

THE PARISH POST

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

CHESHIRE, CONNECTICUT
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Reconnecting With Christ

By Jeff Braun, Senior Minister

Through junior and senior high school, one of my dearest friends was Kerry Sherck. Kerry and I had many classes together, none more fun than French, in which she and I would compete to see which of us Monsieur Lea would call on the most. Accompanied by mutual friends, Kerry and I attended dances, went to parties, hung out over summer vacations, and shared the rollercoaster of growing into young adults. The bond was special. And deep.

Yet, somehow, beginning with college, Kerry and I fell out of touch. We reconnected briefly at two high school reunions and by e-mail a few times. But for the most part, after high school, our paths diverged.

Then, one day late last spring, shortly before the 9 a.m. service, as I was walking through our sanctuary toward the balcony stairs, a woman stood in one of the pews then stepped into the aisle in front of me. She looked me square in the eye, and smiled broadly. I smiled back and prepared to pass her. Then it hit me. It was Kerry Sherck! Turns out that Kerry

was living in Cheshire. When she heard I had moved to town with Lori and the girls and was serving at the church, she decided to surprise me. (She succeeded!)

That reunion with Kerry was a blessing, a gift. It warmed me deeply to see her again. And it warmed me all the more that Kerry had taken the initiative to find me.

Through Lent, Christ does the same. Like a long-time friend from whom we can all too easily become disconnected, Jesus seeks us: undaunted by however distant we might feel, his love undiminished by however long it's been since last we spoke to him.

No matter how distracted we and our lives might be, Jesus stands, plants himself in our path, then smiles... all in the hope that we will recognize him. And respond!

Like my reunion with my friend Kerry, the Lent-into-Easter reunion to which Christ invites us is a blessing, a gift. It promises to warm us to our core. To reground our faith. To refresh our spirit.

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And, perhaps most of all, to remind us that nothing is more precious than the relationships in our lives, especially our relationship with the One who came so that not even death could come between God and his beloved children.

Through Lent, Christ approaches. Christ smiles. And Christ seeks us. In faith, may we do the same!

God's peace,
Jeff

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In Bad Weather

When there's inclement weather, if you're unsure whether your group's meeting will be canceled, please watch WTNH (Channel 8), WFSB (Channel 3) or WVIT (Channel 30). As a general rule, if Cheshire public schools are closed, the church is also closed, with the exception of confirmation. The Rev. Jeff Braun will communicate directly with confirmands about the status of that meeting.

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Meeting Changes?

If you head a board, committee, task force, or other church group with a regularly-scheduled meeting, and on a given date your group won't be meeting at its regular time, please notify the church office as soon as possible by calling 203-272-5323. After 5 p.m., please call the Turners at 203-272-4591. This helps us keep track of who is in the church buildings.

March Worship Schedule

Sunday, March 6: Services at 9:00 and 11:00. Jeff Braun preaching. Communion will be served. Food offerings will be received; the food of the month is breakfast cereal.

Sunday, March 13: Services at 9:00 and 11:00. Jeff Braun preaching.

Sunday, March 20: Services at 9:00 and 11:00. Alison McCaffrey preaching.

Sunday, March 27: Services at 9:00 and 11:00. Jeff Braun preaching.

May Day Tea Party

Plans are being made for a Tea Party on May 1, 2011 from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. in the church's Parish Hall. Please save the date and any wedding, bridesmaid and flower girl dresses you may have for a fashion show.

Models are needed for the fashion show. Teens are welcome! If you are interested, please speak to Jan Garthwait. During spring vacation, we will meet to try on gowns and learning the steps of modeling. If you would like to join our committee, please contact Jan at 203-272-5915, Pam Euerle at 203-272-9345, or Karen Gravino at 203-272-1067.

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

The ABC's of Pledging

Each year, we ask our members and friends to pledge to support First Congregational Church financially. Here's a brief rundown of the why and how of pledging.

Q: Why pledge?

A: Good question! Here's one answer. As a church, our mission is to worship God; to preach and teach the Gospel; to celebrate the sacraments; to encourage Christian fellowship; to continue the church's heritage; to render service toward all people; and to strive for righteousness, justice and peace.

So how do we accomplish all that? Essentially, each of us does it by giving three things: our time, our talent, and our treasure.

Time starts, but does not end, with regular attendance at worship. As for **talent** – can you cook, sing, paint, teach, chair a meeting, babysit, write, seal envelopes, deliver flowers, visit the homebound? Then you have a talent that your church needs.

Pledging has to do with the **treasure** part. To maintain the church – to ensure that we fulfill our mission – we need funds. Prayer is absolutely vital to our life and can do wonderful things, but it can't pay the electric bill! That's why giving is essential.

Q: Can't I put money in the collection plate without pledging?

A: Certainly. But pledging helps the church plan, and planning is necessary. For example, how much staff should we have? It's tough to answer that question without knowing that we will be able to pay them.

Q: What's a fair pledge?

A: First Congregational Church is blessed by having a great variety of people in our congregation. Some are quite well off; others are having a hard time making ends meet. Most are in the middle.

If you take the church's annual budget (about \$700,000) and divide it by the number of pledges made for this year (about 360), the answer is about \$37 a week. But of course, that's an average; some people give much more than that, some less. One thing is for sure: The generous pledge of years ago, "five dollars in the plate on Sunday," is woefully inadequate today, and cannot sustain us as a church.

Q: How do I pledge?

A: You simply tell the church that you intend to give a certain amount each week, month, quarter, or year. That's all. In the early fall, we mail you a form for doing that. You fill out the form and drop it in the collection plate, or mail it back. You can also pay your pledge electronically; ask at the church office for details.

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Q: What if I pledge, but I then lose my job or have some other financial emergency?

A: You simply tell the church that you will be unable to fulfill your pledge. No questions asked – except that we may ask if we can be of any help to you.

Q: Pledging seems like a commitment, and I don't need another commitment.

A: Yes, it is a commitment, but one that we believe should be made joyously. First Congregational Church is making a difference in lives here in Cheshire and around the world. To be part of the family of Jesus Christ is indeed a commitment – the best one you can make!

The Board of Stewardship



The Prayer Net

The Prayer Net is an e-mail prayer chain for your prayer needs. Anyone can email me with a prayer request and I will



forward it on (confidentially if requested) to our wonderful group of committed pray-ers, who faithfully agree to pray.

Anyone may also become part of the group of pray-ers by also emailing me, and I will send you the instructions.

For more information:
revalison@onelane.org.

Alison McCaffrey

Scripture by Heart

This Palm Sunday, we will once again hear the telling of the Passion story as internalized and told by our own members, as the stories of Jesus were originally told before they were set down in writing. Maybe you've wondered how we learn our scriptures by heart. Maybe you've watched us get up, one by one, to offer the words and you've thought to yourself, "I could never do that." But maybe these are the very reasons you should give it try this year. Yes, you!

None of us ever thought we could do this. We each needed convincing to give it a try. And, with God's help and mutual encouragement, it happens – and we are always blessed by what we experience by taking this project on.

We meet every other Monday at 7 p.m. in the sanctuary beginning February 28 (February 28, March 14, 28, April 11 and Saturdays, April 9 and 16). There are small parts and larger parts, and lots of support! Please sign up on the lobby table, or speak with Alison McCaffrey.

Hospitalized?

If you or someone you know is in a hospital or a nursing home, please inform the church office at 203-272-5323. We want to be able to minister to those in our congregation, but federal law prohibits health care facilities from giving out this information. We need your help!

Christian Education in March ... and Beyond

Caroll's Corner: Winter is a wonder. Do you ever think about how under all that knee-high snow, there are tiny plants alive and waiting to awaken into a brand new season? There are animals in hibernation just waiting for spring. Both plants and animals are ready to start the process of living again; their sleep is over.

Do you know that each morning is a brand new day for us? Every evening when we go to sleep, we put that day behind us like the tender little plants in the winter. In their spring, or our morning, we have a brand new day, a brand new chance. No one has ever lived this day yet. No sins, no mistakes, just a brand new chance. What a blessing to have been given a new start every day! God cares for us so much that he created redemption through Christ, and new chances are woven into the fabric of creation.

Morning is coming... spring is on the way... the Lenten season is fast approaching us. Make this Lent count, so that Easter is truly a blessed celebration. Spend extra time in prayer, read your Bible more often, get involved in our church's wider missions. Love the Lord your God with all your soul and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

Wake up every morning knowing that you are loved and that you have a new chance. It's never too late to make the changes you crave. This is winter...spring is coming!

Teachers Needed: We are looking for teachers and shepherds for both services.

We are moving right along. Our classes and closets are cleaner and more organized, our children are enjoying Sundays, and our volunteers are supported. It's easier than ever to volunteer in Christian Education, and we hope you will join our team. We have space for whatever time you could give to our church. If you would like more information, please don't hesitate to see Caroll Cyr.

Bible Sunday: Bible Sunday is March 6. Come help our fourth graders and their families celebrate this special Sunday.

Vacation Bible School: "Inside Out & Upside Down on Main Street" is the name of this year's program. The fun takes place August 8 through August 12 from 9:00 a.m. to noon. The cost is \$30 per child; a second child is \$25, or a family of three or more is \$60.

The themes of the five-day Vacation Bible School are: Gratitude – Parable of the Whiny Workers (Workers in the Vineyard – Matthew 20:1-16); Compassion – Parable of the Roadside Rescue (Good Samaritan – Luke 10:25-37); Forgiveness – Parable of the Shocking Servant (Unmerciful Servant – Matthew 18:21-35); Grace – Parable of the Warmest Welcome (Prodigal Son – Luke 15:11-32); and Faithfulness – Parable of the Master's Money (Ten Talents – Luke 19:12-26).

We are looking to put a team together for that week. If you can be available from

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8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., please see Caroll Cyr. Watch the CE bulletin board located in the Parlor for upcoming meetings and event dates, leading up to this fun week of family fellowship.

Lenten Devotionals: Each Sunday during Lent, church school children will be given a devotional to help them walk through Lent prayerfully. This is something you can help your children with or do as a family. This will start March 13, and go through Holy Week.



Prison Ministry Exploration

In response to the interest expressed on Outreach Sunday in January, a new small group is now forming to explore potential ways we might begin a ministry to those in prison, either as a church or as individuals.

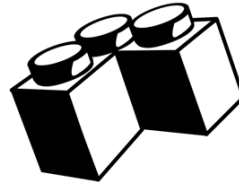
There is much to learn and much to discern as we prayerfully and faithfully consider how God might be calling us in this direction. A sign-up sheet is on the lobby table. This group is sponsored by the Board of Outreach, and convened by Alison McCaffrey.

Save paper!
Get the Parish Post by e-mail.
Write:
office@cheshirecongregational.org

Shake the Winter Blues

Are you suffering with the winter blues? Do you have cabin fever? Relief is in sight! The Board of Christian Education will hold the first 2011 Games/Lego and Pot Luck Dinner Night on Saturday, March 12th, at 5:30 p.m. at the church.

After we have a wonderful pot luck dinner



together, we will break into groups to play a variety of games for all ages. If you have a favorite game, bring it along.

There will also be tables of Legos to build things with. (Who can build the best Goliath?)

All are welcome. Bring your friends. See sign-up sheets in the church. If you have questions, please contact Beth Ross at meimross@gmail.com or 860-426-0702.



Where Are the Donation Bins?

Looking for the bins for your Midnight Run donations of clothing or toiletry items, or for the bassinet for donations of baby items? They have been moved from the Parlor into the Parish Hall by the piano. Many thanks for your continuing support of these important ministries.



Lenten Programs and Activities at Our Church

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper:

Bring your family and friends to the Parish Hall and celebrate Mardi Gras on March 8 with a plateful of delicious pancakes – for a great cause! Members of our Adult Mission Trip are donning aprons to cook and serve you pancakes and a whole lot more! Come anytime between 5:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. (expanded hours); we'll be serving on a rolling basis – leave when you need to, stay as long as you like – and enjoy the great food, festive atmosphere, and awesome New Orleans jazz. A freewill donation will be received; all money goes to sending our mission team to Appalachia on March 27.

Holy Week Labyrinth: Once again, our Holy Week journey will include the walking of the labyrinth, an ancient and sacred spiritual tool for prayer and contemplation. Join us at 3 p.m. Palm Sunday afternoon (April 17) as labyrinth facilitator Laura Litvinoff returns to lead us in the learning and constructing of our labyrinth in the Parish Hall, which will be open for use throughout all of Holy Week, through the Good Friday to Easter Sunday Silent Vigil, and through Easter Morning.



Labyrinths are not mazes: there is only one way in and one way out. A labyrinth walk mirrors the journey of faith: one enters the labyrinth in a spirit of prayer

while centering the heart toward God, and then back out into the world with broadened understandings gained through what can be a profoundly moving experience.

Good Friday to Easter Sunday Silent Vigil:

You are invited to keep watch for the coming resurrection in quietness and prayer in this rich tradition here at First Congregational Church. The Silent Vigil is held in our sanctuary from Good Friday evening (April 22) through early Easter morning. This time of contemplation offers a meaningful way to prepare our hearts and minds for Easter. You may sign up for one-hour time slots, every hour around the clock beginning at 10 p.m. after the Good Friday service, ending at 6:00 a.m. Easter morning. The general signup sheet for the Silent Vigil will be posted on the bulletin board outside Alison McCaffrey's office beginning on Ash Wednesday, March 9. Detailed instructions will be mailed.

Give the Easier Way

Now, First Congregational Church offers a new, easier way to support our mission and ministries: Electronic giving.

Those who are giving using hand-written checks, or who don't want to put cash into envelopes for the offering plate, can now sign up to have whatever amount they choose automatically given to the church on a regular basis. For details, call the church office at 203-272-5323.

Easter Eggstravaganza

In a little more than a month, it will be time for the daffodils and tulips we planted last fall to poke through the earth. It will also be time to put together Easter baskets for children connected with the state Department of Children and Families in Waterbury. Please join in!

Each numbered egg on the “Eggstravaganza” will have information about a child and ideas for basket stuffers. Take a numbered egg from the tree. Sign



your name by the corresponding number. By Sunday, April 17 (Palm Sunday), bring your completed basket to church. We will have tags

available. Please put a tag on your basket with the number of the egg you choose.

For more information, contact Chris Fitzmaurice at fitzmcl@nu.com or 203-272-1472, or Beth Ross at meimross@gmail.com or 860-426-0702.



Cheshire Food Pantry

Every third month, our food offerings will be donated to the Cheshire Food Pantry, beginning this April. We will continue to support both Greater Waterbury Interfaith Ministries and the FISH food pantry with our food offerings on the remaining months.

Malawi Ministry News

Promise Mchenga, a 26-year-old resident of the African country of Malawi who has been sponsored by our church for a long time, is spending a year as an intern with Urban Promise Ministries in Camden, N.J. He plans to pursue a master's degree in Christian leadership beginning this coming September, with a future plan of returning to Malawi to begin to build his own ministry to destitute and desperate children. A visit to Cheshire is being planned.

Midnight Run

Midnight run this month is on March 28. If you're in middle school, come help us make meals to feed the hungry and homeless in New Haven. We then share in a meal together and play some games.



YUTES News

We will have regular youth group meetings on March 6, 20, and 27. We will be going to Silver Lake on March 12-13. We will leave the church at 11 a.m. March 12 and arrive back in Cheshire around 1:00 p.m. on Sunday. All high school and middle school students are invited. The cost for the retreat is \$60 per person. If you are planning on coming on the retreat, you must RSVP by Tuesday, March 8.

The Prayer Shawl Ministry

On many Wednesday afternoons, a small group of women gather in the parlor for a couple of hours to knit, to crochet, and to engage in fellowship. Many of us work on prayer shawls.

This ministry was started here as a small group a number of years ago, and to date has created many shawls. Knitters and crocheters who are not able to attend on Wednesdays have completed projects at home and brought them to church. Finished shawls, usually 60 to 70 inches of soft yarn, are blessed by the group with prayerful thanks for their completion and care and comfort for those to whom the shawls will be brought, often by clergy, deacons, or Stephen Ministers. The recipients are people who are going through a difficult time, such as a serious illness or a loss. One recipient said she had put the shawl on her hospitalized mother and then brought it home each day.

Along with other knitters from the congregation, the group has also made teddy bears for the Christmas Child shoeboxes, and this past fall made squares for Warm-Up America. The Wednesday group also provides an opportunity for friendly conversation. We welcome anyone who would like to come knit, crochet, or just visit. We can also teach you to knit or crochet, as well as supply the yarn. We also continue to welcome shawls made by people unable to attend on Wednesdays.

The group meets at 12:30 p.m. For more information, call Kathy Duffendack at 203-272-2885 or just stop by.

Youth Mission Trip 2011

Our youth will be heading to Owego, N.Y., from July 31 to August 6. We look forward to serving alongside hundreds of teens from other parts of the country while we repair homes of the many residents we'll serve.

All high school students, including those entering 9th grade in the fall, are able to come on the youth mission trip. We look forward to having a good group this year. See www.yutes.org for more details regarding the mission trip and information about how to sign up.

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.

Milestones

in the life of our church family

Deaths

Myron Verner, February 8.

Jacqueline Olander, mother of Roger and Audrey Olander, February 11.

We Say Thanks

Thank you so much for the beautiful reception and your words of thanks. It was an honor to serve you these past three years as your Parish Care Coordinator. This congregation is truly blessed to have so many caring, loving members. With the very generous check to be used for an evening out, Bob and I will have many hours in which to give thanks for being part of our church family.

Donna Mead

Thank you for the many kind expressions of sympathy, thoughtfulness, and caring that have come in since Bob's passing. All the cards and phone calls, meals and flowers, visits and prayers from church members have comforted my family and me. A special thank you to Jeff, Alison, Joe, and Bill, who made the memorial service a moving tribute to Bob, as well as to all who attended. Special thanks too to Fred, Pat, Martha, and so many others who set up, made punch, and baked cookies for the reception. Bob would have liked that the service was not too sentimental and provided a few laughs. And, of course, he would have loved the cookies!

Mary Johmann

Thank you so much for thinking of Roland. The poinsettia is still lovely and he is enjoying it. We appreciate the thoughts and caring that have been shown to both of us.

Lorna Fowler

I am enjoying the poinsettia delivered to me by Joyce Mulholland and her son, Thomas. We had a most wonderful visit. Thank you.

Ruthe B. Sperzel

Thank you so much for all your get well cards, it was so thoughtful of you! I still have cancer, but am going for radiation soon. I still have chemo. I miss church very much, but knowing you all are praying for me helps!

Dolores Bozzuto

Can't thank you enough for being so nice. On behalf of my brother, John Dewey, we want to thank you for the lovely blanket that Jane Montgomery brought to John. How very kind and thoughtful!

Judy Zamecnik

I want to thank everyone for their prayers and all the cards on the loss of my sister.

Martha Sullivan

I would like to thank Maya Wylie of our church for the "cool" card and letter she sent to me. It is the first Valentine I have gotten in a long time. It is refreshing to know that our young people are concerned with us older folks. I was brought up in First Congregational Church through the Sunday School, and ended up teaching high school kids for several years. Maya, I wish you luck in school and hope you enjoy the rest of your life doing nice things for older people!

Bill Grime

Lectionary for March

Sunday, March 6: Exodus 24: 12-18;
Psalm 2; Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1: 16-21;
Matthew 17: 1-9.

Ash Wednesday, March 9: Joel 2: 1-17;
Isaiah 58: 1-12; Psalm 51: 1-17; 2
Corinthians 5:20 - 6:10; Matthew 6: 1-21.

Sunday, March 13: Genesis 2:15 - 3: 7;
Psalm 32; Romans 5: 12-19; Matthew 4: 1-11.

Sunday, March 20: Genesis 12: 1-4;
Psalm 121; Romans 4: 1-17; John 3: 1-17;
Matthew 17: 1-9.

Sunday, March 27: Exodus 17: 1-7;
Psalm 95; Romans 5: 1-11; John 4: 5-42.



*You are cordially invited to a Tea Party
Sunday, May 1, 2011
First Congregational Church, Parish Hall
Half Past Two in the Afternoon*



*Please save the date and any Wedding, Bridesmaid
and Flower Girl dresses we might use for a Fashion Show.
We invite you to wear hats, gloves and dressy dresses if you wish.*



*Tickets available early March
Adults \$10, Children 6-12 \$5, Children 5 and under Free*

For more information:

Jan Garthwait 203 272-5915

Pam Euerle 203 272- 9345

Karen Gravino 203 272-1067