

THE CORNERSTONE



December, 2011

DECEMBER, 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 6:00 Bell Choir, Room 29 6:30 Troop 76 Leadership & Committee Meeting, Parsons' Study 7:30 AA meeting - Room 28 7:30 Chancel Choir	2 3:00 Farmington Valley Chorale Rehearsal - Sanctuary	3 10:00 Farmington Valley Chorale rehearsal, Sanctuary 7:00 Farmington Valley Chorale Concert, Sanctuary 9:00 Farmington Valley Chorale reception, Palmer Hall
4 8:15-10:00 Confirmation Lg. Grp. mtg. for students, Palmer Hall & Sanctuary 9:15 Christion Ed Book Study, Library 2nd Sunday of Advent: 8:30 Communion/Worship, Chapel 10:00 Worship, Sanctuary 10:00 Church School 10:15 Church School Christmas Service Rehearsal/crafts, Palmer Hall 11:15 Care Bag assembly, Room 29 7:00 PF Youth Grp, Youth Room & Palmer Hall	5 1:00 Red Cross Blood Drive, Palmer Hall 4:15 Junior Choir 7:30 Executive Council Mtg., Parson's Study	6 7:30 Valley Saxophone Quartet, Music Room	7 9:30 Hay Stack, Room 28 9:45 Music Together classes, Rm 29 4:00 Women's Praise Choir 7:00 Farmington Valley Chorus, Palmer Hall	8 6:00 Bell Choir, Room 29 7:00 Boy Scout Troop 76 Mtg, Palmer Hall 7:30 AA meeting, Room 28 7:30 Chancel Choir	9 6:00 Supper Club, Palmer Hall & Kitchen	10 1:30 South Park Inn Meal Prep - Kitchen 4:30 South Park Inn Serving Meals - South Park Inn, Hartford
11 POINSETTIA SUNDAY 8:00-12:00 Christmas Gift Collection, Parlor 9:15 Christion Ed Book Study, Library 3rd Sunday in Advent: 8:30 Worship, Chapel 10:00 Worship, Sanctuary Heifer Living Gift Auction after 8:30 & 10:00 a.m. worship services 10:15 Church School Christmas Service Rehearsal, Palmer Hall 11:00 Strategic Planning presentation following 10:00 am service, Sanctuary 7:00 PF Youth Group,	12 4:15 Junior Choir 7:15 All Boards meeting, All rooms booked	13 12:00 Retired Men's Luncheon, Palmer Hall 4:00 Committee on Ministry, Parlor 7:00 ONA meeting, Parlor 7:00 Deacons Meeting, Library 7:30 Valley Saxophone Quartet, Music Room	14 9:45 Music Together classes, Rm 29 4:00 Women's Praise Choir 7:00 Farmington Valley Chorus, Palmer Hall	15 6:00 Bell Choir, Room 29 7:00 Boy Scout Troop 76 Mtg., Palmer Hall 7:30 AA meeting, Room 28 7:30 Chancel Choir	16 10:30 Farmington Valley Transition Academy, Kitchen & Palmer Hall	17 9:00 Church School Pancake Breakfast, Palmer Hall 9:30 Church School Rehearsal for Christmas Service, Palmer Hall
18 4th Sunday in Advent: 8:30 Worship, Chapel 10:00 Worship- Church School Christmas service, Sanctuary 9:15 Christion Ed Book Study, Library Heifer Living Gift Auction after 8:30 & 10:00 a.m. worship services 7:00 PF Youth Group,	19 1:00 Red Cross Blood Drive, Palmer Hall 4:15 Junior Choir	20 9:30 Prayer Shawl Meeting, Room 28 1:00 Faith Circle, Member's Homes 6:30 Cub Scout Pack 276 Mtg., Palmer Hall 7:30 Valley Saxophone Quartet, Music Room	21 4:00 Women's Praise Choir 7:00 Longest Night Service, Sanctuary 7:00 Farmington Valley Chorus,- Palmer Hall	22 6:00 Bell Choir, Room 29 7:00 Boy Scout Troop 76 Mtg., Palmer Hall 7:30 AA meeting, Room 28 7:30 Chancel Choir	23	24 4:30 Christmas Eve Puppet Pageant, Sanctuary 6:30 Christmas Eve Pageant, Sanctuary 9:00 Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols, Sanctuary 11:00 Christmas Eve Service Uncommon Worship, Sanctuary
25 10:00 Worship/Christmas Day, Sanctuary Church School vacation 7:00 PF Youth Grp., Youth Room & Palmer Hall	26 Holiday - Office Closed, Christmas	27 10:00 Card Making Group, Rm 28 7:30 Valley Saxophone Quartet, Music Room	28 4:00 Women's Praise Choir 7:00 Farmington Valley Chorus, Palmer Hall	29 6:00 Bell Choir, Room 29 7:30 AA meeting, Room 28 7:30 Chancel Choir, Music Room	30	31

THE CORNERSTONE

DECEMBER, 2011 WORSHIP SCHEDULE: Season of Thanksgiving

December 4th COMMUNION SUNDAY
8:30 a.m. Early Worship in the Chapel
10:00 a.m. Worship in the Sanctuary
Rev. Alison Patton preaching

December 11th SUNDAY WORSHIP
8:30 a.m. Early Worship in the Chapel
10:00 a.m. Worship in the Sanctuary
Guest Preacher: The Rev. Paul Nickerson
"Do you Want People to Experience Jesus?"

11:00 a.m. Congregational Meeting

As our Strategic Planning Consultant, Paul Nickerson will be sharing in his sermon and then in a congregational meeting after service some exciting news about our ministry plan for the future we are developing. Please join us!

December 18th SUNDAY WORSHIP
8:30 a.m. Early Worship in the Chapel
Jonathan Morgan Preaching on:
"A Guiding Light for Challenging Times"

10:00 a.m. Worship led by the Children of First Church
"Santa's Favorite Story"
- Skit adapted from the children's story

December 21st 7:00 p.m. WEDNESDAY EVENING – LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE IN THE SANCTUARY
A candle-lit service for those experiencing the blues, loss or loneliness during the Christmas season

December 24th CHRISTMAS EVE
4:30 pm **Puppet Pageant** – A Christmas service for all ages
6:30 pm **Puppet Pageant** – A Christmas service for all ages
9:00 pm **Service of Lessons and Carols**
11:00 pm **Uncommon Christmas Worship Service**
Join us for this most Blessed of Nights!

December 25th CHRISTMAS!
10:00 a.m. services
Jonathan preaching on:
"How has your World been Changed?"

From the Senior Minister's Desk

Dear Friends in Christ,

I am just not there yet.

Since this letter is for the December edition of the Cornerstone, I should be writing to you about the joys of Advent and Christmas... *I am just not there yet.*



I am writing to you on the Monday after our Thanksgiving Sunday- an amazing day in the life of First Church. The day began with uplifting and spirit-filled worship at which time we welcomed into our family 14 new members. Then following our 10:00 a.m. Worship Service, we came together as a congregation to share how leadership and a group of very dedicated members have offered support and care for the Fatic family after the tragic loss of their husband and father, Avdo, last June. Then, we headed downstairs to Palmer Hall to enjoy an incredibly festive and creative Holly and Ivy event. Later that evening, we had an amazing Interfaith Community Thanksgiving Worship service with a 70 voice Combined Adult Choir, two Bell Choirs and a very sweet and talented Children's Choir. (To come together as a grateful community for all of God's blessings after such a challenging month was moving and truly gratifying.) Lastly, I went downstairs after the worship service to witness the energy of the Palmer Hall filling and life-changing ministry of our Pilgrim Fellowship program. After so meaningful a day, my heart honestly wishes to remain in this season of gratitude and grace.

Which, in the end, may be the best way to open my heart to the blessings of Advent and Christmas.

Advent symbolizes the spiritual journey of individuals and a congregation as they affirm that Christ has come, that Christ is present in the world today, and that Christ will come again in ways we cannot imagine. So, as the church celebrates God's inbreaking into history in the Incarnation, and anticipates a future consummation to that history for which "all creation is groaning, awaiting its redemption," and it also confesses its own responsibility as a people commissioned to "love the Lord your God with all your heart" and to "love your neighbor as yourself."

As we move through this Advent Season, let us do so with hearts filled with gratitude and wonder for all the incredible gifts of God's loving Spirit. Let us open our minds to experiences of Advent anticipation and Christmas wonder. Let us prepare our lives for hope-filled Good News that God is in our midst and offers us love and grace beyond our dreams and imagination.

In the Joy of Christ's Spirit,

Jonathan

From the Associate Minister for Parish Life and Outreach

We have entered Advent, the season during which we prepare for the coming of the Christ child. Every year I begin December determined to move slowly, deliberately through these four weeks. There is something about Advent that moves me deeply, something about this season that feels both haunting and holy. Dark descends and lamplight glows in every window; cold encroaches and the stars shine a little brighter in the night sky. Trees go dormant, seeds slumber in the frozen earth and somewhere in a time 2000 years past but happening right now, too: life stirs in the womb of a young woman – a young woman unexpectedly, astonishingly, gloriously blessed by God. She is expecting...so it makes sense that I want to gestate, too; that this season puts me in a contemplative mood. After all: Something is stirring; it's not here yet, but it's coming, and I don't want to miss it! I hold my breath and gaze into the darkness, searching. I wrap another blanket around my shoulders and curl up with a cup of tea and a good book. I stare into the fire that crackles on the hearth and imagine what God has in store for us and for this world so much in need of hope and healing.

It is maddeningly easy to get caught up in the bustle of preparations for Christmas. I am lucky if I make it halfway through the second week of December before panic takes hold, I abandon my contemplative practice and grab my to-do list. Still, I know that there is much about this season *before* Christmas that deserves our attention; I know that I can learn something from Advent about waiting and wonder; about yearning and hope; about honoring the darkness and what can be born there. So this year, I will try again to maintain a measured space through Advent. Want to join me? Here are some of the ways and places I have found to savor this season:

- ❖ Pick up an Advent **calendar** and take a few moments to open a window each day between now and December 25th.
- ❖ Create your own **Advent Wreath Lighting**: make a wreath with five candles (four purple and one white one in the middle, like the wreath we use in worship) and light one candle each week (light the central white “Christ Candle” on Christmas Day). Take a few moments of quiet each time you light the candles.
- ❖ Join me and others for an every-Tuesday 6:00 p.m. **Advent Bible study**. No experience necessary – just a chance to explore the gospel readings and reflect on them together.
- ❖ Read the book ***It's Not Your Birthday*** and look for ways to join the First Church conversation (See the article “First Church Reads One Book...”).
- ❖ Join us for the **Longest Night service** on Wednesday, December 21st – a contemplative worship that makes space for our feelings of loss and loneliness during the holidays. Come, light a candle (for yourself or someone else), and remember that new life begins in darkness.

Waiting to see what God has in store,

Alison

On the weekend of November 11-13th, PF Youth Group went on retreat to Camp Woodstock in Woodstock Valley, CT.

The retreat theme was "Choices," because we all know that the path to making a wise choice is not necessarily easy or straightforward, especially for teenagers. The weekend was spent exploring healthy paths to making good choices...slowing down, asking questions, paying attention to our hearts and to God, and taking time for reflection before rushing to decision...

Of course, there was a lot of fun to be had as well - field games and low ropes, baby bottle and baby food races, singing songs, and so much more...



SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

Over the years, many of the initiatives that First Church has become known for have resulted from suggestions of the United Church of Christ (our denomination), First Church clergy or lay leadership. Many of our mission trips, for example, have their roots in an organizational affiliation, such as Back Bay Mission or Habitat for Humanity. Another example, the recent “Mission One” project overseen by our Board of Mission and Outreach and coordinated with the UCC, was very successful in raising not only awareness of hunger but, in Simsbury, hundreds of items for local food banks and over 1 million food items nationwide!

Your ministers and leadership have always been faith filled in identifying ministry opportunities for our congregation. We cherish that legacy and know it will continue for as long as we exist as a family of faith. However, I want to underscore a growing and exciting approach to First Church ministries that you’ll hear more about in our proposed strategic plan: instead of waiting for direction from leadership to launch ministry efforts, we want to encourage the congregation to explore and launch ministry initiatives that have personal meaning and impact to them. This is the “spontaneous combustion” I’m referring to in the title of this letter. What potential opportunities for faith exploration inspire you? What do you see as a need that our church can fill?

Let me give you a few examples of such types of spontaneous ministry. Quite a few years ago, Cindy Cole saw an unmet need for children extracted from high risk homes by DCF to have emergency packets of clothes and other essentials until they transitioned to foster care. My wife Becky picked it up from Cindy a few years later and now a dozen or more members help assemble hundreds of such “care bags” a year. Gordon and Nancy Crouch decided to help develop the Faith Mulira Health Care Center in Masooli, Uganda, inspiring many congregation members to participate. This June, several members of the congregation were moved to help the Fatic family adapt to the tragedy of Avdo’s unexpected death.

You’ll hear more in the weeks ahead about some recommended changes that will, hopefully, empower more First Church members to pursue and lead their own examples of faith-focused ministry opportunities. Stay tuned and open to the Holy Spirit’s call for your own form of spontaneous combustion.

Blessings:



William J. Goss

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11th

Worship with Special Guest Preacher
The Rev. Paul Nickerson

Congregational Meeting
Immediately following 10 am Worship
To introduce Our Strategic Plan



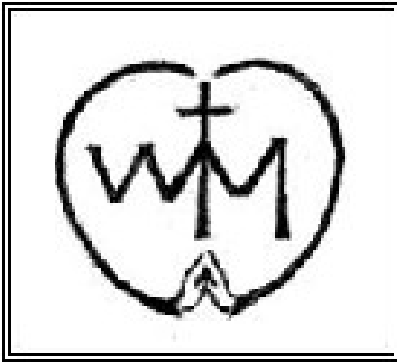
Join us on Sunday, December 11th to hear our church consultant, Paul Nickerson, preach at both our worship services and then stay for a very important Congregational Meeting after the 10:00 a.m. worship. (Children will remain in Palmer Hall for activities during our meeting.)

During the past eight months, Rev. Nickerson has guided our Strategic Planning Team as they gathered facts and feedback and then prayerfully considered what plans God has for our beloved church.

- * Come to the 8:30 or 10:00 a.m. Worship to hear Paul's sermon, "Do You Want People to Experience Jesus?"*
- * Come at 11:00 a.m. to hear the special report from team members and our Church Executive Council who have worked hard these past eight months to make this day possible!*
- * Come and share your insights and hopes for our congregation as we move into this next era of ministry together!*

Join us!





~ *Save the Date!* ~

2012 Women's Retreat

6:00 p.m., Friday, March 16, 2012 *through* 10:00 a.m.,
Sunday morning, March 18, 2012
at Silver Lake Conference Center, Sharon, CT

Join us as we play, rest, reflect and explore faith together. Walk down to the lake, sit by the fire, get crafty or lose yourself in deep conversation. By request of previous year's participants, we are *expanding the retreat two nights!*

This is not to be missed!

*If you would like to help plan this year's retreat,
please contact Pastor Alison Patton: 860.651.3593 or
alison.patton@1stchurchsimsbury.org*



SUPPER CLUB

Friday, December 9, 2011

6:00 p.m.: Social Time

6:30 p.m.: Dinner

8:00 p.m.: Program

Supper Club's **ANNUAL CHRISTMAS DINNER** will be held on Friday, December 9th. Come join us for roast beef prepared by Bob Kane. This will be served "Family Style" with all the fixings by the Committee chaired by Pat & Bill Ketchabaw and Lois & Bob Lyle.

Following dinner, we will be entertained by Mark Mercier and the Women's Praise choir. We know they'll get us in the holiday mood!

All of this for only \$16 per person. If you attended last year, you will automatically be called by the Calling Committee. Not on this "list?" We cordially invite **all** church members/friends and guests to join us. Just call Shirley Meyer (860-693-1944) **before** Dec. 5th. A reminder: to cancel, you **MUST** call Shirley before Dec. 5th or you will be charged \$16 (unless someone on a waiting list can take your place).

Church School News

Church School Schedule of events

Attendance at church school in December is very important!



December 17:
Pancake breakfast at 9:00 a.m., Palmer Hall
 Please sign up with cindy.cole@1stchurchsi-msbury.org. Needed: Mini-Powdered donuts, Fruit platters, apple juice. The church school will provide the pancakes and bacon, and hot chocolate.

Mandatory dress rehearsal in the sanctuary at 9:30 for the Church School Christmas Service

December 25th & Jan 4th:
 Church school vacation, nursery will be available on Jan 4th.

January 8, spring church school session starts

K.I.D.S. @ First

Kids Investigating Divine Stories at First Church

Nursery (ages 3 & under)

The nursery (Rm. 20) is available during the service for children ages 3 and under. In December the children will be learning about the Christmas story.

Pre-K Class (ages 3-5)

The Pre-K class (Rm. 38) will be learning the Christmas story by doing crafts, playing games, and singing. Students will start in church and be dismissed to their class after the children’s message. From 11:00-11:15 a.m. the children attend music in Room 37.

Kindergarten Class

The Kindergarten class (Rm. 37) will be learning the Christmas story, doing crafts, playing games, and singing. Students will start in church and be dismissed to the chapel after the children’s message. They have music from 11:00-11:15 a.m.

Pre-K and Kindergarten students are angels in the Children’s Christmas Service on Dec 18th at 10:00 a.m. Angel costumes are handed out at the dress rehearsal on Sat, Dec 17th in Room 28 after breakfast. This dress rehearsal is important because it will be the only time the kids practice in the sanctuary and learn when they participate in the sequence of the service. After the dress rehearsal, costumes are labeled with masking tape with your child’s name and placed in Room 28. Arrive 15 minutes early on Sunday, Dec 18th to dress your child and escort them to the pew labeled “angels” in the Sanctuary. Your children will also be singing the opening song, “*Away in the Manager,*” which they are learning in music on Sunday mornings.

Program for Grades 1-6, Christmas:

The students will be practicing for the Children’s Christmas Service. This service gives the students the opportunity to learn how a service is put together, the parts of the service, and the ability to participate in the service. The sermon skit this year will be “*Santa’s Favorite Story.*” Lord. (Luke 2:11)

Christmas	Grades 1—6
Wk. 1 (11/27) PreK-6 Begin in Church	Mission Project: Christmas Stocking Decorating and Filling in with Christmas Movie, Palmer Hall, K-6th Grade
Wk. 2 (12/4) PreK-6 Begin in Church	Palmer Hall: Church School Christmas Service Rehearsal/ Crafts
Wk. 3 (12/11) PreK-6 Begin in Church	Palmer Hall: Church School Christmas Service Rehearsal/ Crafts
Wk. 4 (12/18) Arrival time: 9:30 for students involved in the service	Church School Christmas Service

Faith & the Family: How can the family practice their faith at home in the month of December? Here are some easy ways to incorporate your faith into family activities in December:

- Eat a meal together and discuss what family traditions make advent (the 4 weeks leading to Christmas) special in your house. Special meals? Family parties? Putting up a tree? Decorating? What new traditions can you plan that would focus on Jesus' presence, not presents?
- Make an advent wreath and light the candles and read an devotion before dinner each Sunday. Or purchase an advent calendar for your kids to open each day. Discuss the importance of advent as a period of waiting and preparation for Jesus' birth.
- Watch Christmas movies together with popcorn. Have each member discuss what part of the movie they liked or didn't like, what they would have done in the situation, and who they are like in the movie.
- Make Christmas cookies to bring to neighbors or friends.
- Set up a Nativity in your home and read the Christmas story in Luke chapter 2, and Matthew 1:18-2:12.
- Do something as a family for others in need: bring canned food to the Simsbury food bank, clean the yards of older neighbors, etc.



Advent in the UCC

Advent is a season of spiritual preparation for the celebration of the birth of Christ (Christmas), a time of looking forward to the future reign of Christ, and also a time for recognizing his presence among us today through the

Holy Spirit.

Advent is a preparation for rather than a celebration of Christmas. Advent is the beginning of the Christian calendar for the year. This year Advent began on November 27. The first Sunday of Advent is not the beginning of the Christmas season. The Christmas celebration begins on Christmas Eve and continues for the next "twelve days of Christmas."

Purple is normally Advent's liturgical color, associated both with the sovereignty of Christ and with penitence.

Spring Teacher/Shepherd Opportunities, Jan 8, —May 13, 2012.

Help the kids at First Church of Christ grow in their faith and sense of community as you grow in yours, become a church school teacher or shepherd.

Nursery – Kate Bruno, Cheryl Robucci;

Teen aides: Stefanie Muller, Oliva Tawney,

Pre-K—Meredith Dendinger, 1 teacher needed

Teen aides: Marissa Hedman, Mary Hogan

Kindergarten - Pattie Scanlon, Karen Yanik;

Teen aides: Lydia Wartens

Two teachers are needed for each workshop; teachers take turns teaching the class and arrange the schedule to meet their needs, orientation/breakfast meetings are held before the start of each unit on Sunday morning

Spring units are: Boy Jesus in the Temple, Mary Magdalene's story, and Joshua

Computer room – Craig Patton, 1 teacher needed

Cooking room – Chris Morkan, Linda Peach

Art room – Ann Marie Prabulos, JoAnn Hogan

Science room – 2 teachers needed

Game room – Bryan Tawney, Beth Strapp

Shepherds

1st grade shepherd - Erin Naspo

2nd grade shepherd— Jackie Brook

3rd grade shepherd – needed

4th grade shepherd – needed

5th & 6th grade shepherd – Kim Tawney

Contact: cindy.cole@1stchurchsimsbury.org.



Church School Christmas Service Dec. 18th

The students in the church school program will be participating the December 18, 10:00 service in the Sanctuary. This year's theme: Santa's Favorite Story.

Santa goes for a walk in the woods and falls asleep. The forest animal see Santa and think that Christmas is

coming early this year so they call all their animal friends. Santa explains that Christmas is not early, he fell asleep because he was tired. Santa is worried that delivering Christmas presents this year might be too much for him. The forest animals are concerned that there will be no Christmas without the gifts. However, Santa explains that Christmas is about Jesus' birth, not the gifts that they receive.

1. We will be rehearsing the service during church school in December in Palmer Hall.
2. The junior choir is singing in the service and will rehearse at their regularly scheduled time.
3. Pre-k, and Kindergarten: see information on preceding page.
4. 1st graders are sheep.
5. A variety of roles are available for students in grades 2-7th. If your students doesn't have a part yet, please contact cindy.cole@1stchurchsimsbury.org
6. **Dress rehearsal** (and pancake breakfast) **on Saturday, December 17th at 9:00a.m. in the Sanctuary is mandatory.**
7. **All students are asked to wear black shirts and black pants for the dress rehearsal and church service. Costumes will be handed out at the dress rehearsal.**

REV. KEVIN WEIKEL—YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY

PLAY, DISCUSS, WORSHIP, GROW, SERVE, LOVE...

JUNIOR FELLOWSHIP (for 7th and 8th graders)

- Friday, December 2nd** **2:10-4:00 p.m.** Along with the usual - highs and lows, icebreaker, game, etc. - we'll learn about Heifer International and prepare to host our JF Heifer Living Gift Auction on December 11th and 18th.
- Sunday, December 11th** Volunteer to work at our JF Heifer Living Gift Auction. Contact Diann Bailey at diannhbailey@comcast.net to sign up.
- Friday, December 16th** **2:10-4:00 p.m.** Highs and lows, icebreakers, games, and exploring the meaning of Christmas.
- Sunday, December 18th** Volunteer to work at our JF Heifer Living Gift Auction. Contact Diann Bailey at diannhbailey@comcast.net to sign up.

CONFIRMATION (for 8th graders)

- Sunday, December 4th** **8:15-10:00 a.m. Large Group Meeting (Worship)** in Palmer Hall followed by worship in the sanctuary.
- Mid-December** **Small Group Meeting (Advent & Christmas)** at
(specific date & time TBD) host homes.

PILGRIM FELLOWSHIP YOUTH GROUP (for 9th-12th graders)

- Sunday, December 4th** **7:00-9:00 p.m. TBA**
- Sunday, December 11th** **7:00-9:00 p.m. TBA**
- Sunday, December 17th** **9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.** Salvation Army Bell Ringing in front of Fitzgerald's. We only need to volunteers at a time so please email Rev. Kev to sign up for a time slot (kevin.weikel@1stchurchsimsbury.org).
- Sunday, December 18th** **7:00-9:00 p.m.** Christmas Caroling! We'll hop on the bus (which will be decked out in Christmas I lights), and drive around town Christmas Caroling to First Church shut-ins (those who find it difficult to leave home).
- Sunday, December 25th** **No PF Youth Group (Christmas Day!)**



HEIFER LIVING GIFT AUCTION

Why buy milk when you can get the cow?

Do you know your 8 M's? Heifer International teaches that animals provide 8 M's—Meat, Milk Muscle, Manure, Materials, Money, Motivation, and More. Animals are a blessing to resource-poor families and communities in helping them become self sustainable.

JF is hosting a Heifer International Living Gift Auction where you can purchase animals for resource-poor families and communities. You buy the animal and receive a certificate that you can keep or give as a Christmas gift and the animal will go to a resource-poor family who needs it.

Living Gift Auction Dates and Times...

Sunday, December 11th:

- After the 8:30am service outside the Chapel
- After the 10am service in Palmer Hall (during Fellowship/Coffee Hour)

Sunday, December 18th:

- After the 8:30am service outside the Chapel
- After the 10am service in Palmer Hall (during Fellowship/Coffee Hour)

(if these dates and times do not work for you, stop in the main church office between 9am and 4pm Monday through Friday)

THE CHRISTMAS GIFT PROGRAM

The Christmas Gift Program has been a tradition at First Church for about 16 years. Through our involvement with Covenant to Care for Children, our church works with social workers whose clients are abused, neglected or impoverished. Included in this list are teen mothers and children who are mentored through our mentoring program here at First Church. The social workers and mentors provide us the names of these children and gift suggestions for each.



Last year we received over one hundred and seventy Christmas gift requests. Our congregation has very generously provided microwaves, blankets, pots and pans, coats, food baskets, scarves, gloves, and toys ranging from dolls and basketballs to the latest in computer games.

The gift requests are written on tags that you may select through Sunday, December 4th and will be available for you to choose from outside the Parlor and Palmer Hall. During that time period, you will shop, wrap and attach the tag(s) to the gift(s) you have chosen.

Collection day is Sunday, December 11th in the church Parlor from 8:00 a.m.-12:00 Noon. The social workers will pick up the gifts and distribute them to the families. It is important to return the gift on time as it is difficult to get the gift to the child after the collection date. Your gift may be the only gift the child or family receives at Christmas so your generosity is greatly appreciated. The families know that these gifts are being given by our church, and for many it says that the people of God do care and He is with them during difficult times.

This mission project allows the whole congregation to participate and touches many lives as well. For more information, please call Karen Yanik at 860-658-6533 to help assist with the tasks associated with organizing the collection of gifts in support of this program.

Thank you!
The Board of Mission and Outreach

“I Love to Tell the Story...”

“I Love To Tell the Story...” is a monthly column featuring personal stories by First Church members and friends about the ways this church has made a difference in their life and faith.”

October 9th, 2011

I am a 20+ year member of First Church. I was drawn to the church primarily because its philosophy was consistent with my sense of what it means to be a Christian and live a Christian life and because of the UCC's very strong allegiance with social justice.

Since the very beginning, I have been impressed with the many members of the congregation who have taken personal responsibility for ensuring that our church lives out its promise. This devotion to “making a difference to others” has been contagious. As a result, over the years, I have taught Sunday school, served on the Finance Board and mentored a young mother in Hartford. I have always gotten more out of the experience than I put in.

Over the last year or so, God has been leading me to examine social injustice:

- through my job at a Foundation working with health systems, primarily for un-served and under-served populations in Connecticut, I observed the pain, suffering and despair associated with poor health and poverty;
- I saw a member of my immediate family have to make decisions between medicine and food as economic problems continued and public and private safety nets diminished;
- As part of a small group study here at church we discussed *Justice for the Poor* and were faced with the fact that justice does not exist for large populations in our world.

I knew I needed to do something, but I wasn't sure what or how to start. Then came *Mission:1*. This UCC-wide initiative called for collecting food and writing letters to policy makers to encourage changes to U.S. practices related to addressing world hunger. It was a great fit with my search, since hunger is at the heart of much social injustice.

With the work of a great team leading the effort, First Church collected over 500 food items for the Simsbury food bank and served 225 meals to those without power during this latest storm. Seventy-six (76) letters were also written to Senators Lieberman and Blumenthal and to Representative Murphy; letters that have the potential to impact the systems and policies affecting hunger at home and across the globe.

I believe that God chose to use me for this work. I can't always provide as much financial support to the church's mission as I would like, but here was an opportunity for me to use my time and some organizational skills and experience to live out God's promise.

I am grateful for my greater understanding of these issues, for the dedicated people who worked on this with me, for the overwhelming generosity of our congregation, and for the chance to make a small difference in the fight for justice.

Carol Pollack

Music Notes

The Christmas Season is upon us, and, musically speaking, what a rich season it is! There has been an incredible amount of wonderful, meaningful music written for this time of year throughout the ages, and this is our chance to experience compositions contemporary and old, new or familiar to us, where many composers have done some of their best work. Much of the music reaches places in us that words cannot reach, and evokes emotions, memories, and sentiments. It's not too late to be a part of this. The choirs are rehearsing for Advent, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and Epiphany, and we would love for you to be a part of it!



In the last Cornerstone, we made an announcement for a "Pick-Up" Choir - one that rehearses on a Sunday morning and sings the same day, for those that don't have the time to regularly rehearse but would like to sing with us once in awhile. Those who would like to take part can receive the music ahead of time or, if you have the ability to sight-read at will, you are invited to come that morning. I will also be happy to meet ahead of time with anyone who would like to do any rehearsing on their own. A date we have set for this is **Sunday morning, the 11th of December**. We will meet at 9:00 a.m. to rehearse two anthems and responses. We will begin in the choir room on the church office level of the building, and then move to the choir loft. Robes are not necessary, and procession is optional. I will have available and announce the anthem at the beginning of December. I really hope that many of you I have spoken with who have expressed an interest in singing do decide to take part in this. As I said before - Christmas music is wonderful stuff.

Our annual Christmas pageant is on Sunday, Dec 18th, and will feature presentations by our Adult and Junior Choirs, as well as a combined piece to be done by everyone. On Christmas Eve, we have the Puppet shows where much of the music is being provided by our Junior Choir, as well as other choirs, soloists, and instrumentalists. Then our Chancel Choir (plus any singers who would like to be a part), Chancel Orchestra and Cornerstone Brass will present our Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols at 9:00 p.m. At our 11:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Communion Service this year, will be an Uncommon Worship Contemporary Service. We need singers, ringers, instrumentalists and accompanists for all of this. Please contact me if you would like to take part in any way. We would love to have you with us.

Don't forget about First Church's Cornerstone Concert Series hosting the Farmington Valley Chorale's winter concert on Saturday, December 3rd at 8:00 p.m. in our sanctuary. This year they will be presenting selections from Bach's Christmas Oratorio. This should be a glorious production - the Chorale is 80 voices strong - and they have been presenting some impeccable concerts. Tickets are \$15, but free for students. Tickets may be purchased at the

(Cont. on next page)

Music Notes (cont.)

door or through the church office.

Women's Praise Choir will present their annual Supper Club presentation on Friday, December 9th. This is always a fun event for performers and listeners alike.

Upcoming events include our now-annual Midwinter Jazz concert in January. Doug Maher is, once again, gathering an impressive array of musicians. Last year's concert was a sell-out! We will announce the date as soon as possible and let you know where tickets may be obtained so that you won't get left out.

I sincerely hope that your Christmas Season turns out to be everything that you would like it to be - when great and meaningful things can be experienced and everyone can put aside negativity and see life as the wonderful miracle that it is.

Merry Christmas,

Mark

New Year's Day Shelter Meal



How are you spending New Year's Day? We would like to invite you and your family to help prepare and serve a meal at South Congregational Church in Hartford on New Year's Day, January 1, 2012.

We are planning to leave from the First Church parking lot at 9:00 a.m. and we'll be carrying our scrumptious groceries to be cooked and served for an opportunity to make it a Happy New Year's Day for everyone. We'll be back in Simsbury by early afternoon. This is a family-friendly outreach and all are welcome.

If you are interested or have any questions, please feel free to contact Dave Wadhams, 860-321-7160 or wadhams.nd@comcast.net, or Jane Hadley at 860-550-0237.

Sign-up sheets will be in Palmer Hall at Fellowship Hour or in the church office.

Thanks for your involvement.



BOARD OF MISSION MEMBERS VOLUNTEER AT SIMSBURY COMMUNITY FARM

At the tail end of *Mission: 1*, our United Church of Christ-wide anti-hunger campaign, members of the Board of Mission gathered at the Simsbury Community Farm for our fall workday/retreat. We wanted to get to know the farm and explore ways that we might work together to address hunger on an on-going basis in our region. The Community Farm is a town-owned organic farm dedicated to promoting local agriculture and education, and to providing food for families in need.

We spent the morning with the Community Farm gardener, Ann Patrie, who told us the farm's history, dating back to the late 1800's. We also learned about the various educational programs on farming and horticulture offered by the Farm. Many of these programs are for children. The Farm has also developed an Incubator Farmer program, which provides inexpensive farmland, from 1/8th of an acre up to 1 acre, to people interested in becoming organic farmers.

Next, we worked in the fields, on our hands and knees, removing black plastic weed barrier from some very long garden plots! As we worked, we met one of the incubator farmers, producer of "End of the Runway Potato Chips," now sold at a Farmers' Market near you!

Best of all, we discussed an exciting volunteer opportunity for First Church. We have been invited to farm (plant, weed and harvest) a garden plot that grows vegetables for *Gifts of Love* in Avon. Volunteers could practice or learn gardening skills, enjoy the fresh air and fellowship and provide healthy food for some of our neighbors. More information on this mission project will be provided in the coming months. In the mean time, you can learn more about our local community farm, participate in community-wide events, register children for summer camps or become a supporting member yourself.

Check out: <http://www.communityfarmofsimsbury.org/>



2011 Christmas Eve Puppet Pageant

Wanted: First Church members and friends of all ages to help us bring this year's Puppet Pageant to life.

The Puppet Pageant is a re-enactment of the story of Jesus' birth, dramatized with life-sized rod-puppets!

Choose either the **4:30 p.m. or the 6:30 p.m. service** – or both (if space allows), **on December 24th, Christmas Eve.**

There will be two rehearsals the week before.

Participate yourself, or with your whole family! Bring your love of the Christmas story and your inner performer/artist/reader/back-stage hand ... no experience required; just spirit!

Sign-up outside Palmer Hall during the first two weeks of December or contact Rev. Alison Patton for details.

Covenant to Care

Covenant to Care has requested warm children's clothing (gently used), and twin bed sheets and blankets. If you have any of these items that you wish to donate, please bring your extras to Palmer Hall and put them into the blue tub marked Covenant to Care.

Thank you,
Jane Hadley



Gifts that Honor the Meaning of the Season

Even since those three magi presented gifts to the newborn Christ child, exchanging presents has been a part of celebrating Christmas. But sometimes, the presents take over. How can we participate in the tradition of exchanging gifts, while honoring the deeper meaning of Christmas? How might our gift-giving say something about what matters most to us as Christians? Here are just a few gift-giving ideas that might add meaning to the season:

Limit the number: Jesus received only three gifts from the magi – or one gift from each of them. What would it be like to limit ourselves to just one gift for each person in the family?

Make gifts: Frame your favorite picture; write a letter or a poem, design an ornament with your picture on it...be creative! (Check the internet – or your local craft store for all kinds of simple ideas)

Buy Fair Trade Gifts: Check out www.servv.org or www.tenthousandvillages.org. Buying handmade arts, crafts and food products from fair-trade organizations like these helps to fight poverty by supporting artisans and farmers around the world.

Give time: Make a ‘gift certificate’ for time spent together: “This coupon is good for one hour playing games” or “An afternoon in the park”... or whatever you love to do!

Donate time: Donate time to an organization that matters to you. Invite others to join you, or volunteer on their behalf and make that the gift.

Donate money: The youth of First Church will be hosting a *Heifer Living Gift Auction* this December (see article on page 11). You can fight global hunger by giving a goat, a llama or other animals to a family in need. Get an ‘honor card’ for the person in whose honor you make the gift. Check out www.heifer.org

Invest in micro-enterprise: Check out www.kiva.org for ways to lend small sums of money to entrepreneurs in developing countries; each time the ‘micro-loan’ is repaid, you can re-invest it in another project. Make the gift in someone’s honor, or give a ‘gift card’ that allows the recipient to chose a borrower to support.



First Church Reads *One Book* in Advent *It's Not Your Birthday* – by Mike Slaughter

“This Christmas, cut through the hype that leaves you exhausted and broke at the end of the year. Instead, experience the peace of knowing that God is truly with us, the joy of giving sacrificially, and the love of a Savior who gave everything he had for us. In five short, engaging chapters, Pastor Mike Slaughter inspires readers to approach Christmas differently, and be transformed in the process.”

- Read it on your own
- **Gather** with members of the Christian Education Board at **9:15 a.m. each Sunday** morning on Dec. 4th, 11th and 18th **in the Library**.
- Follow – and contribute to – the First Church **blog**
- Convene your own **small group** of friends – discussion questions are included!

In the Spirit of Advent, take time out to prepare for the coming of Christmas.



Advent Bible – Exploring the Christmas Story

Tuesdays, 6:00-7:00 p.m. In the Parlor:

November 29th
December 13th

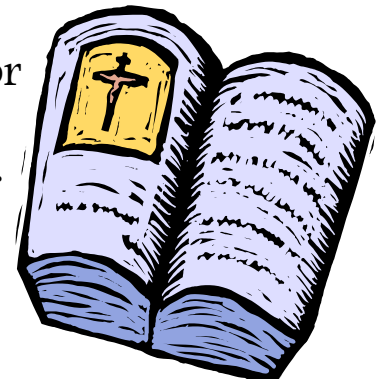
✧ December 6th
✧ December 20th
✧ January 3rd – *Epiphany*

No biblical knowledge needed!

Gather with other First Church members and friends for study and reflection on the Gospel readings as together we prepare to welcome the birth of Christ in our midst.

Led by Pastor Alison.

All welcome!



HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

The Stained Glass Windows

Standing on an easel next to the display cases with the exhibit on “Saving Our Church Records” is an exhibit on the “Restoration of the Memorial Windows.” This whole story of our Stained Glass Memorial Windows is fascinating in the way we came to have fancy stained glass in our Puritan church in the first place, and how we lost and then reacquired them in the late 20th century.

During the last quarter of the 19th century New England, it became the fashion, as it was elsewhere, to follow the Victorian style of architecture, decorating and clothing. Churches of many denominations redecorated their sanctuaries and buildings with heavy draperies, cushions, lighting and stained glass windows and painted frescoes on walls and ceilings. If they could afford to do this, they did.

First Church in Simsbury was no exception. Our church records indicate that during the year 1883, a committee was formed to direct a major redecoration of the church. Horace Belden was chairman of the Prudential Committee and he had some particular ideas himself of what should be done. He was a very wealthy man and his home was just across West Street from the church. He donated most of the \$3000 raised by subscription to cover the upgrade to the church. There was no money in the budget for redecoration. While the Italian glass workers and fresco painters were here working on the church, they also worked at Mr. Belden’s house. In the church, they put in stained glass windows in the side walls in addition to the Memorial Windows. We have no photographs of these but they were mentioned in some memoranda of the time. The church sanctuary ceiling was painted with a “fox and geese pattern with colors of the rainbow running down the walls.” The description of the ceiling has been recorded in some articles and memoirs.

When the windows and frescoes had been there for not quite ten years for parishioners to enjoy looking at, especially during sermons, an act of God destroyed most of them. The newspaper produced by the Ensign-Bickford Fuse Company in an issue from 1892 told about an explosion that occurred across the street that caused a minor earthquake on Drake Hill. Many of the windows were cracked and had to be removed. The Memorial Windows were not damaged. Then plans got underway to redecorate for the 200th anniversary coming up in 1897. So it was decided to paint over the frescoes, install plain windows and cover the Memorial Windows with dark drapes. The church was returned to its original plain and simple Puritan look.

In 1895, while Charles Stowe was minister here, a chapel was built on the north side of the church, and these Memorial Windows were installed in the west wall. It became the fashion to have wedding pictures taken in front of the beautiful windows. The windows remained in the west wall of the chapel until 1965 when the famous fire occurred. Once again, they escaped damage. God was evidently looking out for the memory of the Reverends Woodbridge, Stebbins and McLean.

After the fire they were removed to storage and the west wall of the church was rebuilt to make it longer and to accommodate a stairway up to the balcony. There was no need for

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING— The Stained Glass Windows (cont.)

more windows. The damaged chapel and the rest of the building added in the 1920s were taken down. In 1985, the memorial windows were sold to Jim and Gail Nettles of Simsbury. Lyman Potter was minister during this unsettling time.

It soon became time for the church to begin planning the 300th anniversary, and Bob Naylor was then minister here. He knew about the windows and began to plan how we could get them back and have them installed in an addition that was being planned. He was successful in his plans and the windows are indeed part of the Parsons' Study that was added in 1998. This brings us to the story of how they were restored after being returned by the Nettles. Be sure to read or re-read the story of the restoration. Now you will know how long and how far the beautiful windows have come so that we in the 21st century can still enjoy them.

Donna Hopkins,
Historian

128 years after the Memorial Windows were made. 46 years since the Fire. 13 years since they were put in the new study.

Board of Mission and Outreach *South Park Inn*

*WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME ALONG WITH US OR
WORK "BEHIND THE SCENES" PREPARING THE DELICIOUS FOOD?*

The people of South Park Inn absolutely love it when we come work with them to help meet the many needs of the people there who are homeless and in transition. And, I must say, the blessings are always ours.

Each of the opportunities below represents a great experience to bring a family together, to reconnect with friends, to extend your Women's Circle experience, to share with your Bible Study friends, to add a new dimension to your Men's group involvement, or to develop relationships with board members.

Look for sign ups outside Palmer Hall or email Denise Bell at denise.bell847@gmail.com if you would like to help with any of the following.



- Cooking a meal (approximately 1:30—4:30)
- Serving a meal (4:30 to about 6:30)
- Training to be a lead cook (Jeff is a great trainer)
- Sharing your nursing knowledge with young mothers once a month
- Doing a Bingo Night at South Park Inn or Plimpton House
- Sharing your nutritional knowledge with folks at Plimpton House
- Helping young men in transition learn personal budgeting skills

Meal Dates for 2011: December 10th

November 2011 Executive Council Summary

1. Based on delays encountered due to the recent storm, the presentation of the Strategic Plan to the Congregation has been rescheduled from October 30th to December 11th. Following the presentation, the Strategic Plan will be placed on the Church website for viewing. Two Committees will be formed by the President, Bill Goss, prior to December 11th, which will focus on Personnel and Staffing, and Church Governance.
2. New Members will be accepted into the Congregation on November 20th.
3. A special meeting of the Congregation is scheduled for November 20th to present the recommendations developed in support of the Fatic family.
4. Susan Stover, Chair of the Board of Stewardship, provided an update for Celebration Sunday. At this point in time we have approximately \$493,000 in pledges which is \$6,000 ahead of last year. The Executive Council expressed its strong support for the efforts of the Board of Stewardship.
5. Reverend Morgan commented on the storm shelter and week of hardship endured by all, especially our seniors. Reverend Patton commented on the Anti-Hunger Campaign (Mission: 1), which includes a food drive and letter writing campaign. Reverend Weikel reported that next year's youth mission trip would be to the DOOR program in Chicago, IL. He further reported that an Uncommon Worship service will be held on Christmas Eve.
6. President Goss provided a Treasurer's report in the absence of Treasurer Trimble. YTD results indicate that pledge is down with a \$44,000 shortfall in revenue. However, there is a positive \$25,000 decrease in Personnel expense that reduces our shortfall to \$15,000.
7. Reverend Morgan announced that Bill Ketchabaw was leaving his Pastoral Relations Committee and would be replaced by Connie Keedle. He further noted that Andi Aumen will be relocating out of town early next year and her replacement will be announced later.

Bill Ketchabaw
Clerk

POINSETTIAS



POINSETTIA SUNDAY

December 11, 2011

The beautiful display of poinsettias on Sunday, December 11th is provided by your donations or memorial gifts. To reserve or donate poinsettias, please complete the form below and send it to the church office by noon on December 7th.

Please indicate whether you wish to pick up your plants after the 10:00 a.m. service and / or donate it to one of our shut-ins. Make your check payable to First Church Flower Fund. The cost per plant is \$10.00.

Your name (please print).....

Telephone.....

In memory of.....

OR

In honor of.....

Please deliver.....plants to shut-ins

I will pick up.....plants after worship Dec. 11th

Total number ordered.....

Thank you and Merry Christmas!

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**SUNDAY FLOWERS—
IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY**

It is not too early to reserve a Sunday during this church year to commemorate, honor or memorialize with flowers for the Communion table in the sanctuary.

If there is a Sunday that you would like to reserve, please contact *Bill Lawry* at 860-651-0281 or wlawry@aol.com.

**RETIRED MEN'S LUNCHEON
2011-2012 SCHEDULE**

Join us on the Second Tuesday each month, as follows:
2011: Dec. 13th
2012: Jan. 10th, Feb. 14th, Mar. 13th, Apr. 10th, May 8th

**FELLOWSHIP HOUR SCHEDULE
FOR DECEMBER, 2011**

12/4/11 Board of Trustees
12/11/11 No Fellowship Hour
12/18/11 Board of Elders
12/25/11 NO FELLOWSHIP HOUR—Christmas



CHRISTMAS ENVELOPES: As part of our ministries, special offering envelopes are included in this month's Cornerstone and will be available on Sundays as an opportunity for members of First Church to help support the numerous ministries of First Church. They may be mailed or dropped off at the church office or put in the offering plates during worship.

**CLOSURE OR POSTPONMENT DUE TO INCLEMENT
WEATHER**

If we have to cancel or change any Sunday services and/or related Sunday church activities because of inclement weather, it will be posted as follows:

~On our website <http://www.1stchurchsimsbury.org>.

~The automated message on our main phone number will be changed to reflect what is happening

~WFSB (Channel 3) and WVIT (Channel 30) will scroll our announcement on air under First Church of Christ, Simsbury. An announcement will also appear on their websites - www.http://www.wfsb.com and www.http://www.nbconnecticut.com.