!
Love, love, Rama, Tim, Thais and Iela





Missions Highlight: OPEN DOOR

The Open Door is a non-profit organization located in Gloucester. Their mission is to alleviate the impact of hunger in our community. They serve Rockport, Gloucester, Manchester, Essex and Ipswich.

Community Meals:

They serve seven days a week. The meals are served in a safe environment and offer companionship. (Five at Open Door and two at St. John's Episcopal church in Gloucester). In 2011 they served 16,324 meals at the Open Door.

Our church has been serving meals quarterly at the Open Door for more than 20 years. Our youth group now serves monthly!

We serve on average 45-60 meals at the site. We send an extra meal home with some and place some in the food pantry totaling close to 100 meals every time we serve. There is a sign up sheet in the large vestry on the round table at least three weeks ahead of our serving date.

What are we looking for? Donations of cooked **American Chop Suey** casseroles (at least 9 - 9x13), **4 gallons Milk**, 5 loaves of bread, 1 lb. butter, 1 lb of coffee and **dessert** (50). **Frozen vegetables** (60 serv) and **items for salad bar**. The salad bar has 7 containers with lettuce, tomatoes, and cucumbers. We try and supply things to enhance it, with items such as cheese, meat, fresh fruit, nuts or salads- bean, beet, or cole slaw etc. Cash donations are always welcome to help fill any empty gaps in donations. (I definitely don't mind shopping and/ or cooking if someone wants to donate).

Last but not least the **volunteers** 4 - 6. Volunteers can show up anytime between 4:00 PM (prep work) and 5 PM (start serving) we are usually done by 6-6:15 PM.

The Open Door has many more programs such as the food pantry, mobile food markets, summer lunch, plant a row, holiday baskets.

The Second Glance Thrift Store- offering reduced cost clothing, household items and furniture helps to raise money to help support the Open Door.

All of these programs use volunteers so you can call the Open Door at 978-283-6776 or see Carolyn Knowlton with any questions.

Next OPEN DOOR MEAL is MARCH 4th, MONDAY

From Your Pastor (continued)

What does healthy spiritual alignment look like? Dreyer, in his subtitle, calls his method for running well “a revolutionary approach.” Over the years, I’ve learned that the most revolutionary approach to living well has been brought to us by that fellow named Jesus. This master summed up his approach with these very aligning words: “repent” and “follow me.” We find them spoken at the very beginning of his public ministry (e.g., Mark 1:15, 17). Since we all need to live well, allow me to put a little flesh on these life-giving words.

I appreciate the way author Dallas Willard describes what it means to repent. He says that it is an opportunity for us to reconsider. “[Repentance] is a call for us to reconsider how we have been approaching our life, in light of the fact that we now, in the presence of Jesus, have the option of living within the surrounding movements of God’s eternal purposes” (*Divine Conspiracy*, p. 16). Sounds like good alignment language! This definition also captures the literal sense of the word which is “to turn.” Importantly, to repent is to turn *from* something, the way we’ve been aligning our life without God, and to turn *toward* something else, life that is aligned with God and his loving purposes. What does that look like? When Jesus says “follow me,” he is inviting us to come and see.

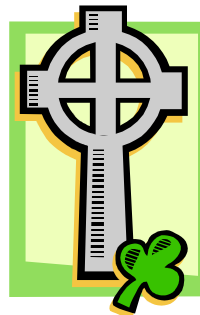
The question that lies beneath such an invitation is this: What are you living for? The fact of the matter is that we all live for someone or something. We all have a “lord.” We all align our life with the pursuit of that which we believe will bring us meaning and satisfaction and purpose and hope. What is it that is aligning your life? What are you trying to get to work together smoothly so that you can live well? What are you basing your life on that holds you accountable? What happens when you fail to live up to *that*? Jesus declares that if we use his life to align our own, then we will begin to move toward living well, and even joyfully. As author and pastor Timothy Keller puts it: “Jesus is the only Lord who, if you receive him, will fulfill you completely, and, if you fail him, will forgive you eternally” (*The Reason for God*, p. 173).

This does not mean that we will live lives that are absolutely free from pain and suffering. To use the logic of Dreyer, it’s not living that causes problems; it’s the way we live that can cause damage and pain. The fact of the matter is that we live in the midst of a mis-aligned world that hurts us all. We, too, from time to time, will fall out of alignment and hurt ourselves. However, aligning our life with the life of Jesus, the one who conquered death, means that pain and suffering will not have the final word.

So, if you’d rather not run, or think about how your neck and spine and pelvis and knee and foot should all line up and work together, but prefer to swim or dance or just sit in the hot tub instead, that’s all good! But I would encourage you in this upcoming season of Lent to give some thought to how you are aligning your life. What is directing and connecting your mind and heart and soul and strength? Are you living in alignment with the One who has given you the gift of life and breath? Are you lined up with the One who can bring you both fulfillment and forgiveness? Jesus invites you to come and take a look at the revolutionary and aligning way of living and loving that he came to reveal.

Grace & Peace . . .

Pastor Tim



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Lent is Here!!!



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