

# 2004 ANNUAL REPORT

## First Congregational Church United Church of Christ Cheshire, Connecticut

### SENIOR MINISTER

2004 was a year of focused professional growth for me. During the first segment of my sabbatical this spring, I began my work toward the doctor of ministry degree. I spent a great deal of time in May working on reading and writing assignments concentrating on the discipline of preaching. This work prepared me for my first of three intensive June residencies at the Iliff School of Theology.

At Iliff, I'm privileged to study under an internationally recognized homiletics faculty including Thomas Troeger and Richard Ward. I've also been very impressed with the caliber of my classmates, all of whom are very good preachers, and some of whom are really extraordinary, knock-your-socks-off preachers. What I've seen and heard already in my professors and my classmates has shown me how very much I have yet to learn about preaching and how very far I have yet to grow as a preacher.

I used the second segment of my sabbatical to experience ministry in another country, culture, and denomination. I thank God that the exchange with the Rev. Graeme Gardiner and the West Epping Uniting Church in Sydney turned out to be such a wonderful experience. Anne, the girls, and I were welcomed into the West Epping congregation with open arms. Graeme has expressed the same about his experience here, and I gather that each congregation felt blessed to hear the Gospel preached from a slightly different perspective and with a very different accent.

I preached every week but one during the exchange, participated in pastoral care and church administration, and led a couple of programs for adults: "Faith and the American Experience" and "The Matilda Effect." Preaching and teaching can be a real challenge in a new culture, but I found the experience to be spiritually uplifting and personally refreshing.

I learned a great deal from ministering with a different staff team in a very different environment. One of the most striking discoveries though was how very similar our two churches are, once you get below the surface. I felt this particularly as I sat in two meetings during my first week on the job: the weekly staff meeting and the meeting of the Church Council. I was taken aback at how at home I felt on the other side of the planet in a church of a different tradition. Their staff and lay leaders are facing the same basic challenges and are blessed with the same gifts and opportunities as we are.

I hope that this exchange is just the beginning of a lasting relationship between the First Congregational Church and The West Epping Uniting Church. Beyond what was gained by the two ministers and the two congregations

during the last few months, there are many ways in which our congregational life may be enriched such as summer internships for young adults considering calls to ministry, shared mission opportunities, and small group connections.

I want to thank the congregation for your support throughout the planning and execution of the exchange. I want to thank especially the members of the exchange committee and all who helped to make Graeme and Jenny feel so welcome.

Evident throughout this annual report are the wonderful blessings that we've experienced as a congregation in this past year, as well as the significant challenges which lie ahead. I am convinced that 2005 will be a pivotal year for our church, a year when we step out in faith. A year when, empowered by the Spirit, we respond boldly to God's call to care for one another, to be a presence of goodness and hope in this community, and to reach out with Christ's love to the world.

May God continue to bless the First Congregational Church of Cheshire, and make of us a blessing to many.

In Christ,  
Rick Dacey

#### ASSOCIATE MINISTER FOR PARISH LIFE

"Welcome!" That's a word *and* a language we try to speak around here. How well are we translating the word into experience? That has been one of our goals in 2004. While welcoming one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is not a new idea, or something we haven't been doing, we are focusing on how we can better welcome one another more fully and intentionally.

Our efforts were spurred on when our denomination launched its national identity campaign, *God is Still Speaking*,...in early December to help unchurched people identify the UCC and its congregations. Our church is one of the 143 in Connecticut that are part of this initiative. Several of us were trained in the Fall, in advance of the debut of this campaign, and a Still Speaking Committee now meets regularly to interpret this welcoming initiative for our congregation and to focus on how we can better welcome everyone, whether visitor or long time member.

Welcome is something we want everyone to experience whether entering through the back parking lot door or by the front vestibule. Our Still Speaking Committee, with the Deacons and Fellowship Committee, is focusing on our Sunday morning person-to-person greeting and on the importance of nametags so that we might greet one another by name. When we gather for worship we have a wonderful opportunity to greet people we "haven't met yet." Our Coffee Hours, warmly hosted by Boards, Committees and groups, offer another opportunity to reach out in Christian community. We are also looking at the ways our building speaks welcome. One of our first meetings was spent in the vestibule looking at it from the eyes of a first time visitor--and we have come up with quite a list of ideas to improve it. We hope that our efforts are becoming noticeable, and we invite your suggestions. Speak to me or anyone wearing a red comma on their nametag.

Small Groups continue to offer opportunities for a closer walk with one another as we journey together in faith. During the ministry exchange I had an opportunity to talk with Graeme about his ten years of experience with Small Groups at the West Epping church. I discovered that both of our churches share a common goal of being a Small Group church instead of a church with small groups. Rather than being a church with one more program, a Small Group lifestyle church is one where its members are part of a network of relationships that encourage and nurture faith that allows them to live out their faith. We are in the beginnings of working toward this goal and we have been very blessed by the growing number of dedicated and gifted leaders and facilitators who step forward with an idea for a group and then turn that idea into a faith and community-building experience. Thank you, all, for sharing your ideas and your time, and for your willingness to lead a group.

In 2004 we launched a new kind of small experience group called "Home Disciples." These fellowship groups meet once a week for 8-10 weeks in a host home to reflect on the previous Sunday's sermon and how it speaks to

our lives. These groups also express their faith through mission efforts as decided upon by each group. In the coming years I look forward to expanding these groups into more of our congregation's life.

During 2004 I began to discern the need for a group of people to work with me to look at the big picture of Small Group life: a group that can brainstorm and map a course to work towards the vision of being a Small Group church. It is my hope to have the group gathered and beginning by this spring.

2004 also saw the completion of a rewriting of the Rev. Barbara Barlok's four-way covenant. A four-way covenant recognizes that God calls people to authorized ministries beyond the local church setting, the four partners of the covenant are thus: the person, the local church, the association and the fourth part, the employer. Barbara is a member of this church and ordained to a ministry with the elderly. She is employed as Executive Director at Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers, a change from the original partners of her covenant. The deacons took this job change opportunity to look at the covenant and to ask how we might better support Barbara in her ministry. One change that was made was that her employer became the calling body instead of the church holding that role. We look forward to Barbara's installation sometime this year and to the opportunity to recovenant with her in a worship service.

For a second year, I was not able to co-lead our two week bicycle trip around New England, ONELANE, offered through Silver Lake's summer conferences. Though we were ready and willing, the low registrations numbers did not support the trip. This year we are trying again, but with a one week trip around Connecticut, with overnight stays in churches. Matt and I look forward to this part of our ministry together, and I am thankful for the occasion for a week of ministry in the wider church.

I am also very appreciative of your support in allowing me the opportunity to serve our wider church on the New Haven Association. This year I conclude my term as Vice Moderator and will become the Moderator in June. I look forward to serving in this capacity and of representing this church in our association activities.

I am, however, most thankful for your support and help and prayers as I stepped into the role of acting head of staff during Rick's sabbatical, Parts One and Two. I feel truly blessed to be part of a church with such strong and capable and thoughtful lay leadership. It was during Part One that we came into awareness of the misjudgment of a worker in the church, and began a review process guided by our Safe and Nurturing policy. The team of people gathered for this process was guided by their faithfulness and thoughtfulness and came to a decision with the whole church's best interest in mind.

Part Two of Rick's Sabbatical was the Ministry Exchange, and it was a joy to serve alongside Graeme and to get to know him and Jenny during their time here. I know I have grown during this experience, and I thank you for your trust in me during this time. I especially thank the Deacons for their support and encouragement.

I need to also thank my colleagues in ministry – for being the team we are and working to lift up one another's ministry as we labor together for God. Thank you Rick, Debbie, Donna, Joe, Glenn, Marianne, Martha, Jessie, Fred and Pat. May God bless our ministries of 2004 and water the seeds for future growth.

Alison McCaffrey

#### ASSOCIATE MINISTER FOR PARISH CARE

It's hard to believe six months have passed since I began working at First Church. It has been a wonderful time to get to know the congregation and staff and I look forward to this year as we grow together.

Primary in my job description is the coordinating and creating of ministry teams to provide support and care to people with special needs. This is largely accomplished by the Parish Care Committee, with guidance and assistance from me. Whether the need is for a regular friendly visitor, an occasional meal brought to a person's home, a chore to be done, a baby blanket delivered to new parents, or a ride for someone who cannot drive, the Committee does what it can to encourage the mutual caring of congregation members.

Much of caring happens spontaneously, but the Committee wants to organize such efforts in the hope that no one might be accidentally overlooked. I am grateful for the hard work and dedication of many who serve on Parish Care teams. The most important work of the church at large is to keep us informed of needs in the congregation that come to your attention. Parish Care depends on *everyone* to be aware of needs and the services we offer to help.

I have taken time to receive special training in October in developing Care Teams as we become more intentional in caring for those with needs among us. I have also done a good deal of visiting, in order to get acquainted with those who reside in assisted living facilities or who are homebound. During Advent, communion was brought to those unable to come to worship. I have also assisted in or conducted several memorial or funeral services.

The Stephen ministry continues to grow with four new care receivers who will begin their fifty hours of training in January 2005. Several people have already felt the benefit of having a Stephen minister visit in times of need or crisis and I am grateful for all the work the Stephen ministers have done. I am especially thankful for the leadership of Sue Chatfield and Karen Gravino in guiding this ministry.

I have enjoyed the opportunity to be involved in leading worship with Rick and Alison and preaching twice over the last several months. First Church is rich in gifts and generous in spirit, and that is evident each time we gather to worship God. It is a privilege to serve among you in this brief time we have had together.

Donna Cassity

### MINISTER OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

*“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*  
2 Timothy 3:16-17

The Christian Education Ministry continues to thrive in this church thanks to the many gifted individuals who have given of their time, talents and vision.

This has been a year of executing our vision and plans from 2002 for Bible Journeys. In February of 2004 we launched the Bible Journeys Workshops for elementary grades using the Workshop Rotation Model. Feedback from workshop leaders, shepherds, children and parents was very positive. There have been many individuals who have worked tireless hours on researching and writing curriculum, designing creative space for workshops, recruiting teachers and shepherds and casting the vision for the congregation. Murals were painted by our mural teams and continue to be painted as the rooms continue to be transformed. The curriculum has been researched and written by many individuals. I continue to spend one day a week taking the research and lessons from the curriculum committee and shaping it into lessons for our workshop leaders to use each month. Thank you to the many volunteers who have helped with this vision and plan. Special thanks to Cornelia Voils, the CE Chairperson and facilitator of our Design Team, for all her hard work and hours of dedication to the Christian Education ministry.

Our younger grades continue to use the Bible Quest materials and reap the benefits of the story-based curriculum. The chapel worship program continues to thrive. Worship is an important piece of Christian Education. I am delighted that on the first Sunday of the month our younger children at 11:00 have chapel and music and our elementary grades stay and experience worship and share communion.

I continue to co-lead confirmation with Rick Dacey each Monday evening. This year we have had 26 youth in the confirmation classes. This fall I took primary leadership of the confirmation program while Rick was away on sabbatical. Many thanks to Glenn Root who was there every week and was part of the planning and vision for each meeting along with Graeme Gardiner, our exchange minister. Graeme provided most of the music and worship pieces of the program but many thanks also to our guest leaders, Alison and Matt McCaffrey and Joe D'Eugenio. The program is exciting and dynamic. Rick and I continue to brainstorm and tailor our curriculum to fit the needs of the individuals in each year's confirmation class. Thanks to the many mentors who have

volunteered to form a relationship with a confirmand and have helped in the spiritual preparation for confirmation.

Special programs like Children's Day, Silver Lake Promotion, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Bible Preparation, Summer Church School, and the annual Christmas Pageant are other programs that have been a part of the course of this year's church school program. Summer Church School this year was the Acts of the Disciples. This was designed to fit the spiritual understandings of the preschool through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade age group. Many thanks to the various people who were storytellers coming to visit us as a different disciple every week. Thanks also to Anne McBain, Sue Mancinelli and Joan Mitchell who rewrote the stories about the disciples. We averaged about 20-25 youth each Sunday through the summer. Vacation Bible School was not held this year. We didn't have the volunteer base or the interest by children to support the program and the C.E. Board wanted me to concentrate on writing curriculum for Bible Journeys. So we suspended the program for 2004 and are going to re-look at it for 2005. The Christmas Pageant this year was a musical, "Follow that Star." This was the first time we have done a musical and it was wonderful. Many thanks to Linda Milton, our director; Joe D'Eugenio, Music Director; Marianne Beckmann, Handbell Director; and Angela Baumann, pianist, for their work on this pageant in preparing the children for drama and music. This musical pageant allowed for the dramatic and musical skills of many of our elementary and Junior High youth to show forth. It was a great job by all in the cast. Children also participated as shepherds, sheep and angels.

Quality ministry flows out of the whole body of Christ's commitment to the education ministry of the church. Our Christian Education ministry is blessed by many dedicated and committed teams of teachers teaching at both hours of our Church School.

Thank you to the many caring and dedicated volunteers that lead our many Christian education ministries:

- Nursery continues to thrive under the direction of our Nursery Committee led by Anne Dacey. Each year the nursery committee recruits and trains our new caregivers and keeps the nursery running smoothly in all ways.
- Christians in Action (C.I.A.) continues to thrive under the leadership of Cindy Cavallaro, Andy Shoop, and Frank Scinto. This exciting ministry to our 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders meets once a month and averages 15 youth.
- Our Church School is blessed by the dedicated and committed teams of teachers, shepherds and helpers teaching at both of our Church School hours. The Junior High classes are learning in units this year that are taught by a different teacher each month. Many thanks to all who have taught a Junior High unit.
- Grace Knipe and Norman Thompson (January – May) are our ever-faithful Church School Superintendents. We are blessed by the many ways they attend to the details of our Sunday morning Church Schools.

Many thanks to Martha Lape and Jessie Waszmer, our office support staff, for the many ways they support the Christian Education ministry. Thank you to Fred and Pat Turner who are always ready and available to help with whatever task needs to be done to enable the Christian education programs to run smoothly.

It is a privilege to participate in worship, lead chapel, co-lead confirmation, and work at all the tasks that keep me busy but I have a firm commitment to ministry being to people and not to tasks. I am eternally grateful to all of the many volunteers who give of their time to share in ministry and create the wonderful atmosphere we have here in the First Congregational Church School. Without your dedication, talents and gifts we would not be able to minister to children and families.

Debbie Gravell

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

The purpose of the Personnel Committee is to develop and administer uniform personnel policies for the staff of the church. We develop and maintain those personnel policies and procedures, support boards on performance evaluations of staff, and confer with the Budget Committee and other groups on such matters as pay raises and performance issues.

Members of the committee for 2004 were: Al Worden and Harry Payne (co-chairs), Ken Euerle, Ruth MacDonald, Ken Stevens, and Al Criscuolo.

This year we proposed and had accepted an addition to the Personnel Policy providing for full-time staff to receive some tuition reimbursement for career development opportunities/higher education with the approval of the Senior Minister, and subsequent review of the Board of Trustees. We oversaw the performance evaluations of staff and work with those to recommend pay raises for staff.

One goal for next year is to develop the performance evaluation process so that we have an appraisal system that will meaningfully assess performance and promote useful guidelines for job growth and improvement. We pledge to be a resource for the staff, committees and boards, and congregation of The First Congregational Church as we continue to support this great staff.

Harry Payne

### MUSIC DIRECTOR

2004 was an exciting year for music at First Church. As the Music Board's annual report mentions, our singing and hand bell choirs are flourishing with a great number of participants, many of whom joined programs for the first time. I am constantly grateful for Marianne Beckmann's work with the bell choirs, often encouraging new students and adults to join and participate. I am also grateful for Angela Baumann's work with the Youth Choirs, as well as our Youth Coordinator, Chainna Murray. Their presence and support is helpful and essential in providing the best possible learning environment for our youth.

Regarding the Senior Choir, we are blessed and fortunate to have a true SATB chorus. With the addition of at least 7 members who have joined the choir for the first time, our choir has become steady in having at least 4 members on any one given vocal part. This consistency from week to week also has been made possible by first trying and then adopting a new rehearsal and worship schedule. The Senior Choir continues to rehearse every Wednesday, but now sings both services on two Sundays per month. This schedule has encouraged more people to participate because they do not need to commit to singing in the choir every Sunday morning. This more "modern" schedule seems to work with people's busy lives and has afforded the choir more time to rehearse anthems of greater diversity and complexity.

We've continued to sing repertoire from the usual Western European traditional canon, but have supplemented it with different styles and periods. The choir has sung Gospel music, music of larger choral works, including choruses from oratorios and larger motets such as Brahms' "How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place." We've sung music of women composers, multi-cultural composers, music for men's chorus and for women's chorus. Additionally, approximately 15 singers from outside the church's community often join the Senior Choir for special services.

Services with music central to their themes and focus remained: Lessons and Carols, Christmas Eve, "All Souls" Sunday, Holy Week and Easter, and Memorial Music Sunday. Memorial Music Sunday inspired great generosity from our congregation and therefore afforded an opportunity for the choir, as well as two members of our youth choir, to prepare and present J. S. Bach's choral Cantata #131, "Aus der Tiefen" with orchestra.

Greater advocating and understanding was brought to the larger congregation regarding the value and necessity to regularly maintain and preserve our organ. An official proposal regarding the needs and refurbishment of the re-leathering of the organ was prepared and offered to members of the Strategic Planning Committee, as well as other committees. The budget committee acknowledged and assessed these needs and repair work and will begin allocating a proper savings specific for the organ in 2005.

The music program has also served to reach out to other boards and bodies within the church. I arranged a piece with music and poetry for our Youth Group, and prepared and performed it with them at the Nov. 28th AIDS benefit concert. The Greater Middletown Chorale also performed a concert in December with the support of the Deacons, Music Board, and Choirs. The opportunity served the church well in offering a chance for the Cheshire community to come and experience music within the beauty of our sanctuary.

The music board has discussed and supports the concept of expanding our music program administratively and musically with the addition of administrative assistants, a paid or unpaid musical intern, and professional vocal section leaders to add and encourage greater skills, vocal strength, and participation in the senior choir. These areas of growth have also been presented and are beginning to be accepted by the church at large.

Overall, there was great participation and enthusiasm surrounding the music program at First Church in 2004. I believe that when we look back on 2004 in the future, we will see it as the year that inspired our future growth.

Joseph D'Eugenio

### HANDBELL CHOIR DIRECTOR

The highlight of the year for me was being able to attend the AGEHR Handbell Fiftieth Anniversary Conference in Norfolk, Virginia from July 24-27. My thanks to the church for the reimbursement of the registration and transportation fees. I was able to attend several workshops at this event. Learning some possible change ringing patterns was my prime goal. I have been able to use this information at both Junior and Senior bell rehearsals. The Workshop presenter was William Wakeland.

Of interest was a unique group performance I heard from the Melmark bell choir - a group of mentally challenged adults who attend a school called Melmark and who are directed by two individuals. This was very inspiring - none of the ringers reads music and are cued by director signals.

The handbell choirs performed as follows: JANUARY - Junior bells, FEBRUARY - Senior bells, MARCH 7 - Senior bells performed "Were You There?", APRIL 8 - Maundy Thursday - bell solo - Jesus Walked That Lonesome Valley, EASTER - both bell choirs - The Day of Resurrection (arr. Callahan) and Christ the Lord is Risen Today, MAY 9 - Senior bells - Simple Gifts, JUNE 6 - Senior bells - The Blessing, JULY 4 - Junior bells - Stars and Stripes, SEPTEMBER - Junior bells - Morning Music (Grieg's Morning/Morning Has Broken), OCTOBER - Junior bells - Oh Sinner Man, NOVEMBER - Senior bells - Benediction, DECEMBER - Lessons and Carols - Senior and Junior bells - Bring a Torch Jeanette Isabella and Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem, DECEMBER - two junior bell members participated in the pageant presentation (Matt Croteau and Marina Olesen) while I played recorder, CHRISTMAS EVE 7:30 Service - Senior bells - Welsh Carol and Oh Come, All Ye Faithful.

Our newest members joined after the Small Groups Expo in September. Sue Walker and Robin Sellati joined the Senior bell choir which brings our membership to six - Sue Mancinelli, Barbara Dowling, Martha Lape, Annette Kelly - with myself, Holly Cashman and Ray Mancinelli as fill in and substitute ringers at various times (Joe D'Eugenio and Gary Snowbeck have also picked up bells to fill in as did Joan Benedetto).

Our newest Junior bell choir members are: Emma Lasher, Madison Healey, Marina Olesen and Emily Walker which brings that group total to 8 and includes Olivia Mulé, Karen Brunetti, Morgan Ingmanson, Matt Croteau.

Our most pressing needs at this time (besides more adult ringers) is a reliable, sturdy cart for moving of the bell cases and handchimes and refurbishing the existing bell set.

Marianne T. Beckmann

## DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY

As yet another year has passed, 2004 was unlike any other years of my ministry here at First Church. When looking back at this year, I can truly say that the youth of our church and our community are extremely lucky to have a church that supports their faith journey. As a congregation we are, beyond any doubt, equipping these young adults to becoming the next leaders for generations to come.

I would like to personally say thank you to the whole church family for helping me to continue my education. Back in the spring of this year, I registered for classes at Southern Connecticut University and I was able to maintain an average of 3.0. I plan to take more courses this coming year.

Over this past year the Yutes participated in many programs that enabled them to challenge each other in debates and discussions about their faith. All of which helped many of them begin their faith journeys.

The Senior High Yutes started the year off by getting to know each other a little better on a weekend long retreat to Silver Lake Conference Center. The program that the Senior Highs experienced was how to develop a more prayerful life.

One of the best parts of youth group this year was putting together the Youth Sunday service. This year the youth along with Tim Schult put together an amazing program on the Passion of Christ. All I have to say is that it was overwhelming. 2005's Youth Sunday is going to be just as incredible as last year's.

We had 40 youth and adults attend one of the year's biggest events on the youth group calendar, which is the Mission Trip -- to Farwell, Michigan. In 2005 we will be going to Millersville, Maryland.

Here is what one of the youth had to say about last year's Mission trip: "You cannot fully imagine, or appreciate, the work camp experience until you participate in it and come away moved, glad to have attended, exhausted, happy, and filled with all kinds of emotions. You are changed, determined to continue in similar efforts elsewhere in your life."

As 2005 begins, the youth group will be looking forward to many new and exciting adventures and continuing their spiritual journey.

At this time, I would like to give a special thank you to all the men and woman who volunteer their time each week to help me with planning and leading programs, providing leadership and guidance to all of the youth in our youth group. Because of the hard work and dedication that these people have given, this youth group continues to grow and strengthen into a magnificent program. These incredible people are vital to the youth ministry of this church. Without them, youth ministry virtually would be impossible. To all the Resource Adults -- thank you from the youth and me!!!

Finally, a special thank you to Rick, Alison, Debbie, Joe, Martha, Jessie, Fred, and Pat for all that they do. As it says on our staff mission statement, "The staff here at First Church Cheshire is committed to team ministry. Recognizing the variety of gifts with which God has blessed us, we support, challenge, assist, and encourage one another as each of us responds to his or her call." I'm truly grateful to be a part of this wonderful ministry team.

Glenn Root

## STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

The Strawberry Festival was a wonderful day enjoyed by the Cheshire community as well as many of our church members. Our thanks to all those who chaired portions of the festival that made it come together as a successful whole and there are many individuals involved in this. The day before and the day of the festival there was a beehive of activity throughout the church and the green with hundreds of people who volunteered for various

tasks. Thanks also to Boy Scout Troop 92 who set up the church tents and Bozzuto's for providing the refrigerated truck for all the food that doesn't fit in our refrigerators.

Proceeds from the 2003 Festival were spent as follows: \$4,000 was given to Parish Care Stephen Ministry to be used for training expenses for two Stephen Ministry Leaders from our congregation (Sue Chatfield and Karen Gravino). \$1,200 or \$150 each was given to the eight United Church of Christ related health and welfare agencies that had been previously supported by the Women's Fellowship: Elon Home for Children, Emmaus Homes, Ryder Hospital in Puerto Rico, Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, Uplands Retirement Center, New Samaritan Corporation, Back Bay Mission, Charles Hall Homes for Youth. The committee is in the process of determining where the 2004 proceeds will be allocated.

Brad Fuller, Chair

### EXECUTIVE BOARD

Our church is, more than ever, a vibrant congregation full of hope and promise as we seek what it means to be children of God. In many ways, this was a transitional year in which we challenged the status quo and looked toward the future.

The most important development this year was the work of the Strategic Planning Committee. During a lay leadership retreat in January, it became clear that many of the Envision initiatives had been implemented and our church's spirit was celebrating our ministries of growing, welcoming, caring, worshipping, and reaching out. With programs in place and thriving, the lay leadership turned its attention to our physical buildings. An ad hoc committee of dedicated individuals: Ruth MacDonald, Greg Wright, David Arai, Rich Kruczek, Walt Ryan, and Jeff Buell, spent six months meeting with all boards, committees, and staff to develop short- and long- term plans for our church space. During the fall they presented their findings first to boards and committees, and in December to the congregation. Through their work, we heard the urgency for repairs needed to our buildings, the meetinghouse in particular, and saw how the building could be expanded to meet our congregation's needs 20 years from now. It caused us to re-examine how we structure our annual budget for building and grounds maintenance, resulting in establishing reserve funds into which money will be allocated each year for periodic maintenance like painting and roofing.

During the year, we were faced with opportunities that caused us to re-examine our relationships with God, with our neighbors, and with each other:

- Our church was tested this year when a lay volunteer demonstrated poor judgment and was relieved of responsibilities. It did, however, cause us to realize that providing a safe and nurturing environment must be a continuous and deliberate effort.
- The Town Center-Cornwall Avenue Historic District was passed unanimously by the Town Council in December this year, despite a "no vote" from our congregation and passionate pleas by many. There were also many among us who supported our inclusion in the district. Now that we are part of it, we will move forward in a spirit of cooperation with the town and with our neighbors. It is clear that regardless how one sided on the issue, this church is beloved by all and a deep desire to maintain it exists, with or without town intervention.
- A resolution on same gender marriage brought by two churches and voted on by the delegates to the annual meeting of the Connecticut Conference of the UCC presented another challenge to our congregation. It is important to remember that the Conference does not speak for any local church, but speaks to the churches on issues that come before that setting of our denomination. Ultimately, the issue of same gender marriage is one that our congregation must seek to come to understand on its own. Our relationship with the conference and the national setting of the UCC is about being a part of something larger, recognizing that we can do far more as a church that is united than one that stands alone.

This was a year of amazing growth for our ministerial staff in both deliberate and unplanned ways:

- The ministry staff welcomed Donna Cassity in the position of Associate Minister for Parish Care. This brings to fruition a plan to put into action our commitment to being a church that cares for one another. She works with the Parish Care Committee and is building the foundation to support lay efforts to provide both physical and spiritual nurturing to those in need.

- Debbie and Glenn's ministries also continue to grow and thrive. In particular we are blessed with the dedication of the Board of Christian Education and their subcommittees to transform our church school program with the introduction of Bible Journeys in February. Bible Journeys is a direct result of Debbie's sabbatical in 2002 where she explored the Workshop Rotation model. This was a tremendous undertaking but obviously worth all of the planning and hard work as the children are truly excited about this program.
- Rick's sabbatical this year ended up being a gift to us all. Surely we will benefit from his doctoral studies in Homiletics. But the ministry exchange with Graeme Gardiner was an opportunity for us to be exposed to a different perspective, especially during the stewardship season. We are glad to have Rick and his family back with us, but we will miss Graeme and Jenny as they became part of our family in their short stay with us.
- Alison demonstrated to all her gift of leadership in Rick's absence. In addition, her Parish Life ministry continues to thrive, offering countless ways for us all to participate in learning, in fellowship, and in worship. The bonds shaped while discussing a book or dissecting a sermon are helping our large church to become one built on relationships with one another as well as with God.

Truly in all that has happened this year, there is no doubt that God is Still Speaking. We are very thankful for the blessings bestowed upon us, but have so much more to do to be the church that God calls us to be: One that welcomes all and nurtures us as we journey in faith together.

Kirsten Sullivan, President

#### BOARD OF STEWARDSHIP

Members: Greg Wright and David Hostage (Chairs), Ed Albrecht, Will Arpaia, Elizabeth Esty, Peter Gadsby, Matt Glatt, Grace Knipe, Cindy Wright

The theme of the stewardship campaign for 2004 was inspired by a hymn from our new Worship and Rejoice hymnal, "Come, All Christians, Be Committed". This theme was originally presented by Will Arpaia on the Stewardship bulletin board, found on the hallway ramp just to the right before one enters the Parish Hall, and he continued to modify and update it as the year wore on. A design logo featuring a hand with a heart in its center was adopted for the campaign. Cindy Wright, with input from Elizabeth Esty and others, designed an attractive and informative stewardship brochure. It was used as part of the stewardship mailing, to welcome new members to church, and as information within the pews. The Board tried several new approaches to publicize its efforts during the September through November stewardship season. Preceded by a "coming soon to a mailbox near you" message in the Parish Post, a letter was sent to each church member that included a bright yellow pledge card and another copy of the stewardship brochure. A four-page stewardship newsletter was purchased from an outside vendor and distributed to churchgoers after service monthly during the stewardship season. Each member of the board wrote several inspirational messages about stewardship that were included on the back page of the weekly order of worship; this space was made available by gracious sharing of the Outreach Board. During the stewardship season it is traditional to have a member of the Stewardship Board speak briefly about the issue. This year we tried a programmatic approach. Representatives from various groups who use the funding were invited to speak about what their groups were doing and how the efforts of stewardship affected their programs. We invited representatives from Caring Ministries, Christian Education, Personnel, Outreach, Music, Trustees, and the Yutes to speak about their committee's efforts and the funding required to move forward with their programs. Exchange minister Graeme Gardiner gave several inspired sermons on the topic of stewardship to help our effort.

As of this writing, the Board of Stewardship had received pledges totaling \$576,054. This included 39 new pledgers. Of returning pledgers, 102 made increases in their pledges, 164 remained the same, and 52 decreased their pledges.

The Executive Board approved a request by the Stewardship Board to consider a program of legacy giving. Work on this phase will commence during the first half of 2005.

### BOARD OF DEACONS

One cannot begin to recount the wonderful accomplishments by the Board of Deacons in 2004 without first naming the members of the board and their individual responsibilities. Helen Wilson served as the Secretary, Mark Sullivan as Treasurer, Terry Hamley as Communion Chair (with competent assistance from Jane Montgomery), Nora Adams served as head of Flowers as well as Correspondence Secretary, Roy Prichard was head of the Scholarship Committee as well as the Search Committee, Gary Rowe was the Video Committee representative as well as Pastoral Relations, Lisa Wilowski and Jane Montgomery were responsible for all receptions, Laura Whinfield was the representative to the Parish Care Committee, Ken Hale assisted in a variety of responsibilities and Ellen Wright served as Assistant Senior Deacon. Youth Deacons included Megan Kelly and Andrew Webster. Many thanks to this extraordinary group! Not only did they manage well their regular Deacon duties of serving communion, providing visitation and flowers and holding various receptions, they also took significant roles in a number of important events in the church.

The list of important events in the church begins with the staffing for parish care. We give thanks to the Search Committee charged with finding a person to fill the role of a newly created Associate Minister for Parish Care position. Deacon Roy Prichard headed up this committee with the assistance of Deacon Mark Sullivan. The committee made the recommendation to call Reverend Donna Cassity for the part time position. Donna began in her new role in July of 2004. We have had a parish care program for a number of years but are pleased that the church recognized its importance and supported the need for staffing it.

After a number of years of planning, we celebrated the creation of a Stephen Ministry program in our church in 2004. Stephen Ministers Ellen Wright, Susan Chatfield, Karen Gravino and Will Arpaia, after having taken part in many hours of training, began providing one to one caring friend ministry to those in need.

Elder Wisdom Sunday celebrated all who had been members 50 years in total in various congregations, a change from the past where we celebrated those who had been 50-year members of our church. Desiring to know more about our long-standing members, we asked the 50-year members to share memories of their church experiences and these stories were chronicled in a booklet called "Telling Our Stories". Special thanks go to Alison McCaffrey for her work in assembling the book as well as to Ellen Wright for coordinating the collection of the stories. Reverend Barbara Barlok, who has held a Four Way Covenant with the church for a number of years, planned and coordinated the Elder Wisdom Sunday service and preached the sermon. The Four Way Covenant, which originally held the church as the calling body, was changed this year to allow Barbara's current employer to act as the calling body, providing the church the opportunity to support her ministry in prayer and act as a partner in the covenant.

The year of 2004 gave our senior minister, Reverend Rick Dacey, the time to take his well earned sabbatical. Rick took the opportunity this year to begin working on a doctor of ministry. His particular interest in preaching led him to take courses at Iliff School of Theology. The Board of Deacons was pleased to support Rick's plan and looks forward to supporting his work over the next several years.

In addition to academic study, Rick spent part of his sabbatical time in an exchange with a minister from the West Epping Church in Australia. By all accounts, the ministers, their families and their churches fared very well by the exchange. Thanks go to the members of the Exchange Support Committee, Deacons Jane Montgomery and Ellen Wright and Susan Chatfield and Ken Euerle who made Reverend Graeme Gardiner and his wife Jenny, feel welcome and supported. Particular thanks go to Reverend Alison McCaffrey, the Associate Minister for Parish Life, who ably assumed the role of senior minister during Rick's absence both in the spring and the fall.

In conclusion, as we focus on becoming a more welcoming church, we are thankful for the caring work provided by our lay leaders, clergy and staff and we look forward to an even better year in 2005.

Susan Hostage, Senior Deacon

## BOARD OF OUTREACH

*It is the mission of the Board of Outreach of the First Congregational Church to assist the congregation in its ministry to the wider world outside the parish.*

The 2004 Board consisted of 12 members including: Paul Adams, Christine Albrecht, Pam Cappiello, Jan Cowles, Mark Hostage, Dennis Lape, Henry McNulty, Susan Pappas, Mary Ellen Thompson, Barbara Voegeli, June Webster, and Katie Worden. We met monthly on the 4<sup>th</sup> week of the month, in addition to a retreat in March.

Our board remained responsive to national and global issues, with the number of natural disasters that had leveled homes, devastated properties and businesses, both in Florida and Haiti. Hurricanes Charley, Jean, and Ivan left little time for recovery. We channeled monies to these causes. Closer to home, the Columbus House in New Haven was rebuilding its program and building through a capital campaign, in which our church donated \$2,000 towards its goal. St. Mary's Church in Colchester, Connecticut also received money after the explosion that destroyed its building. Our dollars have also supported a number of programs through the Small Discipleship Groups, Scholarship monies for Youth Mission Trips, and the Divine Backpack Ministry through Diane MacRae, providing backpacks, bibles, and toiletries for those who are homeless.

The board continues to responsibly inform the congregation regarding who we support, information about the various programs we decide to fund, and any personal stories we can share about how our prayers and money are making a difference. The Outreach video was completed in the fall, thanks largely to the time and talents of Tim Schult. This was a goal of the board to find an engaging way to educate the church as to how far our dollars reach. We strive to involve people in Outreach through the Columbus House, Soup Kitchen, Covenant-to-Care, food collections, FISH, Will Santa Find Me, the Malawi Ministry Team, seed money for the church school Heifer project, to name a few. The numbers of people we serve is significant, many in our own neighborhood. We only hope that outreach opportunities continue to grow.

As we move forward, the church offers infinite possibilities. The small group discipleships often choose a mission to support, the CIA group made goodie bags for Columbus House for New Year's Eve, youth groups or church members are preparing the food for serving at the Columbus House. The overlapping of membership and causes is exciting. How we can further engage people to find a passion or become involved is something we will continue to target as our goal. The soup kitchen may become its own ministry, refrigerator magnets for reminders about the food pantry, an Outreach information booth between services, choosing speakers to educate us about their mission and agency, are just a handful of thoughts for this coming year.

Our role as a board is to raise awareness, enlist and involve people that desire to be involved, help identify talent and identify opportunities. Our hope is to not only inform the congregation but to transform the congregation. The Board of Outreach could then truly become a Congregation of Outreach.

Jan Cowles, Chair

\*specific interest in the agencies may be found at [www.cheshirecongregational.org](http://www.cheshirecongregational.org) or speak to a Board member

## BOARD OF MUSIC

Throughout 2004, the Music Board has been meeting monthly to provide leadership and support for the music program at First Church. The focus in 2004 was the growth of the music program while continuing to strive toward a high caliber of sound/music and learning.

The Music Board itself included a blend of choir members and non-choir members who have an appreciation of music; members were: Sue Smith (co-chair), Linda Milton (co-chair), Nancy Brunetti (Secretary), Megan Stephan (Treasurer); Jack Sellati (Telephone Coordinator); Sue Mattson (liaison to Executive Board); Allan Smits, Mike Pownall, Jeff Turner, Glenda Kirby

Participation in the Music Program at First Church grew in 2004. The church currently boasts:

- Primary Choir (16 members grade K through 3)
- Youth Choir (9 members Grades 4 through 8)
- Senior Choir (25 members plus more than 15 visiting vocalists)
- Junior Bell Choir (8 members)
- Senior Bell choir (6 members)

The music program flourished in 2004 under the leadership of Joe D'Eugenio and includes the Bell Choir Director, Marianne Beckmann; and the Junior Choir accompanist, Angela Baumann.

Amid maintaining a bulletin board and other marketing communications, the Music Board responsibilities included review and approval of the Music Director position description, development of a music assistant position description, 6-month review and annual review for Joe D'Eugenio, and annual review for Marianne Beckmann.

The Music Board was instrumental in marketing and raising the funds for a memorable Memorial Music Sunday on March 28, 2004. The program, conducted by Joe D'Eugenio included choral works by J.S. Bach - Aus der Tiefen (Canata #131) and W. Mozart - Ave verum corpus. A robust choral group supplemented by professional vocalists and instrumentalists was appreciated by all at both services.

To provide clerical and administrative support to the Music Director, the Music Board reviewed innovative alternatives. In the first half of 2004, Joanne Frisco served as the coordinator for the Youth Choirs; from September to December, Chainna Murray took over those responsibilities. Andrew Hostage served as music librarian for a portion of the year; contacts at Cheshire Academy offered options for a student assistant in 2005.

Handbell renovations and the re-leathering of the organ were re-directed, after much discussion, to the Capital Campaign. The Music Board members assisted in defining the needs and pricing out options. Work will continue in 2005 and beyond to utilize a musical series as a fundraising option.

Advent and Christmas provided two wonderful music opportunities: Lessons and Carols which featured the Senior Choir and Handbell Choirs was inspirational while the Junior and Primary Choirs performed in the Christmas Pageant (along with members of the Junior Bell Choir playing the bells and the Orff instruments).

The Senior Choir rehearsal and worship schedule were reviewed and modified to attract new members. Now that the Senior Choir rehearses every Wednesday night but performs at both services twice a month more people have made a commitment to regular attendance.

Goals for 2005 include continuing to grow the music program at First Church through consistency and growth in the choirs (section leaders), contracting administrative assistance (student, volunteer and/or music interns), continuing to pursue funds for the capital items (re-leathering organ and re-furbishing the hand bells), to further develop a music series proposal, and moving all choirs to a higher level of choral performance opportunities.

Susan Smith and Linda Milton

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Pop it and they will come! And come they did. In February, Bible Journeys was launched to the delight of children, teachers and shepherds alike. Since then, the curriculum has covered Creation, the Easter story, the Disciples, Zacchaeus, Ruth, and the Christmas story through Joseph's eyes. The children have baked, taken pictures, played Pictionary, worked on genealogy, play acted, watched videos and eaten numerous bags of delicious popcorn; the smell of which has become our signature fragrance!

The transformation of our space has continued to move forward. The alcove, with its Garden of Eden theme, is complete. Room 9, Red Sea Productions, is 90% complete and some work in room 8, Thou Art, has begun. Our curriculum team has written lesson plans well ahead of our immediate needs and monthly orientation meetings for the teachers make the transition to new themes smooth and efficient.

Special programming, while maintaining some tradition, took on new formats this year. Children's Day offered opportunities for stage acting, while the Christmas Pageant was presented as a musical. Summer Church School, with record attendance, focused on "The Chosen Disciples", with costumed storytelling, art projects and games. Our potluck dinners for the third grade communion and 4<sup>th</sup> grade Bible presentations were all well attended.

Mission opportunities focused initially on the Heifer project. Children were each given one dollar and were challenged to make it grow. They returned \$2,177! Operation Christmas Child brought in 66 boxes for those less fortunate. Even the Confirmation class included mission work in their program, planning and executing a "Bread for Hunger" service project. It was so successful, that mission work will now be included as a permanent fixture in the confirmation program.

Our Board hosted coffee hour in a new way. To launch Bible Journeys, the children met their shepherds in Parish Hall, while the congregation wandered through the church schoolrooms. Coffee, baked goods, and, of course, popcorn, were enjoyed by all.

Christians in Action, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade youth fellowship group, took on new leadership this fall. Many thanks to Frank Scinto, Cindy Cavallaro, and Andy Shoop for leading this active group. So far, they have met with a Salvation Army representative after completing a food drive, and sent care packages, not only to our college kids, but also to soldiers in Iraq.

Many thanks to our dedicated Board members: Joellyn Jason, Renee Walendziak, Michele Jones, Diane Weller, Allison Holtman, Wayne Eddy, Donna Andrews, Beth Barnes, Charlene Black, John Ingmanson, Sherry Gray, Amanda Ploch, and Rachel Brenneman.

The development of Bible Journeys requires many hands. Thanks to Beth Barnes, Charlene Black, Joanne Frisco, Joan Benedetto, Debbie Peck, Cornelia Voils, Sandy Farrell, Joellyn Jason, Renee Walendziak, Leslie Parys, Donna Andrews, Amanda Ploch, Ellen Wright, Barbara Lyke, Diane Weller, Jim Parys, and Grace Knipe for all of their contributions to the process.

Cornelia Voils, Chair

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Year 2004 was a year of transition for the Board of Trustees. Ideas, concerns, and inspiration emanating from the January 2004 Leadership Conference, as well as the words of Rev. Rick Dacey, all centered on re-focusing the efforts of the Trustees. During the previous two years, First Church had made great strides forward in terms of spiritual growth and expanding ministries. In 2004, however, the objective would be to maintain and support that positive growth while simultaneously concentrating on the often under-funded or under-emphasized needs to maintain the facility, the grounds and overall church infrastructure. And so it was with this year-opening challenge, that the Board of Trustees re-organized and re-directed its efforts and areas of concentration.

A part of Rev. Dacey's call was an agreement to upgrade the parsonage kitchen and downstairs bathroom. Unbeknownst to many, the deadline for completing this task was 2004. With no funds set aside to accomplish

this upgrade, the trustees looked inward for methods to meet this obligation within the limits of the existing budget. With the expertise of the talented Larry Pivrotto and Richard Kruczek, the upgrade project was planned and executed. Their donated labor and skills, as well as their ability to secure quality merchandise at reasonable costs, enabled this project to be completed during the Dacey sabbatical. With no funds programmed for this project, however, trustees borrowed money from the Thorpe fund to complete the project. The repayment of this loan will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

The formation of the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) significantly augmented the efforts of the Trustees. In response to an SPC request, Jim Lawson, along with Richard Kruczek completed a comprehensive planning document that outlines all known recurring maintenance costs for the church's plant, equipment and grounds. This document includes annual recurring costs as well as those repair items that take place every 3, 5, 10 or even 20 years. This document should aid the church leadership for years to come in their efforts to plan, program and budget.

High on this list of time-critical repairs was roof replacement, exterior painting, sanctuary window repair or replacement, rain-water conveyance systems, critical tree trimming, and pavement repair/restoration. Richard Kruczek (buildings) and Bill Eagleson (grounds) obtained up-to-date estimates to complete all these tasks. Bid estimates totaled approximately \$500,000. With no immediate source of funds, Rich Kruczek began an organized search for grants and/or low-interest loans. State and federal historic preservation funds were not available (predominantly due to the governmental budget deficits). US Department of Agriculture low-interest loans looked promising and may have provided the avenue to borrow sufficient funds to pay off our current debt (Whiting House mortgage and Thorpe internal loan) while also securing enough funds to complete the key building and grounds maintenance projects. This process was not completed, however, when it became apparent that the USDA could not lend funds directly to a religious organization. As of year-end, the trustees were still in search of alternative sources of grants or low interest funding.

Using traditional Trustee volunteer manpower, a paved (crushed gravel) walkway was completed from the Parish Hall to the daycare playground. Completing the project significantly reduced the amount of mud and debris tracked into the facility by daycare children. This project was completed under the leadership of Bill Gordon and with the able assistance of Bill Eagleson, Ted Wright and other volunteers. In a similar fashion, both the spring and fall clean up weekends help to enhance the appearance of the grounds. Despite an early snow storm that temporarily delayed the fall clean-up, large contingents of volunteers, including active Boy Scout participation, made both clean up sessions a large success.

The year ended much as it had begun, with a long list of repair and maintenance projects that would require near-term attention. Some projects had been completed, while others await funding decisions and a much needed infusion of cash. The early view of the 2005 budget suggests that pledges alone will not support the current list of facilities needs. Therefore, the trustees will remain committed to locating alternative funding sources. A protracted delay in many of the aforementioned repairs will only add to the total inevitable project costs.

Bob Mead, Chair

#### MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Members: Nancy Linton, Betsy DePaolo (co-chairs), Suzanne Fackler (secretary), Addie Marx, Jennifer Smaldone, Sara Buell, Jim Murnane and Chuck Latvis. Staff Liaison: Rev. Alison McCaffrey

The main responsibility of the Membership Committee is to afford organization and support to the staff as they welcome new members into the church.

To this end, the committee met three times, January 5, May 10, and September 27, to plan assistance for the ministers in new member orientations. Three sets of orientations occurred in January, May, and September. The assistance consisted of contacting potential members to inform them of the dates of the orientations and to arrange for childcare if needed. Members of the committee also provided baked goods, coffee, and a cold drink for the meetings and two members of the committee were in attendance, representing the committee. Following the

orientation meetings, new members were welcomed into the church and the committee provided a reception between services on February 5, June 20, and October 17.

The Membership Committee also hosted a New Members' Picnic on September 19. New members and confirmands of the last twelve months were invited along with their families, the deacons, and the staff. The picnic took place in the back churchyard on a beautiful Fall day. The committee provided hot dogs, salads, desserts, and friendship.

Acknowledgement of the new members of the church has been presented through photographs on the bulletin board in the lobby. In 2004, we welcomed 57 new members, including members of the Confirmation Class.

Betsy DePaolo

### FLOWER COMMITTEE

The 2004 Flower Committee consisted of Phyllis Eddy, Ruth Gleeton, Regina Hackett, Jo Korten, Suzanne Lawson, Sharon Perry and Diane Richburg. Mona Coley replaced Virginia Burton early in the year. Betsy Adams was the Chairperson.

The purpose of the Flower Committee is to coordinate the donation of the flowers that are given in honor of and in memory of family and friends and then to arrange for the presence of flowers for weekly services and special events. A brief meeting was held in February to set up a schedule for the callers/runners. A description of the positions was handed out and explained.

Early in the year, we participated in sponsoring a coffee hour between services. We had a flower chart there and people filled in if they would like to give flowers.

In 2003, we tried a new approach to getting flowers for Christmas. As it was successful then, we did it for both Easter and Christmas of 2004. For Christmas, we again had people send in their money and we bought 75 poinsettias. As we have members in our congregation who have plant farms, we worked with two different farms this year; one for Easter and one for Christmas.

In April, we set up special arrangements for Palm Sunday working with Alison McCaffrey. Flowers and palms were specially arranged with palms hung from the balcony. Ninety-three lilies were purchased for Easter.

This committee is fulfilled by the work that they do. With our assistance, those sick or shut in receive flowers weekly. When there is a thank you in the Parish Post to the deacons for bringing flowers, we know it is because of the work of this committee and the fantastic members of this church who provided them. Not only does the church look nice on Sunday mornings and at special events, but we also help brighten the day of those who cannot make it to church.

Betsy Adams, Chair

### FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

The Fellowship Committee for 2004 consisted of Becky Cavazuti, Elsa Bradford, Paige Cowles, Laurie Mozian, Karen Arai, Wendy Howard and Betty Pritchard.

Fellowship's main duty is finding sponsors for the Coffee Hour and secondarily to provide Greeters.

The Fellowship Committee itself sponsored two and donated to one coffee hour in 2004. Using the many and varied small groups in the church to host Coffee Hours has worked out well. It was decided that the group sponsoring the coffee hour will be responsible for all cleanup but will leave some coffee in warmers and any leftover food for the 11:00 service.

One problem that needs addressing is that occasionally another group in the church needs to host a special reception on a Sunday morning and, in the past has not notified the church office or the Fellowship Committee in a timely manner, resulting in confusion as to who is doing the Coffee Hour. Better communication between Boards, Committees, the church office, etc. needs to be established.

There has been much discussion regarding the need for and how to secure Greeters. The sign up sheet on the lobby table will be kept current so individuals and families can sign up to greet. Greeters will continue to be discussed, although the "Still Speaking Initiative" may replace that function.

For 2005, Becky Cavazuti will assume the duty of securing Coffee Hour hosts and keeping the Greeter sign-up current and Karen Arai will chair the Committee.

Betty Pritchard, Chair

### LIBRARY COMMITTEE

The Library Committee met on the first Monday of each month with the exception of July and August.

Objectives: To establish a collection of books, CD's, tapes and videos in meeting the religious needs of the church family, and an increasing understanding of the lives and social needs of the peoples of the world.

Responsibilities: Additions and deletions to the collection shall be the responsibility of the library committee. Recommendations from staff and the congregation will be welcomed and considered, but not binding in these decisions. The Committee will host a coffee hour once yearly in the Parish Hall.

Collection Criteria: Materials in various media will be included if the Committee deems them appropriate for the church library. Books not signed out in at least 15 years are being discarded as we continue to weed out books. Discarded books are placed on a cart and are available to the congregation.

Members: Lenore Murray, Chair, Jane Richards, Joan Kevorkian, Ruthe Sperzel, Faye Gagné, Ruth Campbell

Jane Richards, Chair Pro-Tem

### DELEGATES – KILLAM'S POINT

The First Congregational Church of Branford is the owner of the Killam's Point Conference Center and had set up the Branford Royal Grant Corporation to administer and manage same. As a delegate from our church, I became a member of the Board of Directors of said corporation.

As pointed out in last year's annual report, we were and are using endowment funds for operating expenses. The Corporation had its Annual Meeting and Retreat at our church last January. We had facilitators who addressed our financial problems by showing us effective ways of fund-raising and; also the need for reorganization of our administrative structure. We did elect new officers at this time, replacing ones who had served for over ten years. Fund-raising was not carried out by the Corporation. Nevertheless, task forces were set up concerning reorganization.

One of the task forces created was one for by-laws revision, on which I served. We proposed term limits for all the directors from each of the twelve member churches, all the at-large directors and the officers. There are directors who have served for twenty to thirty years. We also proposed better budgeting procedures and timeliness for receipt of the meeting minutes. The proposed revisions were not enacted.

I believe if we had begun to effectively fund-raise and had enacted the by-law revisions as noted above, we as a Board would not have ended up in conflict with the landlord, the Branford Church. The Branford Church was

increasingly concerned about our financial situation and the miscommunication between the directors and them. The Branford Church proceeded by committee, task force and congregational meeting to terminate the lease between the Corporation and them, which was accomplished in November. Termination could not formally occur until one year after such action is taken, which is November, 2005. This is to allow the Board and Corporation to wrap up all the necessary business and administration before turn-over to the landlord.

Improvements were made from time to time during the year to keep the Center maintained and running effectively. New mattresses and bunk beds were installed in the Point House for overnight guests. The Center remained busy and popular throughout 2004 and reservations for 2005 are already coming in, so that the upcoming year will also be busy. We attempted to close down for the winter, but the cost of winterizing the Center outweighed the expense of remaining open. Thus, the Center is open during the winter months.

Even though I am stepping down as Delegate (Director) from our church, I feel hopeful and confident that the Killam's Point Conference Center will continue to be popular and used as a retreat center for many churches and non-profits as in the past. I hope that under the new leadership of the Branford Church, effective November 2005, Killam's Point will remain the premier retreat center it has been in the past and I would urge our church to continue to use the Center as it has in the past. I will be succeeded by Al Worden in the coming year and I will be serving as Alternate Delegate.

Norman J. A. Thompson

#### DELEGATES – GREATER WATERBURY INTERFAITH MINISTRIES

During the year, GWIM moved its offices and services from the north end of Waterbury to St. John's Episcopal Church at the west end of the green to be more accessible to the people it serves. This Fall, Carol E. Brown, the Executive Director, announced her retirement. Carol had made GWIM more visible to its member churches by visiting each one to speak about the work being done, and also increased its visibility in the community. She will be missed.

Farshid Hakim.

#### DELEGATES – CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE AND NEW HAVEN ASSOCIATION

Our church was represented by our delegates and clergy at New Haven Association meetings in the Spring and Fall. No significant action was taken at either of these meetings.

#### Connecticut Conference Annual Meeting

On Friday and Saturday, October 15 and 16, 2004, lay delegates and clergy from all over the state gathered in Suffield for the Annual Meeting of the Connecticut Conference. Under the theme of "God is Still Speaking," the delegates attended Friday workshops on a wide range of topics, such as Introducing Adults to Theology, Bereavement, and Following Jesus in a Religiously Plural World. They were also treated to a thoughtful and heartfelt address by Rev. Davida Foy Crabtree, the Conference Minister, highlighting in part the challenges faced by declining support in some churches for OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission). On Saturday, the delegates heard a moving keynote address by the Reverend Dr. Park Jong-Wha, Senior Minister of the Kyung-Dong Church in Seoul, Korea. Rev. Park, who serves on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, gave a fascinating and challenging talk about the role of faith in Korea, about the on-going tensions between North and South Korea, the role of U.S. policy in the region, and his view that God-given peace, not unification alone, should be the goal for the region. Delegates watched an informative video on the work of the Connecticut Conference, making tangible what our annual OCWM contribution does in Connecticut and in the world at large. It was a great overview of the Conference's work – and *almost* as good as our own excellent video by Tim Schult

and Jan Cowles. After a review of the Conference's financial status, approval of the budget, and lunch, the delegates reconvened for discussion of resolutions.

The first order of business in the afternoon session was a resolution presented by two churches that had been tabled at last year's annual meeting, namely, "A Resolution in Support of the Civil Right of Marriage for Same-Sex Couples." After a very lively and thoughtful discussion and a variety of amendments, a modified resolution was passed by over 70 percent of the delegates. There are two key provisions of the new resolution: (1) it resolves that "the delegates to the 137<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ declare that the denial of the civil right of marriage of same-sex couples is an unwarranted act of exclusion;" and (2) it calls on the Conference staff and church leaders to urge the congregations to "prayerfully study or continue their study and discussion of this issue and to act upon their conclusion as each congregation and/or member feels led by the Spirit so to do." Notably, unlike the 2003 resolution that was tabled, the resolution that passed this year does **not** commit the resources of the Conference to call for or participate in lobbying for legislation legalizing same-sex marriage in Connecticut. A second resolution, entitled "Encouraging Civil Dialogue Regarding Opposing Views on Issues Concerning Sexuality and Marriage," was also discussed and passed by an overwhelming vote. I commend to everyone to review the full text of the resolutions at the church office, or, for even more information about the Annual Conference, the Conference website: [www.ctucc.org](http://www.ctucc.org).

The issues raised in these two resolutions are, without a doubt, issues on which people of faith may disagree. Thus, it is important to understand what the resolutions do, and do not, mean. The resolution is a resolution *of the Conference*. It reflects the prayerful decision and process of discernment by the delegates of the 137<sup>th</sup> Conference. It is *not* binding on individuals or congregations. As Congregationalists, we have always maintained the right, even the duty, to engage in individual and congregational-level discernment. That is reflected in our church's covenant. Second, the resolution instructs the Conference staff (including the Public Policy Advocate) to "communicate to members of the State legislature that the delegates of the 137<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Connecticut Conference declare that the denial of the civil right of marriage of same-sex couples is an unwarranted act of exclusion." This does *not* call for legislation. It does *not* call for spending of Conference funds to "promote" same-sex marriage or to lobby the legislature. It does *not* say that "the Congregational Church" supports same-sex marriage. It clearly states that the *delegates to the 137<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference* passed this resolution. Third, both resolutions call for on-going study, discussion, and civil, *faithful* discourse on these topics, noting that "tradition in the United Church of Christ does not discourage, but rather welcomes discussions concerning matters of faith among people of faith."

Finally, some have raised questions about the role of the delegate to the Conference. Delegates, like members of other boards and committees of First Church, are nominated by the Nominating Committee, elected at our church's Annual Meeting, and serve for a three-year term. (The exception to this is the youth delegate – as of 2002, each church in the Connecticut Conference is entitled to send one, voting delegate under the age of 22.) In the words of Rev. Crabtree, "it is the responsibility of the delegates and ministers to listen to one another and to discern the mind of Christ on the issues" addressed at the meeting. The delegates from First Church, as in many other churches, prepared for the Annual Conference by discussing issues with church members as well as with the ministerial staff, reviewing materials submitted by opponents to as well as supporters of the resolutions, and, in many cases, attending a workshop/discussion on same-sex marriage issues led by Reverend Dacey this fall. Because discussion is an essential part of the discernment process at the Conference itself, as well as the reality that resolutions are often amended and modified at the Annual Meeting as a result of the discussions, Rev. Crabtree notes that "delegates must be free to vote according to the understanding they develop with the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the context of the Meeting."

I was excited to attend the Conference as a delegate, and found the Meeting both stimulating and challenging. It is my hope, and I expect, the hope of all those of us who were privileged to attend the 137<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ, that the decisions of the Conference provide the basis for the continuing, important, prayerful discussion and discernment within our own congregation about the issues raised by the Meeting.

Elizabeth Esty

### THE WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

The Board of the Women's Fellowship consisted of Mary Hartman, representing Tuesday Circle; Joy Deegan from the Colonizers, Martha Lape, Secretary; and Jessie Waszmer, Treasurer. Addie Marx now represents Ladies Aid. A special thank you to Marie Venter who held that position for many years. The group held no formal meetings during the year but only got together informally to discuss joint events held by the groups and presented any information to the Executive Board.

The three groups coordinate and conduct successful April and October Rummage Sales and a Christmas Fair. The dates for the Fall Rummage Sale were changed from Thursday from 3:00 to 7:00 p.m. and Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon to Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. The results were about the same, so it may be decided to move back to the original times.

There were two special events this year: In May, the youngest of the groups, the Colonizers, celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a dinner and memorial service attended by many members and former members, with greetings from others who were unable to attend. In November, Colonizers hosted a musical evening with our exchange minister Graham Gardiner and his wife Jenny. Many women of the congregation and the other women's groups enjoyed the evening.

The Women's Fellowship made the following purchases for the church this year: eight new lace tablecloths for special events (\$120) and additional flatware to replace missing pieces (\$117).

Joy Deegan

### MEN'S BREAKFAST FELLOWSHIP

The Men's Breakfast Fellowship completed the year with seventeen meetings taking place. For the first time we were forced to cancel a meeting, that was due to the March 17 snow storm which was predicted to be a major event. Our meetings are held the first and third Wednesday of each month October thru May with only one meeting in June and September. We meet at 6:30 a.m. in the church's Parish Hall and have twenty-five members on the roster with an average participation of seventeen.

We have served as host for the Sunday morning Coffee Hour between services.

This all male group managed to provide a Continental Style Breakfast including juice, coffee and a variety of baked goods (store bought and homemade) at each meeting through the efforts of seventeen volunteers. At each meeting we try to have a speaker (member or guest) to present an interesting topic. Topics presented this year include:

“How An Immigrant Family Came to Cheshire” led by Dick Miller

“A Move to the USA & Christianity via a Refugee Camp” led by Ahmad Taheri and Farshid Hakim

“Prayer” presented by Rev. Alison McCaffrey

“Sharing Bits of Personal Wisdom” led by Dr. John Conant

“Future of Technology” led by Jim Louys

“Exploring Logic and Faith” led by Bill Gordon

“Global Warming” presented by Dan Esty

“Our Church Buildings” led by Bob Johmann

“Faith Related Summer Experiences” hosted by Jay Perkins

“Strategic Planning Committee Report” by Ruth MacDonald and Greg Wright

“The Second Coming of Christ” led by Rev. John Afman  
“Our Outreach Program” presented by Dennis Lape  
“Faith in the Australian Landscape” led by Rev. Graeme Gardiner  
“Parish Care” led by Rev. Donna Cassity  
“Christmas Portion of Handel’s Messiah” led by Joe D’Eugenio  
“God’s Will – Why Change?” led by Joe Madden  
“Cheshire Town Budget” presented by David R. Schrumm

Two planning sessions were held by Bill Gordon, John Afman, Dick Miller, and Bob Johmann. We appreciate the help and support provided by the church ministerial and office staffs. Minutes of our meetings can be reviewed in the church library. Ref: Men’s Breakfast Fellowship located in the three ring binder on the Northeastern-most top shelf.

Members: John Afman, Mohsen Akhavan, Ed Albrecht, Wes Alexander, Bill Bengtson, John Campbell, John Conant, Chris Cowles, John Crowell, Rick Dacey, Alex Demac, Bill Eagleson, Dick Eppler, Matt Glatt, Bill Gordon, Farshid Hakim, Bob Johmann, Dennis Lape, Joe Madden, Dick Miller, Jay Perkins, Roy Pritchard, Marshall Tucker, Marvin Turner, Al Worden

Bob Johmann, Coordinator

### CHURCH CLERK

Summaries of Church Meetings held during 2004 are listed below. The complete minutes are found in the church record book and are available to interested parties.

Annual Meeting – January 26, 2004 for the following purposes:

1. Accepting the Annual Report for 2003
2. Electing Officers, Board, and Committee members
3. Conducting any other business that may properly be brought before the congregation.

Resolution: Items 1, 2 were accepted and passed. Item 3 was presented by Rev. Rick Dacey in reference to his Sabbatical and Pulpit Exchange in the coming year.

Church Meeting – June 27, 2004 for the following purpose:

1. Determining the church’s vote on the proposed Town Center Historic District

Resolution: The Congregation voted 2/3rds (two-thirds) against the proposed Town Center Historic District.

Church Meeting – December 12, 2004 for the following purposes:

1. Approving the budget for 2005
2. Hearing the report of the Nominating Committee
3. Hearing a report of the Strategic Planning Committee.

Resolution: Item 1 was read and approved. Items 2 and 3 were presented.

CHURCH STATISTICS

Total Membership as of January 1, 2004		1043
<u>Admissions</u>		
Confirmation Class	28	
Confession of Faith	5	
Reaffirmation of Faith	9	
Letter of Transfer	15	
Reactivate	2	
Total Admissions		59
Dismissions		
Letter of Transfer	7	
Transfer to Inactive	27	
Deaths	10	
Total Dismissions		<u>44</u>
Total Membership as of December 31, 2004		1058

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
CHESHIRE, CONNECTICUT  
272-5323

CHURCH STAFF

Senior Minister	Richard L. Dacey
Associate Minister for Parish Life	Alison McCaffrey
Associate Minister for Parish Care	Donna Cassity
Minister of Christian Education	Deborah Gravell
Music Director	Joseph D'Eugenio
Handbell Choir Director	Marianne Beckmann
Director of Youth Ministry	Glenn Root
Office Manager	Martha Lape
Secretary	Jessie Waszmer
Sexton	Fred Turner

