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No. 1

Their Sacred Work Is Ours as Well

By Jeff Braun, Senior Minister

On Thursday, January 6, Confirmation begins. I am excited for this journey with our church's young people, as are the resource adults with whom I'll be working.

As we know, Confirmation is designed for high-school-aged teens who seek to engage their faith, to come to know God more deeply, and to take personal ownership of the vow to grow in Christian understanding and practice (a vow which their parents took for them at their baptisms). This is the sacred work that our Confirmation students will pursue from January to June.

And yet, this work is not limited to the teens enrolled in the course. Nor can this work be confined to, or completed in, a six-month period, which is roughly how long the course lasts. Because engaging one's faith, coming to know God more deeply, and taking personal ownership of the vow to grow in Christian understanding and practice is every Christian's lifelong work.

We can never believe too deeply, can never walk with Christ too closely, can

never put our faith into action too often, can never tend to every worldly need, can never right every wrong, can never forgive every debt. As close as we might get to faith's fulfillment, Christ draws us still farther. There is always new ground to cover, new lessons to learn, new insights to employ, new community to build.

Fresh from December's fullness, fresh from our Christmas celebrations, and refreshed by the gift of Jesus in our lives, January draws us over into a new year, a new chance, a new cycle in which to put all that we've received... into action.

As our newest class of Confirmands begin to do just that, not only can we support them as their congregational family, we can accompany them, in the Spirit, knowing that their sacred work is ours, as well.

Please join me in blessing our Confirmands as they travel. And my thanks to you for being a blessing to them as they do.

God's Peace,

Jeff

Please Welcome Our New Director of Christian Ed

At a church meeting on Sunday, December 12, Caroll Cyr was called to be our church's new Director of Christian Education. She starts work this month.

Caroll, who lives in Berlin, has been the Director of Christian Education at her home Congregational Church in Berlin, and also has worked part-time as the secretary in the Plantsville Congregational Church.

Also at the church meeting were Caroll's husband, son, and daughter. Please join in giving Caroll a warm welcome as she joins our church family!



Thanks for a Wonderful Fair!

We thought the 2009 Christmas Fair was the best ever, but 2010 surpassed that one! It was a wonderful day of fellowship, good food, and good buys! New friendships were made and old ones renewed. Little ones through seniors enjoyed themselves in beautifully decorated areas of the church and some people got their Christmas shopping done.

The cookie walk was so awesome (what wonderful bakers we have!) that we ran out of cookies around noon. Jackie Cole keeps adding another delicious sandwich to the lunch menu every year, and the pulled pork was so popular this time that we ran out of those around noon as well.

January Worship Schedule

Sunday, January 2: Single worship service at 10:00. Jeff Braun preaching. Communion will be served. Food offerings will be received; the food of the month is breakfast cereal.

Sunday, January 9: Services at 9:00 and 11:00. Jeff Braun preaching.

Sunday, January 16: Services at 9:00 and 11:00. Outreach Sunday; services to be led by the Board of Outreach.

Sunday, January 23: Services at 9:00 and 11:00. Jeff Braun preaching.

Sunday, January 30: Services at 9:00 and 11:00. Alison McCaffrey preaching.

Our imaginative and creative group of basket makers were out in force this year as the wonderful variety of 50 different baskets showed. The parlor was the place to be Saturday afternoon as folks tried to get in the high bid on their favorite basket before the auction closed.

In a visit to the Children's Corner, one could see children sitting on Santa's lap telling him their secret wishes and posing for a picture. At one table children were creating gingerbread houses and at another a craft. Rita Hughes, Cheshire's storyteller, kept the children spellbound with her stories in the story room.

Final figures are not available as of this writing but gross income was at least \$1,500 higher than last year's. The

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committee voted earlier in the year to give 25 percent of the proceeds to the capital maintenance and repair fund, 25 percent to Outreach, \$500 to the YUTES who worked in the Children's area, and keep the remaining amount to use for a project that needs to be funded.

There are so many people to thank for this great event: the coordinators of each area, our greeters, the lunch crew who made it and served it, the setup and cleanup people, those who baked cookies and other goodies, our artists and crafters who donated items, and everyone who volunteered to help – you were all very important to this successful event. And, of course, our thanks to everyone who came out to eat and shop!

Martha Lape



Thanks for 'Pew Pals'

Thank you to all who have brought in a small stuffed animal for our 'Pew Pals,' the furry little creatures found at the end of each pew in the Sanctuary.

Your donations keep this unique ministry of joy and companionship in the pews going. Donations may be placed in the basket outside Alison McCaffrey's office.

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

New Bible Survey Offered

A newly designed Bible Survey, written and led by the Rev. John Afman, will be offered to new and longtime members for eight sessions on Thursday mornings and Monday evenings; choose which session is most convenient for you. The daytime group will begin January 6, from 10 a.m. to noon, and continue every other week through Lent, ending April 14. The evening group will begin Monday, January 10, from 7 to 9 p.m. and continue every other week through Lent, ending April 18 in Holy Week.

The survey will explore material John has written on both the Old and New Testaments.

Recent new members have received their binders, and more are available in the church office or between services from John on Sundays in the Fellowship Hall.

The binder includes three sections: The Content of the Bible, The Bible Answers Life's Questions, and Biblical Characters Tell Their Stories. Selected Scriptures will be read, and questions from our own faith journeys will be raised with Biblical insights and characters helping us to find answers.

John is a retired minister, a member of our church, and a teacher of many Bible studies during the last 10 years. He is glad to answer questions at church or home (203-235-6294). A sign-up sheet for the course is in the church office and at Coffee Hours on Sunday.

Adult Mission Trip

We're Going to Appalachia!

Our Adult Mission Team is headed to Guyan Valley, Benton, West Virginia, to take part in the Appalachia Service Project. The dates are March 27 to April 2, including travel days. This year, 24 adults



can take part in bringing hope to people who are among the poorest of the poor in America. We will

travel by van from the church to Benton, and spend the week working on a variety of projects.

Here is a link to the Appalachia Service Project video:
http://asphome.org/discover/ASP_video

With thanks to the Outreach Board for their financial support, and with a variety of fundraising effort, the cost will be less than \$300 per person. It's not too early to make your plans.

Please indicate your interest now by signing up on the bulletin board outside Alison McCaffrey's office. Please pass this information along to family members, friends, and colleagues. More detailed information will follow. Please see Alison with any questions.

Parish Care 2011

Greetings for 2011. In our Parish Care, there are now three coordinators, any of whom you may approach with requests, concerns, and questions. We are learning the roles ourselves!

The leaders are:

Jan Cowles - jbcowles@sbcglobal.net
(203) 272-8441

Pam Eurele - kleuerle@sbcglobal.net
(203) 272-9345

Jane Montgomery -
jtmontgomery37@cox.net (203) 272-1589

Our role is to work with the congregation as well as the ministers and staff to ensure that needs and requests from those in need are communicated and supported. The ministries currently in operation are:

Baptism/Infants: Ken and Pam Euerle.
Bereavement: Jan Garthwait. Cards and Telephone: Martha Lape. Caring Crafts: Phyllis Balser and Cindy Wright. Chores: John Bates. Meals: Jackie Cole, Marianne Eagleson, and Bobbie Porter. Stephen Ministry: Sue Chatfield. Date Entries: Marianne Eagleson.

Please feel free to approach us with ideas you may see helpful for our church family. We encourage new vision, and will support new leaders in their areas of interest. We are honored and privileged to be part of this committee of 'inreach.'

Jan, Jane, and Pam

Let's Put God to the Test

I am writing this after experiencing our amazing Christmas Fair, an event that was a time of great warmth, love, outreach, and fellowship for everyone who attended, or was part of it in any way.

And I remember all of the other numerous and wonderful things that our church has done for members of our congregation, the community, and the church beyond. The list is incredible, and it goes on and on ... too many to list here.

But then I must ask this question: Why, year after year, do we struggle to meet a bare-bones budget that prevents us from doing even more? Why is our pledging history so much less than what we need? Yes, there are families and individuals who give and give. But I do not believe that we, as a whole church family, are being good stewards for our Lord. I wonder how God feels about this congregation's stewardship? How do you feel?

I understand that a lot of our members support many, if not all, of the programs and missions of this church. And I am also well aware that many of us are on fixed and/or limited incomes. And the economy is not good. But if our church cannot meet our operating budget, we might have to, at some time in the future, close our doors, and none of these programs will be realized. That is NOT the plan God has for us. I truly believe that God has a wonderful plan for this church... if we are willing to listen, hear, and respond.

So, what are we to do? Well, I believe that we need to take an extraordinary step in faith. We need to test God!

Blasphemy? No! It's Biblical. Please go to the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, chapter 3, where God literally invites us to put him to the test... "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse... and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing... then all nations will call you blessed." Overflowing blessing! Can we imagine?

Do we believe, or just mouth the words? I trust that we believe!

Do you?

Ford Cole, President



Women's Bible Study

The Wednesday morning Women's Bible Study winter session begins on January 5 at 10 a.m. in the parlor.

Our topic will be Ezra and Nehemiah, based on Max Lucado's study guide. The cost of the book is \$7.

Please join us for an hour of great fellowship and study. We are a relaxed, laid-back group of women. If you have questions, please contact Audrey Finkenstadt at 203-272-9438.



Columbus House Servers: The Honor Roll

First Congregational Church has begun our 11th year of serving meals at Columbus House, the homeless shelter in New Haven. We commit to providing a meal there whenever there is a fifth Wednesday in the month. It can be estimated that in these past 10 years, we have served well over 3,000 meals!

Part of the joy of this mission is that so many from our church have actively participated. To name them all may be impossible, but here is an attempt: Betsy Adams, Nora Adams, Terri Adesso, Shirley Albanese, Chris and Ed Albrecht, Peggy Allen, Ken Anderson, Will Arpaia, Diane Barnes, Karen Basset, Gretchen Bates, Angela Baumann, Marianne Beckman, Cae Bengston, Joy Biggart, Charleen Black, Sally Blakely, Tracy Bloschichak, Debra Bond, Dolores Bozzuto, Abby Bray, Lisa Brodbar, Carolyn Brown, and Nancy Brunetti.

Also, Amanda Canas, Lisa Canas, Pam Cappiello, Kathy Carboni, Becky Cavazuti, Sue Chatfield, Tracey Colantonio, Jan, Chris, Paige, and Emily Cowles, Elaine Daly, Debbie DeLouise, Evan Dewey, Patti Dickinson, Jessica Dinklocker, Ginny Donovan, Marilyn Donovan, Kathy Duffendack, Kerrie Dunne, Marianne and Bill Eagleson, Dorothy Easterbrooks, Beth Eichelman, Bev Euerle, Pam and Ken Euerle, and Sarah Esty.

Also, Millie Farrell, Jen France, Chris Fitzmaurice, Eleanor Gager, Joe and Kelly Garthwait, Anne Giddings, Jill Gibbs,

Karolyn Glatt, Marilyn Gordon, Cory Grace, Lois Grace, Sharon Graver, Karen Gravino, Diane Griffin, Stacey Groshart, Barb Grudzias, Lynn Hackett, Susan Hale, Karen Havlicek, Joy Hostage, Regan Huntley, Gordon Hurlbert, Abby Hurlburt, Penny Isom, Janet Jacaruso, Jenell Janes, Deborah Kelleher, and Grace Knipe.

Also, Martha Lape, Deb Lasher, Suzanne Lawson, Kathy Letendre, Nancy Linton, Becki Louys, Susan Lubke, Ruth MacDonald, Sue Mancinelli, Lori and Bill Mann, Sandy Marenholtz, Sue and Dick Mattson, Donna Mead, Linda Milton, Toni Moldenhauer, Janet Moore, Sue Morse, Betsy Mulé, Heather Musante, Emma Norback, Glenn Nowie, Carolyn Olander, Lauren Overlock, Judy Ozdemirer, Augusta Ozdemirer, Susan, Ted and Megan Pappas, Sharon Perry, Melanie and Larry Pivrotto, and Carol Ploch.

Also, Beth Ross, Lindsay Reihl, Hope Reinhard, Jane Richards, Kess Scharft, Patty and Frank Scinto, Joanna, Ken and Emily Sgorbati, Andy Shoop, Debra Sinning, Lisa Skelly, Todd Skrzyniarz, the Stepping Stones and the CIA's, Jennifer Smaldone, Tracy Strollo, Kirsten Sullivan, Tina Sullivan, Perry and Ken Stevens, Anne Tait, Mary Ellen Thompson, Christy Tomko, Carol Tucker, Diane Visconti, Renee Walendziak, Susan Walker, Jessie Waszmer, Laura Whinfield, Marge Williams, Kate and Al Worden, Ellen and Jeffrey Wright, Sally Ziegler, and

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Emily Ziolkowski. That's more than 150 people who have helped make this work!

In this lengthy list are some who have left our number in body; they will all always be with us in spirit.

Our work at Columbus House began with a simple suggestion at a Board of Outreach meeting, when the chair challenged us to look around and find something simple that we could do. A small article in the Columbus House newsletter asked for help for meals on a regular basis. The fifth Wednesdays were available, and I decided that might be something I could handle. Little did I know that it would become what it is today, and bring so many people together.

So thanks to you all, and to anyone that I might have missed. I challenge each of you to look around for something small that you can handle – imagine the possibilities! March 30 is our first serving date in 2011 ... watch the parlor for the tins!

Jan Garthwait



January '7 @ 7' Dinners

It's time again for our 7 @ 7 Fellowship Dinners. Imagine gathering with a small group in the welcome of a church member's home and sharing a wonderful meal with warm fellowship. It's easy: all you have to do is sign up to take part in your Church Life Community dinner, each taking place in mid-January. If you've taken part before, please come again! God

calls us to be a church community in the richest sense of the word. And to do that, we need to get to know each other. The better we know one another, the better we can be the church God calls us to be.

What does '7 @ 7' mean? The first 7 refers to the small nature of the group that gathers. The idea is that the group is sized to allow for folks to get to know one another. And the odd number means that everyone is invited: singles, divorced or widowed, as well as couples. The second 7 refers to the suggested approximate time of the meal, though some past hosts have whimsically invited their group to come at 6:37 or 7:17 p.m.

If you are not yet sure which Church Life Community you live in, you can look at the map in the Parish Hall or you can ask Alison McCaffrey. You can sign up by calling the church office or on the sign up board outside of Alison's office.



Milestones in the life of our church family

Baptisms:

Maryn Cassidy Bowman, daughter of Peter and Melissa Bowman, was baptized on December 19; Melissa Bowman was baptized on November 21.

Deaths:

Carmen Pivrotto, mother of Larry Pivrotto, on December 2.

Meet Our Newest Members

Here's a list of the newest members of First Congregational Church. Get to know them! Introduce yourself, and find out more about those who have chosen to join us on our faith journey. They are:

Richard Abbate of Cheshire. Richard is a Captain in the Air Force Auxiliary, a Transport Mission Pilot. He's also a former Registrar of Voters in Cheshire.

Philip and Lilja Bradford of Cheshire. He's a former technician with AT&T; she's a retired probate clerk.

Peter and Melissa Bowman of Plantsville. He's an attorney with Esty & Buckmir; she's a pediatric oncology nurse.

Jay and Kelly DeChello. Jay is a projects engineer for Amano, and Kelly is an office manager for Therapeia Lymphedema.

Hannelore ("Lorie") Dunne of Wallingford, a retired elementary school teacher.

Bill and Millie Farrell of Cheshire. He's a veterinarian; she's a retired teacher.

David and Sunshine Fione of Cheshire. David is a domestic engineer, and Sunshine is a package engineer for Unilever.

Chris and Diane Lamb of Southington. Chris is an engineer for Projects, Inc., and Diane is the office manager for Sav-Mor Cooling and Heating.

Gary and Barbara Logsdon of Wolcott. He's a retired electrical engineer, and she is a retired administrative assistant.

Lauren Minichino-Fisher of Wallingford, a location manager.

Adam and Meredith Napolitano of Cheshire. He's a vice president of Triad Tech Partners, and she is a music teacher in the West Hartford public schools.

Doreen Paul of Wallingford, an office manager for Vilece Computers.

Megan Perez of Cheshire, a foreign language teacher at Chase Collegiate School.

Jeanne Stanton of Meriden, a licensed practical nurse at the Hospital of Central Connecticut.

Sylvia VanHeerden of Wallingford, a registered nurse with The Connecticut Hospice.

A warm welcome to all!

Hospitalized?

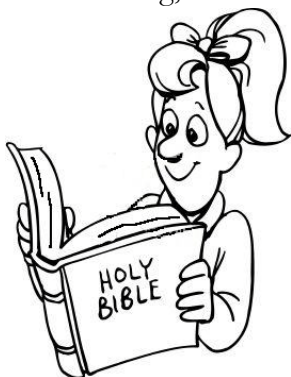
If you, a family member, or a member or friend of the congregation is in the hospital, please notify the church office at 203-272-5323.

Federal law prohibits hospitals and nursing homes from giving us this information.

Confirmation Class Begins in January

Mark your calendars! Open to all high school students, Confirmation is an opportunity to build upon your faith as preparation for joining the church.

This group is not about “learning it all.” It’s not about mastering our faith. It’s not about answering every question. It’s about engagement. It’s about conversation. It’s about sharing, and it’s about the power of



building something that is larger than any one person. Beginning January 6, our group will:

- Dive into the Bible, and discover how it

really does relate to our lives.

- Talk frankly about God, both what we believe and what we wrestle with.
- Examine who Jesus was and is, and discuss how his teachings both call and empower us, both encourage and bless us.
- Explore the rich traditions, histories, and structure of Christianity, our denomination, and our congregation.
- Ask the questions every Christian asks, such as: “What does it mean to be Christian in this day and age?” and “How can I put my faith into action, wherever I am?”

Led by Senior Minister Jeff Braun, and supported by faith guides, the classes will run from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. and will culminate with Confirmation on Pentecost Sunday in June. In addition to the weekly meetings, Confirmands will go on field trips and a retreat to Silver Lake in early May.

This year’s Confirmation program promises to be powerful, faith-filled... and fun! This is, in part, because of what we will study. But it is, equally, because of what each Confirmand will bring to our shared journey: their questions and perspectives, their doubts and joys, their sparking spirits and God-given gifts. Contact the church office, 203-272-5323, or office@cheshirecongregational.org as soon as possible.

Lectionary for January

Sunday, January 2: Jeremiah 31: 7-14; Psalm 147: 12-20; Ephesians 1: 3-14; John 1: 1-18.

Sunday, January 9: Isaiah 42: 1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10: 34-43; Matthew 3: 13-17.

Sunday, January 16: Isaiah 49: 1-7; Psalm 40: 1-11; 1 Corinthians 1: 1-9; John 1: 29-42.

Sunday, January 23: Isaiah 9: 1-4; Psalm 27: 1-9; 1 Corinthians 1: 10-18; Matthew 4: 12-23.

Sunday, January 30: Micah 6: 1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31; Matthew 5: 1-12.

Reaching Out to Our Neighbors

We reached out to the Chrysalis Shelter for Abused Women this past month, taking them the diapers, formula and baby wipes that we purchased with the funds received through the baby bottle project. In addition, we delivered 118 boxes of cereal to the FISH food pantry in New Haven. Both organizations were grateful for the donations, which they said were very much needed. The Board of Outreach also decided to donate the funds remaining from last year's Food for All offering, which has been used to help support the Midnight Run this year, to FISH.

Outreach Sunday: The Board of Outreach is working with Alison McCaffrey and Jeff Braun to plan our first Outreach Sunday on January 16. In worship, we will celebrate the ways we have answered Jesus' call to care for our neighbors, to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, to reach out to those in need.

In between the services, the Board of Outreach will provide an opportunity for our members to hear from those who are participating in some of our outreach opportunities and also to hear from some organizations that we are considering working with more closely. Come hear from the Midnight Runners, from our mission trip participants, from Patti who coordinates our baby clothes ministry, from our Malawi ministry team, from some of the recipients of our Salt and Light grants.

The Board of Outreach is always looking for additional ways that this congregation can use its gifts and answer its call to care. We want the congregation to hear from some of these opportunities. Possible visitors include the director of the Wallingford Homeless Shelter, someone from the Thresholds prison mentoring program and a representative of the Abraham's Tent winter shelter program in New Haven.

This outreach expo will happen only during the coffee hour between the two services. If you attend the 9:00 service, please plan to stay for coffee hour to hear about how we are serving now, and how we might be called to serve in the future. If you attend the 11:00 service, please plan to come to church shortly after 10:00.

Experiencing Midnight Run: We received this report from Pete Ploch, who went on the November Midnight Run along with Kevin Ross and Martha Wylie.

"When we got to the Green, it seemed like there were more people than usual – I'm guessing 60 or more. All of the meals that the kids made ended up being distributed at the Green. Luckily, we were not the only group there last night so there were still meals for the men's shelter. Pam had bagged up clothes, toiletries and other items, and just about everything we put out went. We had boots and shoes that had been collected during the Soles 4 Soles campaign after the shipment had been

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sent. I think we had two pairs left.

“On the way home, Martha commented on how well behaved and polite the people are. These people have next to nothing, and are thankful for anything they receive. Kevin got a surprise at the Green. He gave one guy a new pair of white socks, and in return received a big kiss on his beard. Some people are VERY grateful for what they get.”

This was Martha Wylie’s first experience with the Midnight Run. Here is what she wrote: “Why wouldn’t everyone in our church community want to be a part of something so big and amazing? I know for me it was the age-old ‘not enough time!’ It also felt a bit intimidating, could I really feel safe in an atmosphere of unknown?”

“I am amazed by the humbling effect the Midnight Run had on me! The people who come to gather basic needs, items discarded by strangers, are so thankful. I never felt the sense that we were there to provide because we have more, rather we were there to recognize that a fellow human being needed something that we could offer. I know so many people would enjoy their time as much as I did! I will happily join the Midnight Run again and again and again!”

Would you like to ride along on the Midnight Run? Sign up on the Outreach Board in the Parlor at church or talk with Peggy Allen. Item of the month for January is mini flashlights.

We Say Thanks

I would like to thank you and Mr. Hostage for delivering the lovely flowers! It was a lovely finish to my 93rd birthday celebrations.

Jeanne Zook

Thanks to the congregation for the cards, e-mails, prayers, and thoughts following Amanda’s surgery. We really appreciate everyone’s well wishes. Amanda received quite a few cards, which made those first few days following surgery a little cheerier.

Peter, Carol, and Amanda Ploch

Arthur and I write with so many thanks for so many things. Beautiful flowers arrived at our home when our important anniversary happened and my surgery ensued. At Thanksgiving we again counted our many blessings. At the very top of the long list was our wonderful church and all the caring people who help make our Church so wonderful.

Joy Hostage

On behalf of the Cookie Bake Coordinators, we want to thank those who provided something for the sale. It was a resounding and spirited event, with every scrap of cookie purchased by 1 p.m. The variety of shapes, colors, and kinds made everyone desiring a tin of their own. In the busyness of the season, we appreciate the ‘one more thing’ that has been requested and that you so generously provided.

Jan Cowles, Regan Huntley and Melanie Pivrotto