

THE PARISH POST

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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New Beginnings in a New Year

By **Dave Buchan**
Interim Senior Minister

Happy New Year! This is a time to look back, and it is a time to look forward with hope. It is also a time to examine ourselves, and to make changes in our lives. Have you made any resolutions yet?

Some time ago on "60 Minutes," Andy Rooney announced his new year's resolutions. He promised not to lose weight or to go on any diets. "I know the diets don't work," he said, "and there's no



sense pretending they might." Furthermore," Andy continued, "the cellar and garage are fine the way they are. And so is the attic. I hereby resolve not to suffer through another year of guilt about the mess in the basement, the garage and the attic. I like them the way they are."

Andy Rooney did not want to make any resolutions to change. What about

ourselves? Are there areas of our lives that need change? There is good news for those who would like to make a new beginning. The time is now, and the moment is here. As our old friend Dr. Seuss put it :

Congratulations! Today is your day.

You're off to Great Places, you're off and away.

You have brains in your head, you have feet in your shoes,

You can steer yourself any direction you choose.

Our faith can help make people new. That was St. Paul's experience, and it can be ours, too. He said, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: Every thing old has passed away; see, everything has become new."

As we enter the year 2008, is there an area of our lives where we need to make a new beginning? God is ready to support us in that venture.

In Christ,
Dave Buchan

Winter Sermon Series: The Lord's Prayer

"Lord," said the disciples, "Teach us to pray." In response, Jesus said, "Pray, then, like this: Our Father, who art in heaven..." The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples is found with slight variations in Matthew 6:9-13 and in Luke 11:1-4. It is packed with meaning, yet it is amazingly brief. It's made up of just four sentences, and can be said in less than a minute.

Prayer sustains us. It is the heartbeat of the Christian life. And the Lord's Prayer is the most popular prayer we know. Many of us learned it in Sunday School, and we say it every Sunday in church. But what does this prayer mean? Do we understand everything we are saying when we take these words on our lips? What guidance does the Lord's Prayer give us for our own conversations with God?

This winter, I'll be preaching a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer and its meaning for our world and our daily lives. Come and worship God with us on Sunday mornings.

Dave Buchan

Calling All Bakers and Servers

You are needed for
Alphabet Sundays

Feb 3, 2008 Last names H to O
or

April 13, 2008 Last names P to Z
For 9 o'clock or 11 o'clock services
Sign-up sheets are on the bulletin board
or call Leslie Parys at 699-9929

Worship Schedule For January

During January, Rev. Dave Buchan will preach a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer (see story at left).

Sunday, January 6 (Epiphany): Services at 9 and 11 a.m. Dave Buchan preaching. Communion Sunday. Food offerings will be collected; food of the month is cans of tuna.

Sunday, January 13: Services at 9 and 11 a.m. Dave Buchan preaching.

Sunday, January 20: Services at 9 and 11 a.m. Alison McCaffrey preaching.

Sunday, January 27: Services at 9 and 11 a.m. Dave Buchan preaching. Bible Presentation Sunday (fourth graders will receive Bibles during the service.)

Offering Envelopes for 2008

If you live in Cheshire, offering envelopes for 2008 have been mailed to all who asked for them on their pledge cards. To save postage, members who live in surrounding towns are asked to pick up their envelopes in the church parlor.

It is important that any unused offering envelopes from 2007 not be used for 2008 pledge payments. Envelope numbers for some people have changed, and using last year's envelopes may cause mistakes in recording pledge payments.

Notes from the Executive Board

Much of the December Executive Board meeting focused on finalizing topics to be discussed at the congregational meeting that was held Dec. 9, including a vote to approve the 2008 budget. The proposed budget (as noted at the September meeting) includes salary increases for the settled senior minister and the associate minister, which affect the dollars associated with the handbell choir director, the director of youth ministries, and the parish care minister, as well as the Outreach budget.

Planning was begun for the Annual Meeting, tentatively scheduled for Sunday, January 27.

Revision to the church's bylaws has been an ongoing activity through the Bylaws Review Committee, chaired by Dennis Lape, with committee members Bill Gordon, Mark Sullivan, and June Webster.

The Executive Board has planned a separate meeting to discuss the proposed changes in January. After that time, revisions will be proposed to the congregation. According to the current bylaws, in order to finalize the revisions, two separate meetings must be held before the congregation, one to review the revisions and a separate meeting to vote on them.

Opportunities for information regarding the changes will be available so that interested congregational members can be

fully informed and their questions answered before a vote.

Stewardship will sponsor a "thank-you" dinner for all persons who have pledged for 2008 in the Parsonage at 5 p.m. on Sunday, January 6.

Due to time constraints, a discussion on fund-raising requests, detailed in a Calendar of Giving, was deferred to the January meeting. However, requests for activities usually held early in the year were reviewed, and all were approved by the Board.

Christian Education submitted a requested to hold two mission projects: in February, grades 2-6 will collect cans and bottles in their neighborhoods and at home. The money raised will be used to sponsor children in Malawi; in February and March, the Heifer Project is held. Heifer is a well-established charitable foundation that buys livestock and provides training to make it a sustainable solution.

Relay for Life will have a used book table in the Parish Hall during coffee hour to raise funds for the spring event.

With formation of the Safe Church Committee, recommendations from the Response Team continue to be addressed and acted on. The Safe Church Committee, which will report to the Executive Board, will be responsible for monitoring current safety-related policies

Continued on the next page

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and recommending future ones. It will be chaired by Anne Giddings. Three recommendations are still open: hiring of the permanent director of youth ministries; strengthening of the performance review process; and hiring of additional staff (a parish care minister). The first two are actively being addressed and the third is on hold pending 2008 budget discussions.

Suggestions to improve our church are always welcomed by the Executive Board. Contact any member of the Board to provide feedback or comments.



Meet the Women Of the New Testament

The topic of the next Women's Bible Study will be "Women of the New Testament." The sessions begin January 16 at 10 a.m. The study group will meet weekly in the parlor.

We will use a study guide from the Life Guide Bible Study series. It costs \$5.00. We will explore different scriptures and different women each week, as we walk through this series. Please join us.

You are welcome to study with us when you can, and be away when you must. Each week stands by itself. We read the scriptures together, share reflections on the scripture and close with prayer requests. All women of the church are welcome.

The sessions will be led by Debbie Gravell.

Thanks for Mission Day

The Board of Outreach would like to thank the 17 people who participated in our 2007 Mission Day on Saturday, October 13. We split into two groups to help two of our Connecticut neighborhood community service agencies:

Chrysalis (Meriden) provides a variety of services to anyone who experiences domestic violence. Chrysalis provides shelter, food and clothing to those who have had to flee their situation; a hotline; case management; child and adult advocacy; counseling; and support groups.



Columbus House (New Haven) deals with issues of homelessness. The agency provides food at a soup kitchen, shelter, assessments, case management, and many other programs and services, such as crisis prevention, self-sufficiency programs, and substance abuse treatment.

The two groups from First Congregational helped these agencies by doing a variety of tasks such as painting, yard work, and cleaning. Both of the agencies expressed their extreme gratitude at the teams' willingness to lend a helping hand and were very appreciative of the teams' hard work.

Again, many thanks to all that participated. May God bless you!

Christian Education in January

Bible Journeys For Grades 2-6: This workshop rotation Church School program is for youth entering grades 2-6 this fall. Children will know what workshop they will go to by the schedule below, the bulletin, or the Bible Journeys Board in the hallway across from Room 8.

Grades 3-6 will go to class when dismissed from the church. Grade 2 at 9:00 service only will leave for Chapel in the early part of the service. After Chapel, they will go with their shepherds to their Bible Journeys workshop. Parents can find their children in the classroom listed in the bulletin at the end of Church School.

The Story of Esther

Thou Art, Room 8: Children learn that the story of Esther is not a story of Esther's beauty and her becoming queen, but of God's saving power and how God used a willing person like Esther to save His people. They learn how Esther's integrity and faithfulness led her to act on behalf of others. Through making and wearing a mask, they see that although they can change their outward appearance, it is what is inside that matters most.

Red Sea Productions, Room 9: Children hear a story – The Three Questions. Through the story, children learn how God wants them to act to help those around them.

Desert Tales, Room 10: Children will



see a movie about a girl named Esther, who had to do something that she didn't really want to do. It was hard for her, but she knew that it was what God wanted her to do. In the older grades after the movie, they will be asked about the differences or symbolism between the movie and the story in the Bible. They will do this through a contest after the movie.

Gospel Games, Room 11: Children enter a time of celebrating Purim. They learn that the Jewish people celebrate Purim through joyful activities, giving to the poor, and giving food gifts to one another. Through an art activity, children will create cards for a gift basket for a needy family. A game helps them remember important facts about the story of Esther. As they wrap up the Purim activities, children remember two significant celebrations central to the Christian faith – Christmas and Easter. While Esther saved the Jewish people at that time, Jesus, our living Savior, saves all people who believe in him for all time.

9:00

Date	Thou Art	Red Sea Prod.	Desert Tales	Gospel Games
Jan. 6	Grade 4	Grades 2 & 3	Grade 6	Grade 5
Jan. 13	Grades 2 & 3	Grade 5	Grade 4	Grade 6
Jan. 20	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grades 2 & 3	Grade 4
Jan. 27	Grade 6	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grades 2 & 3

11:00

Date	Thou Art	Red Sea Prod.	Desert Tales	Gospel Games
Jan. 6	Worship	Worship	Worship	Worship
Jan. 13	Grade 5	Grades 2 & 3	Grade 4	Grade 6
Jan. 20	Grades 2 & 3	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 4
Jan. 27	Grade 6	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grades 2 & 3

Fourth Grade Bible Potluck

A Fourth Grade Bible potluck dinner will be held Sunday, January 20, at 5:30 p.m., with a program to follow. Dessert and drinks will be provided by the Christian Education Board.

Please be sure to phone 272-5323 with your attendance numbers and what you will be bringing for the potluck.

All families of fourth graders will receive a letter in early January inviting them to the program, which is an introduction for families about using the Bibles with their children. There will be babysitting for siblings younger than fourth grade.

Bible Presentation Sunday

Bible Presentation will be Sunday, January 27. Fourth graders will receive their Bibles at the worship service they attend.

Snack & Juice Supply

Three-year olds through first graders are served snacks and juice on Sunday mornings.

We have found that asking parents to contribute once a year helps us keep within our budget. We welcome all contributions and offer a schedule as a suggested way to remember.

Please read labels carefully as snacks should have no nuts, peanut butter or peanut oil.

Some suggestions of purchased cookies with no nuts are: nut free varieties of Chips Ahoy, Oreos, Teddy Grahams, Vanilla Wafers, and Lorna Doone.

The schedule is: Last name beginning with K-M, bring snacks in January. Beginning with N-Q, in February. Beginning with R-S, in March. With T-V, April. With W-Z, May.

2008 Slate of Officers

Here is the slate of officers and members of boards and committees for 2008, presented by the Nominating Committee:

President, Bob Mead. Clerk, Christine Albrecht. Treasurer, Walt Ryan. Associate Treasurer, Betsy Barber. Assistant Treasurer, Sara Buell. Moderator, Robert Giddings. Assistant Moderator, Elizabeth Esty. Financial Secretaries, 2008, Dennis Lape and Louise Petrasko. 2009, Ann Madden. 2010, Emma Norback. Alternates: Charles Jones, Peggy Conant, Nora Adams. Auditors: Harry Black, one position open. Historian: Dick Eppler. Women's Fellowship Representative: Addie Marx.

Executive Board: Members at large, 2009, Mark Hall. 2010, Kathy Duffendack. 2011, David Hostage. Board of Deacons: 2009, Joy Deegan, Don Lee, Jim Louys, Ford Cole. 2010, Donna Mead, Elsa Bradford, Jackie Cole. 2011, Mark Dickinson, Matt Childs, Diane Visconti, Joyce Mulholland. Youth deacons: two positions open. Board of Trustees: 2009, Kevin Ross, Ed Albrecht. 2010, Holly Crowell, Bill Eagleson, Rich Kruczek, Tom Reid. 2011, Rich Grudzias, Alan Skiparis, Larry Pivirotto, John Whinfield.

Board of Outreach: 2009, Beth Ross, Lisa Canas, Amy Webb-Mower, Mark Hostage. 2010, Gretchen Bates, Joy Biggart, Kerrie Dunne, Chris Fitzmaurice. 2011, Cindy Mazzaferro, Robin Sellati, Peter Ploch, Mark Sullivan. Youth member (one year), Eric Ploch. Board of

Christian Education: 2009, Emilee Ziolkowski, Jim Parys, Regina Hahn Selzer. 2010, Sue Branzell, Grace Knipe, Lynn Ryan (Chair), Peggy Allen. 2011, Lucinda Orsini, Linda Milton, Carol Ploch, Beth Barnes. Two youth member positions open.

Board of Music: 2009, Audrey Finkenstadt, Perry Stevens, one position open. 2010, Jane Bower, Marty Swartz, Charlene Black. 2011, Ramin Hakim, Andrew Hostage, Susan Bishop. Youth member (one year). Peter Stephan. Board of Stewardship: 2009, Mike Pownall, Norm Thompson, Betty Prichard. 2010, Tony DePaolo, Ruth MacDonald, Laura Whinfield. 2011, Bill Mann, Leah Sanders, Ken Allen. Flower Committee: 2009, Ruth Gleeton, Sharon Graver, Lori Mann. 2010, Karin Arai, Kelly Bunn, Jenell Janes. 2011, Patti Dickinson, Anne McNulty, Susan Pappas.

Fellowship Committee: 2009, Gary Rowe, June Webster. 2010, Martha Triplett-Strollo, Jaclyn Hissick. 2011, Barb Grudzias, Regan Huntley. Youth member, position open. Library Committee: 2009, Audrey Finkenstadt, Joan Kevorkian. 2010, Ruth Eppler, Nancy Turner. 2011, Lois Splain, Arleen Reid. History Committee: 2009, Marshall Tucker. 2010, Martha Lape. 2011, Carolyn Garthwait. Personnel Committee: 2009, Dan Esty, Dawn Smith. 2010, Bob Porter, Jolinda Heavens. 2011, Bill Gordon, Roy Pritchard.

UCC Delegates: 2009, John Afman,

Continued on the next page

Continued from the previous page

Karen Gravino, Terry Hamely. 2010, Jack Sellati, Norman Thompson, Laura Whinfield. 2011, Attila Ozdemirer, Dennis Lape, Betsy Adams. Delegates for Cheshire Interfaith Housing: 2010, Barbara Barlok. Delegates for Greater Waterbury Interfaith Ministries, 2011, Farshid Hakim. Alternate: Jan Garthwait. Membership Committee: 2009, Jan Cowles, Sharon Brenneman, Kate Hall. 2010, Pam Euerle, Jay Knipe. 2011, Marianne Eagleson, Bobbie Porter, Ken Stevens.

Ushering Committee: 2009, Steven Canada, Jim Lyke. 2010, Noureen Hakim, Glen Thompson. 2011, Ken Euerle, Charles Jones. Nominating Committee: Anne Giddings (chair), Carol Warner, Pam Cappiello, Dennis Lape, five open positions.



Covenant to Care

Many thanks to the following families: Barbour, Bauer, Dickenson, Brunetti, Ryan, and Hakims for providing sheets, assorted bedding, microwave and clothes for both boys and girls for the colder weather.

These items were quickly assigned to various children for distribution. Providing a gift for a child this Christmas is a generous thing. Thank you to the many who provided certificates, gifts, and some assorted "extras" with a child in mind. Blessings to all of you and yours.

Jan Cowles

Giving, and Giving Thanks

Though it's not quite over, this year's pledge season has already been unusually successful. Here are some numbers that stand out:

Number of pledges last year: 303. This year, 317. Number of pledges that increased: Last year, 185. This year, 160 (more than half). Total dollars pledged: Last year, \$623,500. This year: \$640,254. Average pledge: Last year, \$2,058. This year, \$2,020. Number of first-time pledges: Last year, 42. This year, 44. Number of pledges not renewed: Last year, 80. This year, 31.

Last year's pledge drive was close on the heels of the Challenge, but it was still more successful than the previous year's.

So you can interpret these numbers to mean that our church continues to grow, and our members to step forward to put their money behind their faith.

There were no recruits to the Board of Stewardship from Nominating last year. All the new members (Betty Pritchard, Norm Thompson, Laura Whinfield, Bill Mann, Ruth MacDonald, and Mike Pownall) were volunteers after the nominating process was finished, mostly because we felt sorry for the people already on the Board: Tony DePaolo and Richard Cushing.

Quite a few people have told me how difficult they think the work of Stewardship must be, and how difficult they would find it to serve on this board.

Continued on the next page

Continued from the previous page

Quite the contrary, in my experience. I've had a number of very good conversations with people I've known for a long time, but haven't talked to recently, or in a couple of cases, with folks I had never gotten to know previously.



It's also been a powerful witness to me to open the pledge envelopes and record the faithful pledges that people have submitted.

I've discovered some surprising things: that people on fixed incomes are among the first to turn in their pledge cards; that having multiple college tuitions to pay doesn't necessarily prevent people from increasing their pledges; and that plenty of pledges come from people who aren't even members, and in some cases, don't live in Cheshire.

A lot of people have made a lot of decisions to be in community here, and we are all the beneficiaries of this faith-directed decision-making.

May God continue to bless us,

Mike Pownall

A Spooky Ministry

What do you get when you have Madame Butterfly, two witches, one pilgrim, the Cat in the Hat, a monk, a turkey and a cat? You get the serving team for the October 31 Columbus House meal!

Columbus House is a shelter for the homeless in New Haven; our church serves dinner there every time there's a fifth Wednesday in a month – and in October, the fifth Monday was Halloween night.

The residents seemed to enjoy the extra fun caused by a costumed wait staff. In a change of operation, instead of the diners' coming to a window for a plate of food, we served them directly at their tables, a service they are not often accustomed to having.

With a grateful heart, we thank the wonderful cooks of First Congregational: Emma Norback, Bev Euerle, Lori Mann, Grace Knipe, Donna Mead, Lisa Canas, Carol Tucker, Nancy Brunetti, Patti Dickinson, Debbie Sinning, Chris Fitzmaurice, Shirley Albanese, Sharon Graver, Becki & Emma Louys, Martha Lape, Jenell Janes, Emilee Ziolkowski, Betsy Mulé, Kirsten Sullivan, Regan Huntley, Elaine Daly, Jen France, Beth Ross, Kelly Swartz, Karen Gravino, Lindsay Hurlbert, Suzanne Lawson, and Beth Eichelman.

The Halloween serving crew were Karen Gravino, Megan Pappas and her college roommate Jenny Sousa, Jan

Continued on the next page

Continued from the previous page

Cowles, Pam and Ken Euerle, and Joe and Jan Garthwait.

A special thanks also to Jenell Janes, who donated a large bag of hotel toiletries that she saved from traveling; she called ahead and found out that these items are always most welcome. If you travel often and collect such items (little bottles of shampoo, miniature soaps, etc.) and would like to donate them, please let me know.

Our next Columbus House meal is January 30. Holiday Blessings to you all.

Jan Garthwait

Help Us Reach You!

Sometimes, last-minute changes to the church's schedule must be made, and it's necessary to notify lots of our members and friends quickly. From time to time, a member or friend of our church will die, and the funeral is scheduled with only a few days' notice. It's important to get the word out as soon as possible.

That's why First Congregational Church has instituted an e-mail notification system to let the congregation know of important, immediate events in our church life. The system has been in place for a couple of months now, and it works well. If you have e-mail, but the church does not know your e-mail address, you can't take advantage of this important, free communication tool. Won't you send the church your e-mail address? We make several promises to you:

You won't get spam from us. The e-mail notification system is used exclusively to send short, important messages about our church life. We don't send any junk, and we don't let anyone else have the list of addresses.

Your e-mail address is not broadcast. Under our system, those being sent messages are listed as "Unknown Recipients." We will know your address, but it will not be sent with each message.

You may opt out at any time. If, for whatever reason, the e-mail system is not what you want or need, just tell us, and we'll remove your address from the system.

To join this vital communication initiative, just send an e-mail to office@cheshirecongregational.org and you'll be signed up soon!

January Lectionary

Sunday, January 6: Isaiah 60: 1-6.
Psalm 72: 1-7, 10-14. Ephesians 3: 1-12.
Matthew 2: 1-12.

Sunday, January 13: Isaiah 42: 109.
Psalm 29. Acts 10: 34-43. Matthew 3: 13-17.

Sunday, January 20: Isaiah 49: 107.
Psalm 40: 1-11. 1 Corinthians 1: 1-9. John 1: 29-42.

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

Covenant to Care - Thanksgiving

Not what we say about our blessings, but how we use them is the true measure of our Thanksgiving

We give many thanks –

For the people who helped prepare for the dinners: Chris and Ed Albrecht, Fred Turner, Outreach, Leslie Holmes Meyer.

For the people who helped load the cars: Tim Graver, Ken Euerle, Emily and Chris Cowles, Walt Ryan, Kevin Ross.

For the deliverers: Joanna Sgorbati, Jan Garthwait.

For the many who donated gifts, time, and talent: Canadas, Ross, Orsini, Chris and John Fitzmaurice, Monllos, Mann, Swartz, Plocks, June Webster, DePaolos, Johmanns, Lisa Canas, Thompson, Pappas, Sara Buell, Kathy Duffendack.

Also, Jane Richards, Roke, Euerle, Anne Tait, Knipe, Cavazuti, Marilyn and Bill Gordon, Warner, Arai, Albrechts, Dick Miller, Ellie Gager, Shirley Albanese, Marianne and Bill Eagleson, Colonizers, Hurlburts, Reid, Charles and Nora Adams.

Also, Estys, Ryan, Brauzell, Outreach, Louys, Visconit, Nancy Brunetti, Ford Cole, Brenneman, Kostin, Benedetto, Mulés, Sgorbati, Time and Sharon Graver, Sue Chatfield and John Afman, Black, Warner, Demacs, Howards, Emilee Ziolkowski, Rich Grudzias, Walt and Lynn Ryan.

Also, Cheshire 4-H Livestock Club, Peggy Allen, Alison McCaffrey, Kathy Pavlick, Wendy Henn, Stacey Petruzella,

Pat Leber, Shoop, Susan and David Hostage, Beth Barnes, Lape, Carol Cummings, Kevin and Beth Ross, Jan Garthwait, McNultys, Cowles.

Thank you for being a congregation of outreach!

Jan Cowles



Fall Cleanup Thanks

The Board of Trustees would like to thank all the members and friends of First Congregational who participated in the Fall cleanup day. We accomplished most of the work that needed to be done.

The help that we received from the Boy Scouts (and their fathers) and members of our Youth Group was most appreciated. Without their help, we would need to have scheduled another day.

A special thanks to Total Tree Care, who donated a commercial chipper and one of their employees to help us eliminate a significant amount of debris that had accumulated over the past couple of years. Total Tree Care has been a good friend of the church over the years, and we appreciate all they have done for us.

The Board of Trustees

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

Write an ‘Ethical Will’

Gather with our church family for the next in a series of dinners. On Thursday evening, January 10, Donna’s Dinner Team will be at work once again providing a meal for a small cost. Then, at 7:15 p.m., our program for the evening will be “Ethical Wills,” led by Cindy Wright.

Many people are familiar with the concept of a last will and testament, the means of distributing one’s assets after death, and making other important statements at the time of decease. But have you ever considered writing an ethical will?

An ethical will is a way to share your values with your family in the same way that a will of inheritance provides instructions for bequeathing your valuables. However, there are important differences. An ethical will is not a legal document. An ethical will is usually shared with others while the author is still alive.

Ethical wills are written by people as a foundation for estate planning to help articulate important goals. Some people find it easier to write a legal will or living will once they have written an ethical will. Ethical wills are also written by people facing challenging life situations and at different life stages, for example, betrothed couples, expectant and new parents, growing families.

Join us on January 10 to learn more about writing your ethical will to preserve a legacy of values for your family, friends

and community. Child care will be provided, but please let us know beforehand. Honor the past, capture the present, and inform the future by creating a ‘legacy of the spirit’.

Looking ahead, the following Church Thursday All Church Dinner will be February 7, with the theme “Africa Night.” We will learn more about our Malawi mission, try our hand at a drumming circle, and enjoy typical African food.



Lenten Small Groups

Lent begins February 6, and the Parish Life Team is planning a new small group series to meet in homes and in the church. Every week, each small group will view one of a series of videos in the “Questions of Faith” series as a springboard for discussion.

Produced by EcuFilm, the “Questions of Faith” series invites thoughtful discussion for the basic questions of belief and meaning that come to us over and over in our lives. Each video presents contemporary Protestant, Jewish and Roman Catholic thinkers ranging in vocation from priests to psychotherapists to Old Testament scholars to evangelists to preachers to sociologists. All are welcome to take part, youth members – we invite you to come. More details to come.

From the Deacons: Some New Directions

This has been a year of transition for First Congregational Church, and as such, it's been a somewhat unusual one for the Board of Deacons as well. Certainly, we performed our traditional duties: serving communion, delivering flowers, attending to the needs of members and friends of the church, and celebrating happy occasions.

But this year, we have headed in some new directions too.

In January, we hosted the farewell reception for Rick Dacey and his family – a sad time in terms of their leaving Cheshire, but also a time to hear Rick affirm positively that this change was not about him, but about the church's "Walk with Christ", which has gone on for more than 275 years and still continues. In the absence of a Parish Care Minister, we also assisted Alison and the Parish Care committee with some of their very important endeavors.

The Deacons were charged with forming search committees for an Interim Minister and a new Senior Minister. We assisted Debbie Gravell with the Confirmation process as it relates to CE and the Youth Ministry. We began work with the Membership Committee to help determine the true number of members of the church.

Perhaps our most enjoyable task was being an integral part of planning and orchestrating First Congregational Church's first Homecoming, an event that

also honored our congregation's 50-year members. This great affair, held in September, included representation from every generation.

There's a wonderful old hymn that includes these words by James Russell Lowell: "New occasions teach new duties." Even though he wrote them more than 160 years ago, those words apply perfectly to our church, right now. Most people find change

unsettling, and we appreciate that. The Board of Deacons has grown this year in our "Walk with Christ", and we are endeavoring to bring that kind of positive growth to the congregation as a whole.

Please remember to "Enjoy the Journey"!

I wish you peace.

*Howard S. Murphy, Jr.
Senior Deacon*

Youth Group News

The Yutes Lock-in was well attended. There were fun games and some great discussions, and we even got a good night's sleep so that we'd be awake and ready to help with the church leaf clean-up the following morning. Twenty-five energetic kids with rakes helped make made short work of the parsonage and green. December saw the group walking the Labyrinth in Woodbridge and sharing their voices by Christmas Caroling.

Here are our upcoming events:
Continued on the next page

Continued from the previous page

January 6, 20 and 27: 5 to 7 pm
Regular meetings, with dinner provided, in the Parish Hall. New members are always welcomed. There are no requirements for participation except an open spirit.

On January 11 to 13, about 25 youth and adults will be on retreat at the Monadnock Bible Center in New Hampshire. (All the available slots have been filled.)

Summer Mission Trip Update: Slots are filling up fast. If you plan to attend this year's trip, please get your deposit in as soon as possible. Youth and parents should visit our web site, www.yutes.org, every week for details and last-minute news.



In Matthew 4:4, Jesus explained that God's Word is central to true satisfaction: "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Interested? See Beth Ross, or sign up for more information.



Milestones

In the Life of our Church Family

Deaths

Dorothy Shultz, November 16
Ruth Kurtz, November 22
William Gere III, November 28
Catherine Ricci (Melanie Pivrotto's mother), December 4
Frederick J. Mullaney, December 5

Our Many Blessings

"Count your blessings," the saying goes. But how often do we stop to do that? All too often, we're task-oriented, which means we're working to fix some problem. That means we spend a lot of time focused on problems, and not enough time thanking God for the blessings in our lives.

Here at First Congregational Church, we are blessed in dozens, or probably hundreds, of ways. Here are some of our blessings. We invite you to post this list in your home so that you may be reminded frequently of the good in all of our lives:

- The Challenge – 205 families in the congregation stepped forward to pay off some \$400,000 of accumulated church debt. As a result of the Challenge, reserves have been fully funded according to the budget for 2006 and 2007.
- Members and Friends have also stepped forward with funds for Church Drive, Homecoming and other church activities and projects.
- Church Thursdays – Dinners and Small Group Meetings – Fellowship, Sharing and Learning
- The recent photography show, "Where Do You See God?"

Continued on the next page

Continued from the previous page

- Beautiful banners and new seat cushions in the Sanctuary.
- Members' and Friends' donating time and energy to Church activities and functions – leaf raking, cooking and serving food, preparing for services, maintaining the Church.
- The Communication Task Force and recent improvements to the Parish Post, the Weekly Bulletin and the web site.
- Small Group Expos and the forming of new Small Groups –In Response to Our Family's Needs: Bible Studies, Bereavement, the Bible and Terrorism, The Inferno, Financial Awareness, Genealogy.
- Our Homecoming Day 2007, "Open House at God's Place," a celebration of our life together and our life with God.
- Flowers: Weekly bouquets, lilies and poinsettias in the sanctuary; flower delivery and home visits.
- Scholarships.
- Videos to share our services with those who can not get out.
- Fair exchange coffee and a better venue for the wonderful food at coffee hour.
- Expansion of the Parish Care program: the Welcoming Team, greeters, "Pew Pals."

- Small Groups pamphlets.
- A revitalized Membership Committee, and new members joining our church family.
- Special Services: Confirmation, the Easter Vigil, Maundy Thursday, Lenten Sunday Evening Services, Christmas Eve.
- 70 years of the Strawberry Festival.
- The Yutes and Sunday School – Programs to Nurture and Guide: Confirmation preparation, Children's Day, the annual Christmas Pageant, the summer church school, vacation Bible school, Stepping Stones, Yutes meetings and Mission Trip.

And that isn't all! More blessings in next month's Parish Post!

Letters of Thanks

Dear Congregational Friends,

The flowers delivered to me were beautiful! Can't express my delight enough to my wonderful church friends.

Love & prayers,

Dolores Bozzuto

My sincere heartfelt thanks to all those members of the church for the many prayers, cards, flowers, dinners and the removal of leaves. I am fortunate indeed to belong to a church with so many kind and caring people. Your thoughtfulness will long be remembered.

Sincerely,

Nadine Simmons