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Giving Thanks, Looking Ahead

By Jeff Braun, Senior Minister

As I look back upon the last program year, I am inspired by all that our church has accomplished. In the end, all thanks go to God for granting us the capacity to build his church; to Christ, for modeling how; and to the Spirit, for awakening our God-given gifts and for continuously reminding us what Christ taught us.

Unquestionably, all thanks go to God. But due (and proper) thanks also go to each member and friend of this congregation, and to the congregation as a whole.

For the truly countless ways that you and other members of our church family have helped to build our congregation and, by extension, our broader denomination and community, in the past program year (September 2010 through June 2011)—thank you! Thanks to our gifted and giving staff, as well.

Christ has endowed us with great gifts. With those gifts come both great responsibility (to follow when Christ beckons) and a profound sense of spiritual purpose and fulfillment (which is the fruit

of committing ourselves to a God who exceeds and yet embraces us in every way).

Christ is ever the same, and yet ever new. Christ is ever at our center, and yet ever calling us to the fringes, to the periphery, toward the disenfranchised and the unwelcomed, and to move beyond what is comfortable ... so that we, like Christ, might comfort others. So that we, like Christ, might remain open to the Spirit's creative force.

Our work is holy. But hard. And it is wise and good to seek our Sabbath time; not only on Sundays, but through the delights of summer.

As we refresh ourselves this summer, let us recall and celebrate what we have accomplished this past program year through the Holy Spirit. There is much to give thanks for. Let us think, as well, of what lies ahead.

As we relax and refuel, may the fall's excitement and challenges begin, already, to sparkle upon the waters of our

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imagination. May the yet-to-be-fulfilled invitations of the Spirit begin to whisper both around and within us, so that when it, once again, comes time to put our hands to the pilgrim's plowshare, we will be fortified; we will be energized; we will be willing; and we will be ready. Ready to answer Christ's continuous, rarely easy, always renewing, yet ever-reassuring call.

Thanks, again, to each of you for your contributions this past year. And thanks be to God, from whom Christ rises, the Holy Spirit descends, and hope abounds.

God's Peace,

Jeff



Going Away? Pre-Pay!

Summer is a time for many of us to get away for a while, but the church's ongoing expenses don't take a vacation. That's why it is important to maintain your financial pledge even during the weeks you aren't in Cheshire.

Please send your pledge fulfillment donations in advance, if you can, to the church office. Thanks in advance for helping to keep our church strong!

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

July-August Worship Schedule

Sunday, July 3: Single worship service at 10:00. Jeff Braun preaching. Communion will be served. Food offerings will be received; the food of the month is canned peaches or pears.

Sunday, July 10: Summer worship hours begin; services at 8:00 in the Chapel and 10:00 in the Sanctuary. Jeff Braun preaching.

Sunday, July 17: Services at 8:00 and 10:00. The Rev. Peggy Allen preaching.

Sunday, July 24: Services at 8:00 and 10:00. The Rev. John Afman preaching.

Sunday, July 31: Services at 8:00 and 10:00. The Rev. Barbara Barlok preaching.

Sunday, August 7: Services at 8:00 and 10:00. Alison McCaffrey preaching.

Sunday, August 14: Services at 8:00 and 10:00. Alison McCaffrey preaching.

Sunday, August 21: Services at 8:00 and 10:00. Alison McCaffrey preaching.

Sunday, August 28: Services at 8:00 and 10:00. Jeff Braun preaching.

Note: In the weeks that both Jeff Braun and Alison McCaffrey will be away, the Rev. Peggy Allen, the Rev. John Afman, and the Rev. Barbara Barlok will be available for pastoral emergencies. Information on how to contact them is on Page 3.



Same-Sex Weddings Conversations Held

During May and June, the Board of Deacons hosted six conversations with the congregation on the topic of same-sex marriage. At issue is to determine whether to allow our ministers to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies in our Sanctuary. More than 80 members participated, not including Deacons.

We heard people speak to both sides of the issue, and recognized that while some people were very clear on their views, others continue to struggle, looking for God's will. The Spirit was indeed present, as individuals expressed thoughtfully and with great openness how they believe the church should move forward on this issue.

As the last conversation was concluding, a petition was submitted by some members of our congregation requesting that the decision to allow same-sex marriage be made by a vote of the congregation, not by the Board of Deacons alone. The petition complies with the requirements for special meeting request as outlined in the Bylaws. We believe, as a Board, that the petitioners seeking this meeting are deeply committed to the congregational process, and that a special meeting is but one more way to engage our members on this issue.

Before coming together in a congregational meeting, the Deacons will meet to discuss what we've heard. We will listen for God's voice to discern the direction we think he wants for our church, and be true to our original, stated

process, being faithful to those who gave not only of their time but, more importantly, their hearts.

We have conferred with Executive Board, which supports the Deacons' issuing a call to a special meeting at a date yet to be determined. We look forward to your continued support and participation.

The Board of Deacons



Pastoral Emergencies July 15-31

Both Jeff Braun and Alison McCaffrey will be away from July 15 through July 31. Here is how to reach clergy during that period:

The Rev. Peggy Allen will be available for pastoral emergencies from Friday, July 15 through Thursday, July 21. Peggy can be reached at home at 203-272-3654 or by cell phone at 203-317-9186.

The Rev. John Afman will be available for pastoral emergencies from Friday, July 22 through midnight Friday, July 29. John can be reached at home at 203-235-6294.

The Rev. Barbara Barlok will be available for pastoral emergencies from midnight Friday, July 29 through midnight Sunday, July 31. Barbara can be reached at home at 203-272-7994.

The Rev. Alison McCaffrey will be available for pastoral emergencies beginning midnight Sunday, July 31. Alison will be back in the office Monday, August 1.

Christian Education in July, August, and Beyond

Church School News: Our updated church school handbook will be going out, along with registration forms. Please get the latter back to the church as soon as possible. We are making some changes in our program, and want to have an accurate count of all our children and families. If you have any questions, please contact Caroll Cyr.

Vacation Bible School: So far, 30 children have signed up! If your children are going to be attending VBS, please sign them up as soon as possible.



We are planning our snacks and crafts and want to

have plenty for all. We have lots of room, and all children are welcome.

Any child age 5 through grade 5 is welcome, and encouraged to bring a friend and sign up today! Registration forms are available by calling the church office or can be found outside the C.E. office. Easier yet, go to our web site and register there.

Summer Church School: CE is hosting a one-room schoolroom all summer, located in room 8/9 for any child age 3 through grade 3. All other children are invited to worship with their families. This summer, we are learning the 10 Commandments. It's a fun curriculum, and easy to teach; if you have a free week

and could be either a helper or teacher, please see Caroll Cyr

Homecoming Sunday: Homecoming Sunday is September 11. Mark your calendars and be ready for a new Sunday school experience!

Teacher Appreciation: First Congregational Church has a wonderful set of volunteers. You all have shown a great amount of dedication and love for our children. Your excellence in what you do is greatly appreciated.

I hope the restructuring of the upcoming year makes it easier for you all to both volunteer and enjoy worship on a regular basis.

Child Summer Safety: Summer brings bikes, balls, pools, bugs and sun. Please be careful this summer. Watch both your children and others. There are so many bikes around – make sure you drive defensively and protect your children by insisting they wear helmets when riding bikes or skateboards.



Bugs and sun also pose a problem, so again, protect your family with bug spray and sun lotion. Have a safe and blessed summer. We are looking forward to a full and vibrant fall kickoff!

Caroll Cyr

Paul's Stewardship Letter

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul created some eloquent descriptions of living the Christian life. Probably the most famous quotation from that letter is “and now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

He also spoke about the Resurrection, writing “What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown as a physical body, it is raised as a spiritual body.”

Following these lofty and inspiring words, Paul has another matter to discuss with the Corinthians: Money. “Now concerning the collection,” he writes in Chapter 16, “on the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn. ... And when I arrive ... I will ... take your gift to Jerusalem.” In other words, Paul was writing a stewardship letter, making sure the Corinthians didn't forget to give to the church!

This juxtaposition of the spiritual and the financial might seem odd to some, but evidently it didn't faze Paul – and it shouldn't surprise us either.

Whatever good our church does – in outreach, in Christian education, in music, in parish care, in building community, in connecting us with the work of the Holy Spirit – there is always the reality, as there was in Paul's time, that bills must be paid. The Corinthians didn't need to worry

about insurance and utility bills, but church upkeep was an issue, then as now. And of course there was mission work to be done among the poor, the sick, the homeless, and the hungry. That required open purses as well as willing hands, as it also does in the 21st century.

Because you don't need a ticket to attend our worship services, and because we don't bill for a membership fee, it's easy to assume that somehow the ministry and missions of the church don't cost anything. If only it were so! But, as Paul's letter to the church at Corinth reminds us, giving generously has been a part of church life since Day One.

In concluding his letter, Paul has one more thing to say: “Let all that you do be done in love.” That applies to giving as well as to everything else.



Strawberry Festival Thanks

Whether it was hulling and slicing strawberries on Friday, hauling tables and chairs to and from the green on Saturday, flipping burgers, serving shortcake, selling tickets, or running a game, the Strawberry Festival required a huge effort from our church members.

And, as always, you came through and helped to run another successful and fun festival. Thanks to all of you!! Hope to see you (and many new faces) on Friday June 8 and Saturday June 9, 2012.

Brad Fuller

Calling all Ladies

Summer is here, and we hope you have some time to relax and read a good book. We hope you will find time to join us for a Women's Book Discussion. The schedule of meeting dates and books that are being read is:

July 11: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz

August 8: *Small Wars: A novel* by Sadie Jones

September 12: *Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese

October 3: *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones

November 7: *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand

The meetings begin at 7 p.m. with refreshments and conversation, and move on to discussion at 7:30. Host homes are announced in the Sunday bulletin and the reminder e-mail that is sent the week before the meeting. If you would like to receive the reminder, send you e-mail address to mlape@aol.com or LBSanders@hotmail.com. Come join us when you can.

Learn to Knit

This summer, a group of several women from the Caring Crafts group will teach and mentor youth of the church who would like to learn this needle art. We will try to meet weekly. Interested? Call Kathy Duffendack at 203-272-2885.

Summer Hours

Worship: During July and August, there will be 8 a.m. worship in the Chapel and 10 a.m. worship in the Sanctuary. Both services will be led by clergy.

Office: Due to Michael Lombardi's departure in June, through Labor Day, the church office will be open from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Regular business hours will resume on Tuesday, September 6.

Church Calendar Online

You may now keep up with all upcoming events at First Congregational Church by going online. Visit cheshirecongregational.org and select "Calendar" from the boxes at the top of the home page. It's a quick and easy way to keep up with everything that's happening in our church, from the times of worship services to special events.

Hospitalized?

If you or someone in our congregation whom you know is hospitalized, please tell the church. We want to provide parish care, but federal law prohibits hospitals and nursing homes from giving out the names of patients or residents. Please help us be a caring congregation!

News and Notes from the Board of Outreach

Prison tour: On June 14, thirteen members and friends of our church went on a tour of the Manson Youth Correctional Center, one of the Cheshire prisons, guided by our own member Lorrie Canas. Manson houses young men age 14 through 20. It was an eye-opening experience. We saw the large vegetable garden that was made possible by a donation from our church to Lorrie a number of years ago, which is a bright spot in a concrete environment. This was a first step as the church explores ways to begin a prison ministry. If you are interested in participating in this exploration, please contact Peggy Allen at 203-272-3654 or, after August 1, Alison McCaffrey at church.

Baby Bottle Project: Many thanks to all those who filled a baby bottle coin bank to support the two girls we sponsor through the church Malawi mission and to support the Chrysalis Shelter in Meriden. If you participated in the baby bottle project but haven't turned in coin bank bottle yet, you can still bring it to church and either leave it in the office or put it in the offering plate.

July Food Offering: Our July food donations will be sent to the Cheshire Food Bank. They have a particular need for spices, sugar, and paper products, although all non-perishable foods are welcome.

Midnight Run: Food donations for the Midnight Run tend to drop off over the summer months, so if you are able to

sign up to contribute some ingredients for the 55 suppers we prepare on the last Monday of the month, it will be much appreciated. Our nights this summer to feed the hungry and homeless in New Haven are July 25 and August 29.



Thanks from Fellowship

On behalf of the Congregation, the Fellowship Committee thanks all those who provided a fellowship hour over the past months. You gave our members and visitors an opportunity and reason to linger and talk and share. Conversation, connecting, and sharing is the real definition of fellowship. The coffee, tea, and food are a bonus!

Thank you to the Executive Board, Stephen Ministers, Women's Book Club, Deacons, Board of Christian Education, Flower Committee, Nominating Committee, Bible Study group, Tea Party group, Ladies Aid, Membership Committee, Colonizers, Outreach and Adult Mission, Strawberry Festival group, YUTES, Caring Crafts, and Trustees. Your efforts are sincerely appreciated! The Fellowship Committee is open to ideas and suggestions on how to improve any aspect of the Sunday fellowship hour and church fellowship in general. Please speak to any one of our members to share your ideas. They are Lisa Canas, Jane Richards, Joyce Mulholland, Susan Mancinelli, and Emilee Ziolkowski.

The Fellowship Committee

Lectionary for July, August

Sunday, July 3: Genesis 24: 34-67;
Psalm 45: 10-17; Song of Solomon 2: 8-13;
Zechariah 9: 9-12; Psalm 145: 8-14;
Romans 7: 15-25; Matthew 11: 16-30.

Sunday, July 10: Genesis 25: 19-34;
Psalm 119: 105-112; Isaiah 55: 10-13;
Psalm 65: 1-13; Romans 8: 1-11; Matthew
13: 1-23.

Sunday, July 17: Genesis 28: 10-19a;
Psalm 139: 1-24; Wisdom of Solomon 12:
13-19; Isaiah 44: 6-8; Psalm 86: 11-17;
Romans 8: 12-25; Matthew 13: 24-43.

Sunday, July 24: Genesis 29: 15-28;
Psalm 105: 1-11; Psalm 128; 1 Kings 3: 5-
12; Psalm 119: 129-136; Romans 8: 26-
039; Matthew 13: 31-52.

Sunday, July 31: Genesis 32: 22-31;
Psalm 17: 1-15; Isaiah 55: 1-5; Psalm 145:
8-21; Romans 9: 1-5; Matthew 14: 13-21.

Sunday, August 7: Genesis 37: 1-28;
Psalm 105: 1-45; 1 Kings 19: 9-18; Psalm
85: 8-13; Romans 10: 5-15; Matthew 14:
22-33.

Sunday, August 14: Genesis 45: 1-15;
Psalm 133; Isaiah 56: 1; Psalm 67; Romans
11: 1-32; Matthew 15: 10-28.

Sunday, August 21: Exodus 1:8 –
2:10; Psalm 124; Isaiah 51: 1-8; Psalm 138;
Romans 12: 1-8; Matthew 16: 13-20.

Sunday, August 28: Exodus 3: 1-15;
Psalm 105: 1-45; Jeremiah 15: 15-21;
Psalm 26: 1-8; Romans 12: 9-21; Matthew
16: 21-28.

Milestones

in the life of our church family

Baptisms

Colton Jacob Mitchell, child of Glen
and Kristina Mitchell, June 5.

Deaths

Joyce Smelings, cousin of Anne
McNulty, May 14.

G. Hunter Culley, uncle of Kathy
Duffendack, May 16.

Watson Dee, friend of Jane
Montgomery, May 17.

John Smelings, cousin of Anne
McNulty (and husband of Joyce Smelings,
above), May 18.

David Stolberg, brother-in-law of
Carolyn Brown, May 24.

Eugene Victor Perrin, father of Adam
Perrin, May 28.

George Stoughton, cousin of Henry
McNulty, June 1.

Visit our church's
web site often:
cheshirecongregational.org

We Say Thanks

I want to thank Don Lee for delivering a beautiful bouquet of flowers to me for my birthday. I appreciate the Caring Committee of the church for being so thoughtful. It made my day!

Beth Eichelman

Barbara and I would like to thank our church family for walking with us through my health journey. The many cards, phone calls, prayers, meals, and visits were so appreciated. Just think: Our wonderful family came to Seymour to care for us. We want to thank Jeff and Allison for always checking in on us. It is nice to hear a gentle supportive caring voice. Thank you to Joellyn Jason, Mark Hostage, and Ryan Black for delivering flowers that brought so much pleasure. Thank you all for your love. We are feeling better.

Rich and Barb Grudzias

Thanks for the delicious meals delivered to my home after my recent operation. Special mention for the desserts and for the ladies who cooked and delivered. Saved me from six TV dinners!

Gordon Clark

I truly never realized the impact that those cards we sign on Sundays make to their recipients until I witnessed Garry opening his cards from all of you. He was overcome with tears and gratitude. Garry has struggled with the recent losses of his sister, mother, and aunt. Your wonderful cards of sympathy have lifted his spirit. Thank you from both of us.

Lisa Canas

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