

THE PARISH POST

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

CHESHIRE, CONNECTICUT
www.cheshirecongregational.org

Volume XXIX

January, 2012

No. 1

The Real Work of Christmas

By Jeff Braun, Senior Minister

It's been said that the real work of Christmas is not decorating our homes and Christmas trees or the exchanging of gifts. It's not caroling or seasonal parties. It's not even worship or the singing of sacred hymns. As integral as these all are



to our Christmas experience, the real *work* of Christmas... is far deeper. It endures long after the season has faded. And it invites us – what's more, it calls us – to venture forth into the post-Christmas season with transformed hearts, so that, newly imbued and newly radiant with Christ's in-breaking love, *we*... might help transform the landscape and the lives... around us.

To quote the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, the real work of Christmas is:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,

To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers and sisters,
To make music in the heart.

This... *this*... is the work of Christmas. *This* is our sacred call. Our sacred call. Our soulful joy.

Whether it is through our trips to Columbus House, Midnight Run, Deacons delivering flowers to church members, Stephen Ministry, all-church cards signed by the congregation on Sunday mornings, mission trips, a growing prison ministry, gathering in weekly worship and prayer, or innumerable other endeavors by our church... through all of these, and more, let us be about the real work of healing, of sharing, of laughing and loving, and of making Christ's accompaniment and spiritual unity... just a little more real.

Happy New Year.

Jeff

Malawi Concert Thanks

On the night of the Malawi concert, Pete Ploch wore a T-shirt that said UBUNTU. In the Bantu languages, it means “one,” as in one world; we are all God's children. It was the perfect T-shirt, because the Malawi concert celebrated the connection between us in Cheshire and our friends in Malawi.



Singing, drumming, playing the guitar and flute and cello and piano ... the talent was real! Our talent included the good folks from our church who made us art and Christmas stockings and food for the silent auction. Guests from our church family and community helped create a wonderful night of peace and unity.

Together we raised \$3,000.00 and this money will bring smiles and full bellies and books to our Malawian friends. Thank you, one and all.



Boar's Head Road Trip

Come travel with us to Hartford's Asylum Hill Congregational Church for the 45th annual Boar's Head Festival. We have purchased a block of tickets for Saturday, January 7, at 3 p.m. festival show. Tickets are \$20 each; carpooling is available, and there's an option to stop and have dinner on the way home. For more information, please speak with Karen Gravino or Alison McCaffrey. Sign up in the lobby.

January Worship Schedule

Sunday, January 1: Single service at 10:00 a.m. College Sunday; the service will be led by our college students. Communion will be served. Food offerings will be accepted; the food of the month is boxed macaroni and cheese.

Sunday, January 8: Services at 9:00 and 11:00.

Sunday, January 15: Services at 9:00 and 11:00.

Sunday, January 22: Services at 9:00 and 11:00.

Sunday, January 29: Services at 9:00 and 11:00.

Baby Basket Ministry

Our church's contributions to the Baby Basket Ministry benefit needy women and their newborn babies, through Waterbury Hospital and Bristol Hospital. Here's how you can help this important outreach. What's needed is a collection of new and good quality used baby clothing, shoes, bibs, blankets, toys, towels and washcloths, and new baby toiletries.

These are collected all the time, but especially on the third Sunday of each month. Please use the baby bassinet in the Parlor on the third Sunday of the month for collections.

For further information, contact Patti Dickinson at 203-271-7003. Also, please see the Waterbury Church of Christ's website at: www.basketministry.org.

Report on October 2 Congregational Meeting and Votes

The purpose of this communication is to share the outcome of an important, recent congregational process and to thank the members of our congregation for their heartfelt participation.

Last May and June, the Board of Deacons hosted a series of congregational conversations on the issue of same-sex marriage, designed to give all members an opportunity to study, listen, reflect, and express their beliefs on this topic. More than 90 members responded by participating in one or more of the six sessions held over the course of several weeks.

The Deacons had intended to make a decision on whether ministers would be permitted to perform same-sex marriages on church premises. The Deacons were to be guided in their discernment by study, prayer, and the voices heard at the sessions. Shortly after the final conversation, the Board received a petition from 34 of our members (in accordance with Article VII, Section 2 of our church by-laws) requesting that “any decision made about performing same-sex marriages on the church premises be made by a majority vote of the congregation at an officially-called church meeting.”

In response, the Board of Deacons called a church meeting for Sunday, October 2, 2011 (after the 11:00 service), to consider the question of whether to allow same-sex marriages on church premises. The first vote was to determine whether the decision to allow same-sex

marriages on church premises should be made by a vote of the congregation or whether it should rest with the Deacons. This vote was 105 to 51 in favor of a decision by the congregation. The second vote was on whether to allow same-sex marriage ceremonies to be performed on church premises. This vote was 124 to 41 in favor of allowing same-sex marriages, with 3 abstentions.

Thanks to all who participated in this truly Congregational process. Your prayerful presence and contributions, in the conversations and in the church meeting, embodied the very best of our tradition and reaffirmed that our spiritual unity is more than the sum of our differences. We are blessed to be on this journey together.

The Board of Deacons



Saying Thanks

Thank you so much for the flowers delivered to me after the Nov. 20 service to honor me on my 75 birthday. It was such a pleasant surprise.

Helen Prince

Thank you so much for your cards and kind words after dad’s passing. Dad really loved his “church on the Green.”

Cheryl and Karen, Bill Grimes’ daughters



A Christmas Fair Thank You

Many thanks to all of you who helped to make this year's Christmas Fair a success: Our wonderful bakers, our "sales people" at each table, our kitchen workers, Santa and his helpers, those who helped with crafts in the children's area, those who brought handcrafted items to be sold, those who did set-up and clean-up, our greeters, those who did the publicity, and all those who came to shop and have lunch.



It was a great day, with people enjoying themselves and each other. People were able to see old friends and perhaps make some new ones.

A special thank you to Jackie Cole, Debbie Wylie, Deb Brown, Lisa Canas, Patti Dickinson, Sue Delgrego, Kate Altobello, Karen Gravino, June Webster, Sue Hostage, Regan Huntley, Jan Cowles, Melanie Pivirotto, Jan Garthwait, Beth Ross, Joellyn Jason, and Ann Izzo, who worked so hard coordinating the various parts of the Fair. They are an amazing group of creative people.

Martha Lape

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www.cheshirecongregational.org

... And Thanking Bakers

Dear Fabulous Bakers,

We sold more cookbooks this year, upped the price, and still sold nearly every morsel of cookies baked. The selection and creativity that is displayed around the 'cookie walk' table is remarkable. People came back for more, in their preparation for parties, visiting with family, or personal consumption in the privacy of their homes. Many asked if the recipes were included in the cookbook; each year will contain the newest contributions to add to the original book.

We wanted to thank every one of you who took the time to bake, and deliver them in a timely fashion so we were ready for sale when the doors opened. On behalf of this committee, we bless you and wish the happiest of holidays with your loved ones.

*Regan Huntley, Jan Cowles,
and Melanie Pivirotto*



An Extra Sunday in 2012

There will be 53 Sundays in 2012. If you have made a WEEKLY financial pledge to the church for 2012, that will entail 53 payments, not 52. So, for example, if you pledged \$50 a week, your annual total will be \$2,650, not \$2,600.

Many people who filled out pledge cards wrote in a weekly amount, then multiplied by 52 to get an annual total. As it turns out, for 2012 that's not the right calculation.

Christian Education in January

Caroll's Corner: Here we are at yet another New Year. Big dreams, big ideas, big plans. Now what? How many times do we stand at the edge of another year and make promises we either have a hard time keeping, keep for a while, or never keep at all? Why do we do this to ourselves? We set ourselves up for failure, which makes us feel worse.

I offer this up for your consideration. Remember that every day, not just New Year's Day, is a brand new start. Each morning as the sun rises, know that no one has lived in this day yet. No one has sinned, or has loved, or has failed or succeeded in this day. Each day, God gives us a brand new chance to change what we can with the help of the Holy Spirit. With Christ, all things are possible. Start each day with the awe and wonder of the majesty, grace and love of God and see where your day continues from there.

New Year's resolutions are good, but each new fresh and blessed day is a gift straight from God; use this day wisely.

Christmas Sunday school schedule: There will be no Sunday school or nursery care on Christmas Day or New Year's Day. This will allow our valued volunteers to worship with their families as well this holiday season. We invite you all to worship as a family.

CPR/Heimlich/AED Training: Christian Education has hired someone to come and lead training for CPR/Heimlich Maneuver/AED Training with us on

January 21 at 10 a.m. The training will take approximately two hours. The cost is \$20 per person, with a 25 person maximum class. Checks should be made out to the church and in the memo line noted "CPR Training." All checks need to be received no later than January 8. Please sign up in the lobby or see Caroll Cyr. Teachers, shepherds, nursery care workers, board members, and congregants are encouraged to attend. If cost is an issue, please see Caroll Cyr; partial scholarships may be available.

Thank You: I want to thank everyone who helped and attended the Advent Workshop and our Children's Christmas Pageant. It takes many hands to make these events go smoothly, and they surely did. The Advent workshop was enjoyed by all who attended. The food was great and the fellowship was even better. Our children worked so hard on their lines and I think had a great time performing in our pageant. Practices were lively and entertaining. A huge thank you goes out to all the parents, children and volunteers that made these days a success. You know who you are and most importantly... So does God.

**Christian Education Communi-
cations:** I have started to send weekly (or as needed) e-mails to all the parents of children in our Sunday school program, and also to this year's volunteers. If you have not been getting them but would like to, please contact Nancy Sewell in the church office.

Sunday school teachers in January:

<u>9 a.m.</u>	P.S.3 &4-K	Grades 1&2	Grades 3&4	Grades 5&6	Grades 7&8
Jan 1	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	No Sunday School
Jan 8	Donna Ann Eisbach	TBD	Karen Purslow Abby Hurlburt	Kathy Duffendack Julie Witte	Susan Harris Bob Mead
Jan15	Kate Childs	TBD	Lanelle Giosa Kirsten Sullivan	Karen Pettit Eric/Joe Pettit	Kate Hall Mark Hall
Jan 22	Sue Persio	TBD	Joyce Mulholland Heidi White	Kathy Duffendack Addy A.	Tim Hart Linda Mclean
Jan 29	Donna Mead	TBD	Karen Purslow Abby Hurlburt	Jaime Fanning Addy A.	Susan Harris Bob Mead

<u>11 a.m.</u>	P.S.3 &4-K	Grades 1&2	Grades 3-6	Grades 7&8
Jan 1	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	No Sunday School	No Sunday School
Jan 8	Suzanne Lawson	Sunshine Fiore Sherry Gray	Deb Lasher Emma Lasher	???
Jan15	Martha Triplett- Strollo Beth Rojas	Nicole Kevorkian Brendan Devine	Patti Syme Lisa Ellis	Deb Kelleher Linda Milton
Jan 22	Sue Branzell Noureen Hakim	Lisa Skelly Janet Moore	Megan Perez Caroline Behuniak	Don Lee Kerry Dunne
Jan 29	???	Sunshine Fiore Sherry Gray	Deb Lasher Emma Lasher	???

News of the Youth Groups

Fuel meets the first and third Wednesday of each month. We've had a lot of fun at our meetings while having some good discussions about our faith. If you haven't checked us out yet, please do so on January 4 and 18 from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.

Many thanks go out to the youth that helped us with the Christmas Fair. Thank you for helping with the children's' area in the fair. The youth group would like to thank Jan Garthwait, Joellyn Jason, and

Beth Ross for inviting us to participate. We appreciate the support they give the youth group here at the church and their support for our mission trip.

Our SAW (Service Along the Way) events have been a big hit so far this year. Stay tuned for upcoming SAW events in the new year.

Nooma: We will continue to meet on the first Sunday of the month again starting in February. We will not meet on

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New Years' Day. If you haven't seen this video series, please do come and check it out. It's a great way to engage our youth with their faith and talk about some important topics. Join us on the first Sunday of each month between services.

Midnight Run: Our middle school midnight run group will meet on January 30. Families can check the board for things that they can donate. We thank those middle school youth that show up each month to help make the 55 bag meals that members of the congregation deliver to the homeless and hungry in New Haven that night. We meet the last Monday of each month from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Lectionary for January

Sunday, January 1: Isaiah 60:1 – 62:3; Psalm 72: 1-14; Psalm 148; Ephesians 3: 1-12; Galatians 4:4-7; Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 2:22-40.

Sunday, January 8 Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19: 1-7; Mark 1:4-11.

Sunday, January 15: 1 Samuel 3: 1-20; Psalm 139: 1-18; 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20; John 1: 43-51.

Sunday, January 22: Jonah 3:1-10; Psalm 62: 5-12; 1 Corinthians 7: 29-31; Mark 1: 14-20.

Sunday, January 29 Deuteronomy 18: 15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13; Mark 1: 21-28.

Serving at Columbus House

Our Church provided a heartwarming meal to almost 100 guests at Columbus House on November 30. Our usual meatloaf, mashed potatoes, green beans and rolls with homemade pie was a hit once again. Our assortment of pies was bigger than ever with apple, blueberry, cherry, pumpkin and even pecan!

Many thanks once again to all of our wonderful, generous cooks and servers: Karen Gravino, Millie & Bill Farrell, Henry McNulty, Emma Norback, Lisa Canas, Glenn Nowie, Kathy Duffendack, Brian Castler, Terri Adesso, Rich Grudzias, Anne Tait, Carol Cummings, Jenell Janes, Augusta Ozdemirer, Janet Moore, Pam & Ken Euerle, Peggy Allen, Beth Eichelman, June Webster, Carolyn Brown, Eleanor Gager, Ken Anderson, Joe Garthwait, the McLeans, the Albrechts (with potatoes donated by Bob Giddings), the Harrises, and Martha Lape.

Additional thanks to Craig Capiello who, through the Cheshire Community Food Bank, donated our green beans and ketchup. Chris Albrecht hosted the servers afterwards with a warm bowl of soup and wonderful fellowship. Our next meal at Columbus House will be on February 29.

With gratitude and best wishes to all,
Jan Garthwait



What We Have Done, Through Outreach, in 2011

As 2011 closes and we look forward to 2012, the Board of Outreach wants to thank the congregation for its support and participation in the work of caring for our brothers and sisters. We have sent food regularly to three area shelters and, despite the big October snowstorm, we exceeded our goal of 1,111 non-perishable food items for Mission:1.

We send meals and clothing every month to New Haven on the Midnight Run. We made generous financial gifts to tsunami relief, to our Malawi Outreach where we also sponsor two girls, and to hunger relief work here and abroad.

We currently have six active KIVA micro-loans to women all over the world and a similar number have been repaid. We have donated backpacks full of school supplies to Cheshire Human Services, baby supplies to the Baby Basket project in Waterbury, Thanksgiving baskets and Easter baskets and Christmas gifts to clients of the Waterbury Department of Families and Youth.

We cook and serve meals at the Columbus House Shelter. We are exploring prison ministry and this year participated in the Angel Tree project to provide Christmas gifts to the children of

inmates. Despite the economy, both the Lenten Food for All project and the spring time Baby Bottle project were supported even more generously than last year. Every year, more of our members (both adults and teenagers) go on mission trips.

The Board of Outreach is grateful for your participation, inspiration and encouragement and looks forward to new challenges in our on-going call to be hands of God in a world in need of God's love and care.

Save the Date: Annual Meeting January 29

The Annual Meeting of the First Congregational Church of Cheshire, United Church of Christ, will be Sunday, January 29, in the Parish Hall.

The meeting will begin with a potluck supper at 5 p.m., followed by the usual business of the Annual Meeting.



Milestones in the life of our church family

**Have you remembered
First Congregational Church
in your estate planning?**

Deaths

Diane Maturo, wife of Bill Maturo,
November 29.