

# First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA

October 22, 2025

---

## PASTORAL REFLECTION Reverend Thomas Hawkins

### OF BUTTERFLIES AND SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

Jan and I spend our summer delighting in the hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies that feed on the pollinator plants we've planted to attract them. Jan describes our flowerbeds as a "butterfly nursery." Each morning she counts the number of monarch caterpillars munching their way through the various milkweeds we've planted for them. One morning in August, she counted a dozen monarch caterpillars. Soon we were spotting new butterflies flexing their wings in the sun before flying off in search of sweet, nutritious nectar to help them grow strong.

Our last monarchs disappeared in mid-September. Knowing how long and perilous a journey they would be facing, we were sad to see them go but eager for them to depart. No other butterfly anywhere in the world migrates like they do. Monarchs make a two-way migration travelling as much as three thousand miles each way. They always return to the same wintering grounds in Mexico each year, which is amazing considering the monarchs who leave Massachusetts each autumn are the great-great grandchildren of the monarchs that travelled north in the spring. Scientists have estimated that monarchs can travel as much as 100 miles per day. Their average speed is around four to six miles per hour – about the same speed as a casual jogger. Sometimes they fly as high as 800 to 1200 feet – high enough they are not even visible to the naked eye.

All this is accomplished by a tiny creature that weighs less than a small paperclip. Yet this fragile, vulnerable butterfly possesses the strength to accomplish an almost impossible 3,000-mile journey to a destination it has never visited. Then, in the spring, its children or even grandchildren will use some mysterious inner compass to find their way back to the New England gardens their forebearers left the previous fall.

The caterpillar's ability to emerge as a butterfly from its chrysalis has long been a metaphor for the Christian promise of resurrection. Less seldom, however, do we compare the monarch butterfly's monumental migratory journey to our own spiritual journeys.

Our lives are also fragile and marked by vulnerability. Yet, like a monarch butterfly, we bear within us an incredible strength and tenacity to persist. The monarch butterfly reminds us that fragility and strength are not opposites. They are instead two qualities that live side-by-side, and even complement each other. We all know someone whose physical health is fragile; yet they show an amazing strength to live each day with joy, resilience, and compassion toward others. Even in our fragility, all of us have wellsprings of strength and resilience. As Paul said, "For Christ's sake . . . when I am weak I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:10)

Like the monarch butterfly, we also have a mysterious, internal compass to guide us. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are guided through times of uncertainty when we don't know what to do or where to turn. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." (Rm. 8:14)

Monarch butterflies are not rugged individualists. As they travel south each autumn, they may fly alone through the day; but at night they come together in what scientists call "roosts" where they cluster together to stay warm and safe. In the same way, the Christian life is a constant movement between our individual witness in the world and our Sunday-by-Sunday gathering for rest, warmth, and renewal as we worship together.

As we move into late autumn, our butterflies are now gone; but they will be back next spring. In the meantime, their formidable 3,000-mile journey provides us with important reminders about our own spiritual journeys as God's people.

Blessings,  
Pastor Thomas

SUNDAY WORSHIP in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

### BELIEVING AND BELONGING CLASS TO BE OFFERED

Interested in learning more about First Congregational Church's history, beliefs, and ministries? Pastor Thomas will be offering a class sometime in November for anyone interested in affirming their membership and participation at First Congregational Church/East Longmeadow. Please speak to him this morning or sign up on the poster where we enjoy coffee fellowship after worship. We'll set a convenient time and day when we know who is interested.

### CHRISTMAS COLLECTION CRAFT FAIR:

**November 1st from 8:30-3pm.**

It seems impossible that the first Saturday in November is right around the corner! Our Christmas Collection Craft Fair is quickly approaching. This is one of our largest fund-raisers and needs many helpers. There are so many ways to lend a hand.

Any day-of fair related questions or concerns to the church office.

Thank you for anything you can do to help!

### HELP TO MAKE APPLE CRISP

Volunteers are needed on Wednesday, Oct. 29 to peel apples and make apple crisp in the church kitchen. Please bring your own vegetable peeler.

### EVERGREENS, PINE & BERRIES

It's that time of year again when I come begging. I really, really need some branches of evergreens from your yard or woods. Think of friends with evergreen trees that would share a few clippings with us. These will be used to fill the cemetery logs that will be sold at the craft fair. We are looking for any kind of evergreen. Examples – spruce, pine, yew, arborvitae, juniper, winterberry, etc. These cemetery logs are very popular. We usually sell out before noon! Please bring these greens to the church anytime. You can leave them near the back door of the apartment building..

Thank you!

### NEIGHBORS IN NEED *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." - Galatians 6:2*

Advocacy is essential to participating in God's mission in the world. Gifts to the Neighbors in Need offering support ministries of justice and compassion in the United Church of Christ. If moved to make a donation, an envelope is provide in the pews until **October 26**. Mission and Outreach thanks you for your support.

### ALTAR FLOWERS



The flower committee invites you to remember, and honor loved ones or offer celebration for a joyous event. We have following open dates!

- November 2, 9, 16, 23

Call the church office if you are interested or sign up in the breezeway.

### PRAYER CONCERNS

Prayers and Joys

### PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

God of grace and goodness: You create all things in your image and everything that lives and moves speaks to us of your mercy and care. May your Word and Spirit be our inner compass as we journey through each day. In our weakness sustain us with your mighty power and use our strengths to love and serve both you and our neighbors. Amen.



First Congregational Church

7 Somers Road, East Longmeadow, MA 01028

Web: [churchontherotary.org](http://churchontherotary.org) ~ email: [office@churchontherotary.org](mailto:office@churchontherotary.org) ~ 413.525.4121