

# Isaiah 61 Cafe expanding to provide cold-weather shelter

By ADAM DRAPCHO  
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

LACONIA — It was less than three years ago that Dawn and Dave Longval opened the Isaiah 61 Cafe. Not exactly a soup kitchen, the organization welcomes all who would appreciate a cup of coffee, a meal, use of a shower or laundry facilities, or just a soft chair. In that time, the Longvals have become

attuned to the needs of the local homeless community, and to better address those needs they have announced the purchase of the adjacent building on New Salem Street.

Known recently as the performance venue Pitman's Freight Room, the addition of nearly 5,000 square feet of space will allow Isaiah 61 to provide a place for just about anyone to escape the cold of

winter nights.

Isaiah 61 Café was established after the Longvals, who had been bringing food to homeless people in Laconia, learned that there was nowhere in the city that felt welcoming to people who couldn't afford to pay for a cup of coffee or a sandwich. Even in public

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# The Laconia Daily Sun

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The Rev. Robin Thomas Soller, left, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Meredith, is assisted by Helen Watkinson, head of the church's Altar Guild, as they place the Paschal Candle in its stand earlier this week. The candle will be lighted for the first time during the Easter Vigil service on Saturday evening. That liturgy will be held outdoors, and will be the first in-person service the church has held since COVID began. (Michael Mortensen/Laconia Daily Sun)

## Easter 2021: Celebrating hope in a time of anxiety

By MICHAEL MORTENSEN  
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

LACONIA — For the second year in a row, Christians prepare to mark the holiest time in their church's calendar as they continue to grapple with the concerns and uncertainty that have been brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

Given the trials and anxieties in this era of COVID-19, the message of Easter is all the more compelling and meaningful because Easter reminds people of the need to believe in something stronger than grief or fear. And that is hope.

"I think my main message is that we can celebrate resurrection even in challenging times," said the Rev. Jim Shook, pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Gilford.

That the past year has been extraordinary is undeniable. Consider the COVID statistics alone. Just prior to Easter last year the number of people in the U.S. who had been infected with COVID stood at 368,533, and the death toll was 11,008. As of Wednesday morning, just over 551,000 Americans had died from the virus, and the total number infected was approaching 30.4 million, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Faith has played a significant role in the

lives of many during the COVID crisis, according to a recent poll.

While only about 18 percent of Easter-celebrating people plan to go to church this Easter, 47 percent of Americans say that religion has helped them get through the pandemic, according to a nationally representative survey conducted by WalletHub.

It is in the midst of this shocking period of time that many Easter-believing people come together to pray and celebrate.

For many Christian faith communities the special celebrations begin this evening with the celebration of Holy — or Maundy — Thursday commemorating the Last Supper. The special services continue in some churches with the observance of Good Friday and then Easter Vigil after sunset on Saturday. In many traditions those three services contain distinct rituals which are performed at no other time.

Easter last year occurred just one month after COVID hit the state. Schools, shops and many businesses were closed, and gatherings of more than 10 people prohibited. That meant churches had to switch to online services. Since then some churches, however, have resumed in-person services, while still providing an online option for their congregation.

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Dawn and Dave Longval, at right, plan to change very inside Pitman's Freight Room, which Isaiah 61 Cafe is purchasing from Dick Mitchell, at left, and his wife, Connie. The Longvals plan to move their cafe into the Pitman's space, making room in their adjacent building for a cold weather shelter. (Adam Drapcho/The Laconia Daily Sun photo)

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spaces, they would be shoed away by police if more than a handful of them were found congregating. The café created that space, a place they could be welcomed, have a meal, meet friends and attend to basic needs during the day – or take a nap on a couch.

Through the relationships they formed in the cafe, the Longvals realized that their friends needed someplace to go after the cafe closed in the afternoon – especially in the winter. Yes, there are shelters in the city, but they come with barriers. Notably, the existing shelters require that the person pass a drug screen before they can get a bed. Some also charge a nominal amount, which is still prohibitive to some.

Dawn and Dave have rules prohibiting substance use on their property, but they don't turn someone away merely for intoxication. Over time, this has allowed them to build relationships with people – and then to worry in the winter how they will survive frigid nights exposed to the weather.

"There's no place here, you have to be sober to go to the Salvation Army, you have to be sober to go to the Belknap House," Dawn said, but that can be a deal breaker for someone with substance misuse disorder.

Another relationship developed while they were running their cafe – with the owner of the adjacent property, which shares a wall with the building the Longvals own. Dick and Connie Mitchell operated Pitman's Freight Room for several years, and Dawn once approached them previously to ask if they would want to sell. No, was the answer at the time. But then the pandemic happened, resulting in a pause in the performance promotion business, and the Mitchells decided that the time was right for retirement. Papers are expected to be passed today, March 31.

The Longvals plan to move their cafe operation into the Pitman's building, which the Mitchells have

already fashioned into a comfortable, living room-like space. They will use the current cafe space to create a shelter, with about 20-30 beds, separated into men's and women's quarters, which will be available at night during the coldest weeks of the year.

"We want to take care of them and make sure they survive," Dawn said.

During the warmer seasons, the shelter space will serve as housing for members of their community who have found their way to sobriety but are still forming a financial foundation for themselves.

"In the off season, I'm thinking of it as more of a transitional space, for people who have overcome their addiction but can't quite get their first apartment," Dawn said. "It would be a transition into the real world... We know who's ready and who's not."

Dawn said she plans to spend the summer studying how other low-barrier shelters work, then open Isaiah's in time for next winter.

Daisy Pierce, a leader in the Laconia recovery community and a member of the Mayor's task force on homelessness, said such a shelter would fill a gap in services.

"It's amazing, it's what Laconia needs at this time," she said. The task force is currently working to set up a temporary shelter for the rest of the current cold season, "it's great that there will be one stood up for next winter."

Resting in an armchair at Isaiah 61 Cafe, Cindy Field said the cold weather shelter "is very important. Because people are out there who need someplace to sleep without having the cops telling them to move along."

Field said that spending winter nights outside is "very hard - and cold. You have a lot of blankets," she said, and those who do find a somewhat sheltered place then worry about getting kicked out in the middle of the night.

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# Congregations differ by celebrating remotely or in person, trying new things or sticking to familiar

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"At least this year we'll be back in church," said the Very Rev. Marc Drouin, pastor of St. Andre Bessette Parish in Laconia and St. Joseph Parish in Belmont, noting that he and his fellow priests will have a congregation in front of them as they conduct the upcoming services.

Catholic churches throughout the state have been holding in-person Masses for 10 months, but with special COVID precautions, including social distancing, which considerably reduces the number of people who can be in the church. For example, the capacity of Sacred Heart Church in Laconia is presently limited to 80 to 90 people, Drouin said, far below its rated capacity of 600.

Others churches in the area are continuing to stick to online services only.

At the Laconia Congregational Church, the Rev. Neal Wilson will lead a live-streamed Holy Thursday/Good Friday service tonight in addition to a service on Easter Sunday. Tonight's service will include a virtual Communion

with Wilson saying a prayer of blessing for the bread and wine which worshippers have set aside at home and which they will then consume at the appropriate time during the service.

Because of the challenges so many in his congregation have been facing, Wilson said he is trying to focus on bringing a message of reassurance.

"I think of my message as being a sort of comfort food," he said.

Along that same line, he said he and the church's music director have purposely chosen music that is familiar.

But there are also instances where people will have their first opportunity to worship in-person since COVID began.

Both the United Methodist Church in Gilford and the Weirs Beach Methodist Church will be co-hosting a sunrise service on the Boardwalk in Weirs Beach on Sunday at 6:30 a.m. Worshippers will be required to wear masks, "and there probably won't be any singing," Mark Lamprey, pastor at the Weirs church said.

Last year's sunrise service was canceled because of the pandemic.

"We are all trying to resurrect after

this COVID," Lamprey said. "COVID has really been playing heck with a lot of things."

Members of Trinity Episcopal Church in Meredith will have their first chance to worship in-person in more than a year on Saturday when the Easter Vigil liturgy will be celebrated outside in the church's parking lot, starting at 8 p.m.

The service will include the lighting of the Easter Fire and Paschal Candle followed by readings from the Old Testament which tell of God's redemptive activity in human history.

"If we are going to try something new, Easter is the perfect time to try it," the Rev. Robin Thomas Soller, the church's rector, said of the decision to use the service at which the message of Easter is first solemnly celebrated as the first opportunity for parishioners to assemble and worship in nearly 11 months.

Dick Aucoin, pastor of the Lakes Region Vineyard Church in Laconia, said as the country and the world begin to emerge from strictures of COVID this Easter will be different from those before.

"It's an opportunity to come together and understand the power of the Resurrection in our lives," he said. "But this year I think Easter will not be so much about the day, but about the people who are involved in the day."

Soller, like other area members of the clergy, stressed that though these times may be unprecedented, the message of Easter is timeless.

"The good news is that God is with us in the midst of everything. There's always new life," she said.

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To contact Michael Mortensen, send him an email at [mike@laconiadailysun.com](mailto:mike@laconiadailysun.com).

## Pfizer says its COVID-19 vaccine protects younger teens

(AP) Pfizer announced Wednesday that its COVID-19 vaccine is safe and strongly protective in kids as young as 12, a step toward possibly beginning shots in this age group before they head back to school in the fall.

Most COVID-19 vaccines being rolled out worldwide are for adults, who are at higher risk from the coronavirus. Pfizer's vaccine is authorized for ages 16 and older. But vaccinating children of all ages will be critical to stopping the pandemic — and helping schools, at least the upper grades, start to look a little more normal after

months of disruption.

In the vaccine study of 2,260 U.S. volunteers ages 12 to 15, preliminary data showed there were no cases of COVID-19 among fully vaccinated adolescents compared to 18 among those given dummy shots, Pfizer reported.

It's a small study, that hasn't yet been published, so another important piece of evidence is how well the shots revved up the kids' immune systems. Researchers reported high levels of virus-fighting antibodies, somewhat higher than were seen in studies of young adults.

## Correction: Colonial project cost \$14.4 million

LACONIA — An article that appeared in yesterday's edition misstated the final price of the renovation of the historic Colonial Theatre in downtown Laconia. The project will cost a total of \$14.4 million.

It's not just uncomfortable to stay outside all winter, Anijarwati said. It starts to take a toll on one's overall wellbeing. Even if she found a place to stay at night, she would only get two or three hours of sleep. When she finally found shelter, she realized how her health had suffered from the lack of sleep.

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Erna Anijarwati spend much of the winter struggling to survive the cold, though she now has found overnight shelter thanks to a local church.

"It's very important to have a shelter to stay indoors, especially during the winter season. I experienced sleeping outside for two months, December to the end of January. It was really hard," Anijarwati said.

For Anijarwati, it wasn't sobriety that was the issue, it was the \$10 per night fee that she couldn't afford at another shelter.

"I give thanks for Dawn and Dave, who help those in need, to feed them and give them shelter," Anijarwati said.

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To contact Adam Drapcho, send him an email at [AD@laconiadailysun.com](mailto:AD@laconiadailysun.com).

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