

THE PARISH POST

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A Time for New Wood

By Dave Buchan, Interim Senior Minister

The woods are changing. Hints of red and yellow appear now amid the gray of the distant hillsides in anticipation of spring. Soon the magnolia and the cherry will be in blossom. And the world around us will break into color.

The flowering trees of Cheshire remind me of a story told about the poet Longfellow. When he was well along in years, his hair was as white as new-fallen snow and his cheeks were as red as roses. An ardent admirer asked him how he was able to be so vigorous and to write so beautifully.

Pointing to a blossoming apple tree that stood nearby, he said, "That apple tree is very old, but I never saw prettier blossoms on it than those that are there now. That tree grows a little new wood each year, and I suppose it's out of that new wood that blossoms come. Like the apple tree, I try to grow a little new wood each year."

I think there is a truth for us here, regardless of our age. If we're going to be vital and vigorous, we have to grow new wood, just like Longfellow's apple tree.

We have to keep growing in our lives, finding new interests, trying out new things, keeping our minds active.

Someone once said that it's not hardening of the arteries, but hardening of the attitudes, that gives us the most trouble as the years go by. Beautiful blossoms grow on new wood.

That's true in everyday life, and it's equally true in our spiritual lives. We want to learn new things and to grow into the fullness of Christ. And when that happens, even while cold winds still blow, faith can come to beautiful flower.

April is a time in our lives to grow new wood, to grow in faith. 2 Peter says, "...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ" (3:18).

Church services continue at 9:00 and 11:00 Sunday mornings. Worship God with us, and bring a friend.

In Christ,
Dave Buchan
Interim Senior Minister

Progressive Dinner

The First Congregational Church Progressive Dinner is back by popular demand!

Here's how it works: All the guests for the dinner party meet at one home for appetizers (in this case, Jeff and Sara Buell's home), then the party "progresses" to various houses where the main course and dessert are served.

This year, the dinner is **Saturday, May 3**, starting at 6 p.m. at the Buells'.

There will be signup sheets in the Parlor and Parish Hall. On the sheets, you will have sign up either to host a dinner in your home or to be a guest who brings a part of the meal.

Each host indicates how many guests he or she would like to have for dinner, and plans the meal, deciding what, if anything, needs to be brought by the guests.

There will also be a place on the sheets for those with children, to indicate babysitting needs. In this way, we might be able to match up needs with sitters.

We are also looking for available babysitters for that evening. If you are available or need sitters, the contact person will be Kate Hall. Her email is katehall4@gmail.com

This has always been an evening that not only nourishes the body but also the soul with friends, laughter, and good times. Come join us!

Worship Schedule For April

Parents: Please check the Christian Education news in this issue for changes to the Church School schedule!

Sunday, April 6: Alison McCaffrey preaching. Services at 9 and 11. Communion Sunday; food offerings will be taken. Food of the month: Boxed macaroni and cheese.

Sunday, April 13: Dave Buchan preaching. Services at 9 and 11.

Sunday, April 20: United Church of Christ Conference Minister for the South Central Region, Mike Penn-Strah, preaching. Services at 9 and 11.

Sunday, April 27: Youth Sunday. Services at 9 and 11.

Caring Crafts Meeting

The next meeting of the Caring Crafts Ministry will be Monday, April 28, at 7 p.m. at Donna Mead's home, 15 Conifer Drive, Hamden. If you need directions or have questions, call Donna at 203-248-9576.

This is always a relaxed, quiet time to gather, share a common interest, and help others through our shawls and blankets. Bring your current crafty project and join us. We would love to have you.

Our Outreach at Work: The Children's Home, Cromwell

The Children's Home, in Cromwell, is a Christian treatment center for struggling children and their families, providing residential treatment, special education, group homes, and outpatient therapy services.

The Children's Home works with boys and girls aged 8 to 18 who come from dysfunctional families. Many of the children have been abused and/or neglected. In Cromwell, they are provided with a caring home-like atmosphere, a state certified special education school, and a therapeutic environment in which they receive individual, group, and family treatment.

The Home started in 1900 as a Swedish orphanage tending to 30 children, and has evolved to educating more than 100 students, 63 children living in-house the rest either mainstreamed back into the public school systems graduated to group homes. The Home is funded by State of Connecticut Department of Education and Child and Family Services as well as grants, fund raising and donations from organizations such as our church.

They need volunteers. Some of the activities are:

- Buddy Program – This in-house mentoring program matches volunteers to a young person who resides at the Home. Minimum commitment is for one hour per week for the duration of the child's stay (average stay 10-18 months).

- Tutoring – Matches volunteers to students who need academic support: homework, reading, time management, and developing good study skills. A one hour per week commitment is expected.

- The Learning Center – Volunteers are needed to help in classrooms during the school day (8:30 a.m. to 2:20 p.m.) or with special skills in the computer lab, gym, art room, science lab, or greenhouse. There are many needs.

- Special events – Volunteers who have limited time may be available to help at different fund raisers, picking up donations, or securing prizes. For instance, on May 5, an 18 hole golf tournament fund raiser will be held at the Farms Country Club with a lobster bake. Volunteers are needed to help coordinate and run the event.

The First Congregational Church has provided a cash donation in the past, but with our limited resources this year, the committee plans to offer many opportunities for our congregation to outreach individually with varying amounts of time commitments and physical abilities needed.

We each have unique talents and gifts, but the greatest of these is our ability to love our neighbors. The Board of Outreach challenges our members and friends of the First Congregational Church to pick one of the multiple organizations

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that we support and will educate you on within this year.

Make a difference in someone's life by picking an activity, offering your services, volunteering, or donating items from their wish list. This can be done as an individual, group or as a family. Please check the Outreach bulletin board in the church parlor for details about volunteering at The Children's Home or elsewhere.

The Board of Outreach has approved a \$200 donation to The Children's Home to purchase special netting to keep the greenhouse from overheating. The greenhouse has been not used in many years, but the school is especially interested in starting it up again. The science teacher will oversee the greenhouse and use it for their science curriculum, whereby the children will have an opportunity to grow flowers and vegetables as well as understand the growing process. In addition, we will need volunteers to help clean up the greenhouse and, of course, supplies are also needed: bags of potting soil, containers and seeds.

Other activities that the Board of Outreach would like to schedule for this year include: becoming a pen pal and writing to a student, scheduling a game night (such as bingo, teaching knitting, sewing, crafts, fishing, computer games, etc., scheduling a spa night for nails and hair makeovers, making cookies or fudge with the children as a group project, scrapbooking, computer training, and more.

Spring Rummage Sale

The spring rummage sale will be held April 24 from 1 to 6:30 p.m. and April 25 from 9 to 11 a.m. in the Parish Hall.

If you can give an hour or two of your time to help with set-up for the sale on April 21, 22, or 23, come to the Parish Hall between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. to find out what to do. Or you may come April 21 or 22 between 7 and 9 p.m. and help.

Helpers are also needed to pack up leftovers at 11:00 a.m. on Friday morning, April 25.

Donations of clothing, household items, toys, games, books, and jewelry may be placed on the stage from April 20 through noon on April 23. No large pieces of furniture, please! There is no long-term storage so please abide by these dates.

This will be the last Rummage Sale held here at our church unless someone volunteers to be the "point person." This person coordinates the spring and fall sales (gets the dates on the church calendar, contacts the publicity person, answers questions during set-up and sale, and recruits volunteers to set up and work at the sale).

Rummage sales not only allow you to clean out your closets; they also provide clothing and household items for women's shelters (Chrysalis, Safe Haven, and Columbus House) and Covenant to Care, clothing for the Branford and Guilford thrift shops and Act 4 in Watertown, and sports equipment to the Cromwell Children's Home.

Christian Education in April



Believers: You've Got Mail!

Bible Journeys, for Grades 2 to 6, will learn about the Apostle Paul and the letters he wrote to the churches. These workshops will prepare the children for leading the Children's Day Worship Service on Sunday, May 18.

Please note that the schedule for April/May will be a little different than usual. On April 6, the 9 and 11 o'clock Church School will see a movie in Room 11. Please note that the 11 o'clock students will have Church School that day.

From April 13 through May 4, the 9 and 11 o'clock church school will rotate through workshop classes. Please note that on May 4, the 11 o'clock students will have church school.

Looking to next month, on May 11 students at both hours will practice for Children's Sunday. On Saturday, May 17, there will be a Children's Sunday rehearsal for all children: 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. for the

9:00 Church School, and 11:00 to noon for the 11:00 Church School. Any questions, please call the church office.

Malawi Mission Project Praise

The children in grades 2-6 redeemed lots of bottles and cans and raised \$142.96, plus an additional donation of \$100 from a generous classroom shepherd for a total of \$242.96. Jimmy Parys, a 7th grader, raised an additional \$80. This money will go to the Malawi Project to help buy mosquito nets for children and help with the lunch program at the Malawi school.

Children also wrote letters to children in Malawi which will be sent to the principal of a school that Amy Webb is acquainted with in Malawi.

At 9:00, the second and third grade class raised the most money and will receive certificates for a gift at the Bible Bucks Store. At 11:00, the fourth graders raised the most money at their hour and will receive similar certificates. Thank you to all the children for their efforts to help children in Malawi.

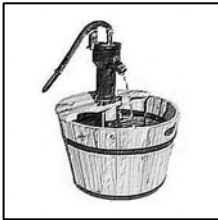
Clean Water for Africa

The 2008 Confirmation Class Mission Project is "Clean Water for Africa." It will be held on the church green on Saturday, April 26, from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Donations will help purchase water pumps for villages in Africa.

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The twelve confirmands will be out on the green encouraging everyone in the Cheshire community to make contributions to provide clean water for villages in Africa. Everyone who makes a contribution, large or small, will receive a water bottle. Every bit of the money raised will go to provide clean water.



We've been working really hard planning and preparing for this event. Would you be willing to help us spread the word?

Would you be willing to tell your friends and neighbors in Cheshire what we are doing and invite them to drop by and make a donation? Clean water saves many lives – especially the lives of children. Thanks for helping us spread the word!

Bible Journeys on the Web

Check out the church web site for Bible Journeys Herald and Parent Connection Newsletters. You will find them under Christian Education.



Covenant to Care

Many thanks to Betsy Adams, Lisa Canas, and Gary and Carol Warner for their gifts of a crib, assorted kitchen items and bedding as well as a guitar for a 16 year old, who awaits another move in foster care. Thanks as well to Lisa Canas for a double stroller and storage unit and to Diane Weller for a beautiful set of dishes.

What's Up With Youth

Youth Sunday, April 27, is fast approaching. This energetic service, a perennial favorite in the parish calendar, is led by the youth of our church and is a testament to the living faith of our young people. Youth Sunday is not primarily a Youth Group event, although many who come to Youth Group will play a part. Instead, it is an event in which as many of our young people as possible step forward and participate. So, if you are reading this and are in Grades 7-12, you really should take the initiative and join us!

We will meet on the first three Sunday evenings in April from 5 to 7 p.m. with dinner provided. Please commit to being present at all three preparation meetings. We promise to make each meeting fun and uplifting.

Thanks to Joellyn Jason, Todd Skrzyniarz and Kevin and Beth Ross for their (somewhat bleary-eyed) help in making the High School Lock-in such a success. Thanks to our generous congregation as well for their support of our bake sale. We hope you enjoyed the delicious cakes, fresh bread and cookies! Middle School Yutes will have their own Lock-in on April 4.

Our Praise Band is really starting to sound professional! Rehearsals are from 4 to 5 p.m. Sundays, and are open to all singers and musicians. Come make a joyful noise!

Remember to check the web site, www.yutes.org, for complete information and last minute updates.

Meet Our New Members

By now you may have gotten to know the five new members who joined the church family late in 2007. The Membership Committee would like to share a little more about each member with you. We hope you will take a moment to introduce yourselves to them.

George Albanese, Jr. relocated back to Cheshire three years ago and became a member after having grown up in this church. George has two daughters, Heather, age 21 and Alyssa, age 19. George is employed by Component Engineers in Wallingford. His hobbies include fly and salt water fishing.

Carol Cummings moved from Westbrook to Cheshire 3 years ago with her husband, Ray. Together, Carol and Ray have five grown children: Sandy, Michael, Kevin, Laurel and Daniel. In their retirement they enjoy hiking, sailing on Long Island Sound and skiing. Carol participates in the Stephen Ministry program.

Abby and Kent Hurlburt have lived in Cheshire for seven years and have two children, Jack, age 4 and Elise, who is almost 3. Abby works for Wallingford Public Schools and Kent works for Glastonbury Public Schools. They enjoy gardening, carpentry, drawing, teaching, mountain biking and spending time with family. Abby and Kent came to join the church to provide a Christian model for their family and to give thanks to God.

Lucinda Orsini has lived in Cheshire for one year after relocating from

Massachusetts with her husband, Occhio, and their two daughters, Avery, age 5, and Julia, 3. Lucinda works for Bristol Myers Squibb in Wallingford. She enjoys hiking, sailing and biking. Lucinda joined the church so she could reconnect with her personal faith. She also was ready to find a place to begin the faith connection process for her children.

If you know people considering church membership, please ask them to contact the church office for details.



Spring Cleanup Day

The Board of Trustees have scheduled the annual church grounds Spring Cleanup Day for Saturday, April 26.

We need to pick up the tree debris (from the winter storms) from around the meeting house, connector, parish hall, the parsonage, the Whiting House and the church green. We also plan on mulching around the meeting house, the connector and the parish hall.

How can you help? By joining us and donating your time and energy. We will need rakes, shovels, tarps, wheelbarrows, barrels, and a couple of chain saws. We will begin at 9 am and plan on being done by noon. We look forward to seeing you!

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

Deacons Approve Parish Care Coordinator

The Board of Deacons has been busy recently.

We unanimously approved the Parish Care Coordinator job description as a volunteer position. We also unanimously approved **Donna Mead** to serve as the volunteer Parish Care Coordinator for an undetermined period of time. This was done with the concurrence of the Parish Care Committee. Appropriate documentation has been forwarded to the Chairman of the Personnel Board for the appropriate action. This was presented to the Executive Board on March 4.

Here's the job description. Anyone with questions or comments should contact Ford Cole, Senior Deacon, at 271-9041 or fcole7619@cox.net:

Purpose of Position: Serve as liaison between the ministers and the Parish Care Committee, relaying care needs from the ministers to the Parish Care Committee as well as communicating to the clergy a summary of actions taken by the Parish Care Committee. Maintain detailed records of actions taken by the Parish Care Committee.

Qualifications: Excellent organizational and record keeping skills with a demonstrated ability to work with congregational members, leaders, ministers, and staff. Some computer proficiency in church record keeping. Communication skills with the ability to listen compassionately. A positive, caring,

Christian attitude. Ability to maintain absolute confidentiality.

Key Result Areas: Parish Care needs are met in a timely, efficient, Christian manner. Accurate records are maintained of Parish Care efforts.

Accountable to: This volunteer position meets with the ministry staff and receives input from the Chair of the Parish Care Committee. As a volunteer, there is no need for a formal annual performance review, however, a biannual evaluation with the Associate Minister(s) and the Chairman of the Parish Care Committee is recommended to provide feedback, personal growth, and to document strengths and weaknesses of the volunteer.

Overview: Coordinate the ongoing work of the various pastoral care ministries and help identify new resource people to meet needs as they arise. Maintain detailed records that monitor all Parish Care efforts. Communicate needs and requests from those in need to those who can be of assistance. It is anticipated that this will be a 10-12 hour volunteer position.

Key Duties and Responsibilities: Attend the pastoral care meetings of the ministry staff to identify individuals with care needs. Communicate newly identified care needs to the Parish Care Committee in a timely fashion. Record and maintain the church records for ministers and

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ministries, e.g., prayer pagers, acute care and long-term care records, lists of visitations, bereavement, meals, Stephen Ministry, Caring Christians, cards. Attend monthly Parish Care meetings and communicate new care needs. Assist in identifying resource people to meet the needs of new ministries.

Also, manage the Prayer Payer program. Maintain proper confidentiality and appropriate boundaries throughout the caring ministry network of the church. Provide a written monthly report to share with staff, Board of Deacons, and Parish Care Committee summarizing activities of Parish Care activities including weekly number of personal hours spent on the job.

The Deacons also held our annual retreat on February 16, and welcomed new Deacons Matt Childs, Joyce Mulholland, Diane Visconti, and Mark Dickinson. In addition, we:

- Welcomed and hosted a luncheon for the UCC's Connecticut Conference Minister, Davida Foy Crabtree, on Sunday, March 9.
- Approved \$1,000 from our budget for the scheduled repair and updating of the Video-Audio system in the sanctuary.
- Approved the Church Profile, which was submitted to the Deacons by the Senior Minister Search Committee, and forwarded it to the Executive Board.
- Approved the following members to serve on the Pastoral Relations Com-

mittee: Ramin Hakim, Chair (term expires December 2008), Carol Tucker (thru December '08), Nancy Brunetti (thru Dec. '09), Howard Murphy (thru Dec. '09), Lisa Canas (thru Dec. '10), and Mark Hall (thru Dec. '10).

We were unanimously thankful to **Peggy Allen**, who agreed to serve as temporary Associate Minister during Alison McCaffrey's sabbatical this summer.



Have You Donated Items To the Church Parsonage?

The parsonage is currently undergoing some renovations and we need to get the building ready for its future use.

Several people had donated some items, including beds and mattresses, a sofa, televisions, and tables and lamps. The Board of Trustees offer you the opportunity to reclaim these donated items, if you wish. To do so, phone the church office at 272-5323 no later than Friday, May 9.

Those items not 'reclaimed' and removed by then will be offered to the church's Relay For Life team for their upcoming tag sale. Anything left of useful value will be offered to Goodwill.

Hospitalized?

If you or family members are in the hospital, please make sure to tell First Congregational Church. Due to privacy laws, we can no longer obtain this information from the hospital.

Update from the Senior Minister Search Committee

We know it seems like a long time since we started – almost a year. However, with the support of members, boards, our ministers, and First Congregational staff, as well as the guidance of our UCC regional minister, Mike Penn-Strah, we have made great strides toward our goal.

Focus Groups: Last spring and summer, we listened as many focus groups discussed what qualities we seek in our next Senior Minister and where our church is heading.

Survey: Our churchwide survey in September had wide participation. Your answers to the questions posed provided us with meaningful information.

Church Profile: Equipped with your input through the survey, and helped by the support of our church family, we worked our way through 38 questions. These asked us to take a thorough look at our church: where we as a church come from, where we are at the moment, and where we are headed in the future.

The profile was completed in recent weeks and has been reviewed by our ministers and by Mike Penn-Strah. It then was approved by the Deacons and by the Executive Board, and is now ready to go.

The completion of this profile is one of the crucial steps on our way toward calling a new Senior Minister. It will provide potential candidates with an accurate description of our church. (Interested members can find a copy of the profile in the church office.) You will find the

answer to question No. 39, Statement on Leadership in Ministry, on our bulletin board.

Job Posting: “Vibrant congregation in historic church seeks inspirational SrP (Senior Minister) to help us discern a renewed vision and challenge us to more fully respond to God’s call.” That job posting appeared starting March 10 on the UCC web site, and we expect to receive our first profiles of interested candidates soon.

We continue in our quest to understand the inner workings of our church and to become ready for candidates’ questions. We also have begun the process of learning how to read the incoming profiles. You will hear more about this in coming months.

Continued Dialogue: Meanwhile, we count on your continued support and input to help us further toward finding the very best settled Senior Minister for our church. Thank you for your continuing support. It means the world to us.



Choir Tour in Europe

From April 10 to 19, the Greater Middletown Chorale, under the direction of Joseph D'Eugenio, and members of our Senior Choir, will embark on their first Eastern European concert tour. They will sing concerts in Vienna, Salzburg, and Prague. If you would like to wish ‘Bon voyage’ to our members, come to the church parking lot on April 10 at 10 a.m.

Notes from the Executive Board

The Executive Board meets on the first Tuesday of every month to, as our bylaws put it, “coordinate, promote and evaluate the program and welfare of the church.” Membership consists of elected officers; representatives from church boards and committees; at-large members representing church-wide groups; and church ministers. At the March meeting, these topics were discussed:

The Caring Communities Project continues, with mapping nearly completed. The next step will be to determine and assign a responsible person to each Caring Community. Please contact the Rev. Alison McCaffrey if you have ideas, or would like to help her with the project.

Executive Board review of the revisions to our church’s bylaws is nearing completion, with the final meeting scheduled for early April. Current bylaws require two congregational meetings to change them; one to review the proposed changes and a separate meeting to vote on them.

We are tentatively planning on holding the first meeting on Sunday, May 4 and the second on Sunday, June 8, both after the 11:00 service. Copies of the revisions will be made available prior to the first congregational meeting.

Your thoughts and ideas to improve our church are always welcomed by the Executive Board. You may contact

church President Bob Mead or any member of the Board – Christine Albrecht, Susan Bishop, the Rev. Dave Buchan, Lisa Canas, Ford Cole, Anthony DePaolo, Kathy Duffendack, Mark Hall, David Hostage, Rich Kruczek, Addie Marx, the Rev. Alison McCaffrey, Bob Porter, Lynn Ryan or Walt Ryan.



Lectionary Readings for April

Sunday, April 6: Acts 2: 14, 36-41; Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1: 17-23; Luke 24: 13-35.

Sunday, April 13: Acts 2: 42-47; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2: 19-25; John 10: 1-10.

Sunday, April 20: Acts 7: 55-60; Psalm 31: 1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2: 2-10; John 14: 1-14

Sunday, April 27: Acts 17: 22-31; Psalm 66: 8-20; 1 Peter 3: 13-22; John 14: 15-21.



Milestones In the Life of our Church Family

Deaths

Gilbert Lassen – February 24, 2008
Mary Hartman – February 28, 2008
Robert Behler – March 2, 2008
Robert Lowell – March 7, 2008

SPECIAL PARISH POST INSERT



Mark your calendars! This year, Relay for Life will be held on June 6 and June 7, and we are looking for people who would like to be on our team.

Again this year, members of your church family will take part in one of the largest relays' in New England. Last year Team SteepleChase (that's us) was Number 7. Each member of the team is doing individual fundraising as well as the team will be doing the following to raise money:

- A Tea and Chocolate Party is planned for April 19. See Betsy Adams for tickets (271-1872).
- A Tag Sale is planned for Saturday, May 31 beginning at 8 a.m. in front of the parsonage.
- Our Book Sale will continue in the Parish Hall. Please visit us weekly, as our collection changes frequently.

During the Relay, a representative from our team will always be out on the track walking while other members camp out along the track enjoying entertainment, activities and camaraderie. You are invited to come and visit any time during the Relay.

You are also invited to our Sunrise Service on Saturday morning, June 7. We ask you to pray for and with us. On April 6 we will host coffee hour, so we can answer any questions. You may also contact Carol Ploch (272-5959), Rich Grudzias (272-2483) or Betsy Adams (271-1872) at any time.

Watch for further information in the Bulletin and the Parish Post.

The Gospel of Mark

This is the oldest of our four gospels and also the shortest. Come to a Bible study focusing on this gospel with Peggy Allen on Thursday evenings starting May 29th and ending July 10th (no meeting on July 3). Time and place will be announced. Bring your Bible and an inquiring mind. A sign up sheet is available at the table near the offices.