

THE PARISH POST

THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

CHESHIRE, CONNECTICUT
www.cheshirecongregational.org

Volume XXVI

January, 2009

No. 1

A New Senior Minister for Our Church

By unanimous vote of the Congregation on December 14, First Congregational Church has called the Rev. Jeffrey D. Braun to be our new Senior Minister. He will start here in mid-March.

Since September 2004, Jeff has served in Redding, Conn. as associate minister at The First Church of Christ, Congregational. There, his varied responsibilities included worship leadership, pastoral care, senior high youth ministry, mission work, and program development and leadership (such as special worship services, spirituality series, retreats, guest lectures, and cultural events). Jeff worked closely with the church council, board of deacons, and Christian education committees.

Jeff was born in Bronxville, N. Y., in 1968. In 1986, he graduated from Staples High School in Westport, the town in which he grew up and in which his family and he attended the Greens Farms Congregational Church. He earned his undergraduate degree with honors in Rhetoric from Bates College in 1990.

From 1991 through 2001, Jeff worked in corporate advertising and marketing,

serving such clients as Procter & Gamble, Citibank, Brunswick Corporation, AT&T, IBM/Latin America, GM/Saab, Johnson & Johnson, and Neutrogena.

He is a 2004 graduate of Yale Divinity School, where he received the prestigious Henry Hallam Tweedy Prize (a distinction awarded to the graduating student who displays exceptional promise for pastoral leadership). Since graduating, Jeff has served on the Yale Divinity School Board of Advisors, and has helped teach the "Introduction to Pastoral Care" course as an adjunct member of the Divinity faculty.

Before his tenure in Redding, Jeff interned at First Church Congregational in Fairfield. His pastoral training includes a 2002 chaplaincy/clinical pastoral care program at Norwalk Hospital. He and his wife, Lori Braun (who also graduated from Staples High School in 1986), met in 1990 and married in 1997. They have three daughters: Serena, age 8; Anike (pronounced: ah-NEE-kay), age 6; and Olivia, age 3.

Within the Redding community, he

Continued on the next page

Continued from the front page

served on the Easton Redding Community Coalition (a group of parents and educators focused on the issues related to teenage alcohol and drug use) and participated regularly in town events, such as Eagle Scout Courts of Honor, Boy Scout award dinners, and the Redding Volunteer Fire Department's annual recognition dinner.

Within the United Church of Christ, Jeff twice co-coordinated training sessions for Fairfield East and Fairfield West Association congregations participating in the "God Is Still Speaking" initiative.

In addition to time with family (his first love), Jeff enjoys bicycling, hiking, and generally being outdoors, as well as comedy, reading, writing, and travel.



Music at First Congregational

This year's Memorial Music Sunday will take place at one 10 a.m. service on Sunday, March 29. The Senior Choir will sing American composer Morton Lauridsen's *Lux aeterna* for chorus and soloists. The service will be accompanied by pianist and organist Allan Conway.

A special thank you to our choirs, hand bells, and soloists whose singing and playing inspired us in the Advent and Christmas season. We are fortunate to have such remarkable talent within our church family. We look forward to another year of praising God through song.

Worship Schedule For January

Sunday, January 4: Services at 9 and 11. Dave Buchan preaching. Communion Sunday. Food offerings will be received; the food of the month is canned tuna.

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

Sunday, January 18: Services at 9 and 11. Dave Buchan preaching.

Sunday, January 25: Services at 9 and 11. Dave Buchan preaching.

Kitchen Clean-Up, Fix-Up

Our church kitchen serves us well, with many groups using 'her.' However, she is beginning to show wear and tear. We have begun sprucing her up, but we still have a long way to go. We soon will be cleaning out cabinets and reorganizing. Ken Euerle has kindly offered to begin painting with his team of helpers in January.



Won't you consider joining us in this effort? We need your ideas. You may speak with Carol Cummings at 272-3446, Jan Garthwait or Bobbie Porter. Our 'new' kitchen is going to look great!

P.S. When we finish this project, we will have a kitchen 'shower' for her.

Moses: The Man and the Message

When our children were little, Patty and I took a tour of Universal Studios in California. Universal must have been the company that brought us the old Cecil B. DeMille film “The Ten Commandments,” because, as part of the tour, our little bus came to the Red Sea.



The waters were supposed to part as the bus drove through. But we did not fare as well as the children of Israel on this one. And Charlton Heston wasn't there to play Moses for us.

The wiring on the bus must have become wet – and we stalled about half way through the crossing. A truck had to come and pull us out. So much for our soggy introduction to Moses!

Moses is one of the towering figures of the Old Testament. He was a leader – a military commander, a deliverer, nation builder, and a man of God.

Few have had his impact on the shaping of our heritage, and his influence continues to this day. His life has inspired paintings by artists like Rembrandt and

Chagall. Who can forget Michelangelo's famed statue of Moses? Authors all the way from Thomas Mann to Elie Wiesel have been fascinated by him.

Churchill studied Moses as a leader. This January we'll have a series of sermons which focus on the life of Moses. What was the secret of his life? How was he able to accomplish all that he did? His experience can guide us in our own pilgrimage through life with all its joys and perplexities. We can learn from Moses.

Our services are Sunday mornings at 9:00 and 11:00. Child care and church school are provided.

*In Christ,
Dave Buchan, Interim Senior Minister*



Women's Bible Study

Women's Bible study is held Wednesdays at 10 a.m. in the church parlor. The facilitator is Debbie Gravell. All women of the church are invited to join us as they are able. Please feel free to join at any time. We use a study guide series by Max Lucado, cost \$6. Please call Debbie in advance if you need childcare and she will try to arrange it (272-5323).

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

9:00

Date	Thou Art	Red Sea Prod.	Desert Tales	Gospel Games
Jan. 4	Grade 6	Grades 2	Grades 3&4	Grade 5
Jan. 11	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 2	Grades 3& 4
Jan. 18	Grades 3&4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grades 2
Jan. 25	Grades 2	Grade 3&4	Grade 5	Grade 6

11:00

Date	Thou Art	Red Sea Prod.	Desert Tales	Gospel Games
Jan. 4	Worship	Worship	Worship	Worship
Jan. 11	Week Off	Grades 2-4	Grades 5/6	Week Off
Jan. 18	Grades 5/6	Week Off	Week Off	Grades 2-4
Jan. 25	Week Off	Week Off	Grades 2-4	Grades 5/6

Christian Education in January

The Bible Journeys Workshop Rotation for Grades 2-6 in January has to do with John the Baptist. Children will know what workshop they will go to by the schedule shown here, the bulletin or the Bible Journeys Board in the hallway across from Room 8.

Thou Art, Room 8: All grades will make a soap on a rope dove to remind them of how baptism symbolizes that our sins are washed away. Workshop leaders for this workshop will need to prepare soap clay in advance of each week's lesson. The recipe is in the lesson plan.

Red Sea Productions, Room 9: Children will visit stations of preparation for the birth of the Messiah as a part of a play, "Wilderness Experience." They will act out the preparation play.

Desert Tales, Room 10: Children will watch the video "John the Baptist" from the New Testament Animated Bible Series.

Discussion will follow the video. Popcorn will be served using our new popcorn maker. The workshop leader and shepherd will need to make the popcorn and clean up afterward.

Gospel Games, Room 11: Children will begin an object identification game to introduce the concept of prophecy. Children will play the game "Wheel of Fortune" in teams, solving the puzzle for points.

Mission Updates: Our families participated in the UNICEF collection at Halloween time. Unicef total donation this year was \$86.53; thank you to all the families who collected.

We also sent 55 filled shoeboxes to Operation Christmas Child. Thank you to all the church members who made a shoebox. Thank you also to the Caring Crafts ladies who made the teddy bears to go in the boxes.

Parish Care in October and November

Here is what your Parish Care Committee and its volunteers did in October and November:

Bereavement – Three people were sent the Bereavement Series booklets and invited to join the Bereavement group, which meets on the last Thursday of the month in Room 11 at 7 p.m. A Remembrance Service was held December 18 in the chapel for anyone who suffered a loss this year.

Birth/Baptism – There were four baptisms, each receiving a plaque commemorating this wonderful event.. The committee received four more baby blankets for future delivery.

Cards – 42 cards were sent containing sympathy, get well, thinking of you, birthday, anniversary, and thank you sentiments.

Caring Visitors – Eight parishioners are being visited by Caring Visitors. There is a need for more Caring Visitors to visit once or twice a month with our parishioners who are bed ridden or home bound. Please contact Donna Mead if you are interested in becoming a visitor.

Chores – One grateful parishioner had a long awaited paint job done by one of our caring parishioners.

Meals – 19 meals were delivered. Jackie Cole will be the contact person for January and February. The three coordinators met with the Parish Care Coordinator and discussed alternate

methods of providing meals that could possibly be more efficient and timely.

Prayer Pagers – Four of the seven pagers were used.

Stephen Ministry – 53.5 hours were spent by 10 ministers with 11 care receivers.

Telephone – On November 1, the Telephone Ministry began with 11 volunteers in place. This will be a welcome return of an important ministry to our parishioners. Seven calls have been made.

The Parish Care Coordinator spent a total of 75 hours in October and November.

Have you prayed
for someone who has a
Prayer Pager?



Instructions are on the “pastel page” in
each Sunday’s Bulletin.

(If you would like a prayer pager, please
call the office at 272-5323, ext. 10, for a
referral to a minister.)

Notes from the Executive Board

At the December Executive Board meeting, church safety was discussed. In the fall, Executive Board, Trustees, and the Safe Church Committee became involved in the question of personal safety if and when people come to the church office looking for food or money, especially when only one staff member is present.

As a result, recommendations were made by the Safe Church Committee for additional security measures. These recommendations have been implemented and include formal training provided to the staff by the Cheshire Police Department and security devices that allow us to continue to function as a caring house of worship while providing an added measure of protection for our church family.

Other Items: The Nominating Committee is continuing to fill positions, although most are filled. Church worship attendance remains steady, and attendance at church school is good. The Personnel Committee has reviewed the Church Personnel Manual. No significant changes were recommended to Executive Board.

In the Hospital?

If you or a family member is in the hospital, please remember to tell the office at First Congregational Church. We want to minister to you, but because of federal privacy laws, we may not ask hospitals whether you are a patient.

Annual Meeting Plans

The church's Annual Meeting will be **Sunday, January 25**, beginning with a potluck dinner at 4 p.m. hosted by the Deacons. There will be a short program prior to the annual meeting. We want to make this a time of warm fellowship for our parish family, as well as an opportunity to do God's business.

More information will be forthcoming concerning specific requests, but please contact Jackie and Ford Cole by calling 271-9041 or e-mailing fcole7619@cox.net, or Joyce Mulholland, 272-0140 or Joycemulholland@live.com if there is some specific way that you would like to contribute.

The bad weather date for the Annual Meeting will be Monday, January 26.

Mission Trip Concert

First Congregational Church has two students at the prestigious Eastman School of Music, and both have agreed to participate in a concert to help underwrite some of the costs of our upcoming adult mission trip to the Gulf Coast. Eric Biggart is a classical guitarist, and Jonny Allen is a percussionist. Trio Volta and our own Praise Band will also perform.

The concert will be held on Sunday, January 4, in our sanctuary, beginning at 7 p.m. A free will offering will be received, and the Board of Outreach will host a reception following the concert.

The Wrapup of 2008's Pledge Drive

Now that pledge season is nearly over, and our budget has been approved, it's a good time to sit back and take stock. You've probably heard that pledge commitments fell off considerably from last year's record-setting total, though there were several points for optimism. Has God been less good to us, or have we been less forthcoming in our return to God of his blessings?

As of December 10, our total for all pledges received this year was \$545,421, a little more than \$100,000 or 15% less than last year's final total of \$646,200. There have been 277 pledges so far, compared with 327 last year, a decrease also of more than 15%. However, we have a reasonable hope of receiving still perhaps 20 or 25 more pledges, though these will be too late to have a direct bearing on the budget process.

Despite this sobering assessment, you may have heard that, as of October 26, Pledge Sunday, we were actually more than \$100,000 ahead of last year, an amazing feat. This is probably a result of the leadership pledging of the Executive Board and a couple of other boards and committees, who turned in their pledges a full month early, and the effective advocacy of Bob Mead, Tom Reid, Lynn Ryan, and Eric Ploch in stewardship moments during services leading up to Pledge Sunday. We got off to a roaring start, even as the stock market tanked! For those who responded, thank you for your timeliness as well as your generosity.

The average pledge this year was down just slightly from last year: \$1969 this year compared with \$1976 last year. There were 91 pledge increases, and 112 decreases. While our pledge total this year is off, so far, about 15.6% from last year's total, the average pledge for those who have pledged is off only about 2.9%.

So most of our short-fall this year is from pledges not renewed, rather than from decreases in pledged amount. Along with this, there were only 11 new pledges, or ones renewed after a lapse, whereas there were many more last year: 46.

So the answer is that those of us who have pledged have collectively been nearly as generous giving back to God this year as last. For whatever reason, however, fewer of us are deciding to make that return.

Perhaps that will change next year. We've heard that tough economic times turn people back to God and make them more grateful for their blessings. Perhaps this recession has more to teach us.

Your Board of Stewardship thanks you for your generosity to your church. If you haven't yet made a pledge of support to empower the church under the new senior minister in the new year, it's never too late: we'll be happy to take your pledge any time. No amount is too small to make a difference when combined with 277 other pledges, all moved by the one Spirit.

The Board of Stewardship

'Scripture by Heart' Returns

A new opportunity for "Scripture by Heart" is coming in January to gather around the Lenten lectionary texts.

On Palm Sunday, we will share the Passion story according to Mark's Gospel, and on Maundy Thursday we will share the texts of the Last Supper during our Maundy Thursday Meal and Worship service.

Being part of Scripture by Heart is more than memorizing the texts and repeating them back.

Each member of Scripture by Heart studies a biblical text, depending on their comfort level, which they will come to know by heart, which entails developing a deep understanding and nuanced interpretation of the passage.

Then, in Sunday worship or in special services, members of the group will relate the Scripture texts orally, from the heart, as they were originally intended.

This is not the same as acting. The oral performance of biblical texts is a liturgical and interpretive act with deep roots in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. You will be guided through a spiritually enriching process of both coming to know the texts and preparing to perform them. Please let Alison McCaffrey know if you are interested.

Offering Envelopes for 2009

As you may have noticed, the 2009 pledge card did not ask "Do you want envelopes?" Here is how we will provide them for 2009. If you had envelopes for 2008, you will get them for 2009 unless you tell us otherwise. Conversely, if you did not have envelopes last year and want them for 2009, please let us know.

We mailed envelopes to members who live in Cheshire on December 29. Envelopes for out-of-town members were available for pick-up in the parlor beginning Christmas Eve. We do it this way because we mail them bulk rate for local, and first class for out-of-town which costs considerably more per box.

Financial Secretaries Emma Norback, Ann Madden, Louise Petrasko, and Dennis Lape



Milestones

In the Life of our church family

Baptisms

Layna Renee Paul, daughter of Kevin James Paul & Renee Kurtz Paul, November 23.

Jason Patrick Steinfeld, son of Eric Scott Steinfeld and Jennifer Lobdell Steinfeld, November 30.

McGuire Platt Auitable, daughter of Anthony John Auitable and Kirstin Bergvik Auitable, November 30.

The Lectionary Explained

In each issue of the Parish Post, there is printed a lectionary for the month. Here are some questions and answers to help members and friends use this worship resource.

What is a lectionary? A lectionary is a list of scriptural texts recommended for use in worship or study. Most of the time, they consist of a reading from the Old Testament; a Psalm; a reading from the Epistles; and a Gospel reading. This can change, however: During Easter, for example, the Old Testament selection is usually replaced with one from the Acts of the Apostles. Sometimes there are readings from the Apocrypha (“wisdom books” that may not be included in every Bible).

Is each Sunday’s lectionary used as a basis for the worship service? It depends. Some ministers try to base their sermons on that day’s lectionary; some don’t.

Who decides which Bible passages are in the lectionary? An ecumenical group called the Consultation on Common Texts, consisting of Bible scholars and church officials from the United States and Canada.

Do all Christians use the same lectionary? In the United States and Canada, yes, pretty much; it’s meant for all Christians, Catholics and Protestants, lay and clergy. Many Christian churches choose to read the same lessons aloud each Sunday to emphasize the sense of

there being one community united in Jesus as we journey through the church year.

Why should I read the lectionary passages? Reading the scriptures helps define our Christian faith, and rather than doing this in a haphazard way, the lectionary is a regular, ordered way to encounter the Bible throughout the year. Some of the time, the suggested readings take us to unfamiliar places in scripture, and offer new insights into our faith.

If I read all the lectionary passages, will I eventually read the whole Bible? Probably not, although you will have experienced most of it. The lectionary is constructed so that a very large selection of verses are included over a three-year period, but some verses of many books are omitted.

Lectionary for January

Sunday, January 4: Jeremiah 31: 7-14; Psalm 147: 12-20; Wisdom of Solomon 10: 15-21; Ephesians 1: 3-14; John 1: 1-18.

Sunday, January 11: Genesis 1: 1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19: 1-7; Mark 1: 4-11.

Sunday, January 18: 1 Samuel 3: 1-20; Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18; 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20; John 1: 43-51.

Sunday, January 25: Jonah 3: 1-5, 10; Psalm 62: 5-12; 1 Corinthians 7: 29-31; Mark 1: 14-20.

Budget Passed at December Congregational Meeting

Here is a report on the December 7 congregational meeting.

Nominating Committee: Anne Giddings, Nominating Chair, read the committee report, noting changes in a few positions due to the new by-law revisions. She reminded those at the meeting of the many others serving the church, and saying that these positions are just a part of the work done by our church community.

She thanked the Nominating Committee members for their efforts: Pam Capiello, Joy Deegan, Dennis Lape, Ann Madden, Mark Sullivan, and Carol Warner.

Senior Search Committee: An update was given by Chair Kirsten Sullivan. She provided the good news that many already knew – a candidate had been selected – and expressed sincere thanks to all Search

Committee members for dedicating their time and skills to this search.

The 2009 Budget: Walt Ryan, Treasurer, presented the proposed 2009 budget.

He started by thanking Budget Committee members, saying that this last round was an extremely arduous effort to meet expenses with expected revenue.

He also commended Stewardship on their work on the pledge drive this year, especially in light of the financial situation.

Here are some of the significant points of Walt's presentation:

- There is a significant shortfall in 2009 expected pledge income: about \$100,000. Due to this, the 2009 budget needed to be revised by cutting expenses.

- Reserve funding will not be completed; this will account for just under half of the deficit amount (\$50,000).

These dollars will need to be found another way, perhaps through a separate appeal. In addition, funding for other capital projects will be impacted.

- Salaries make up about 70 percent of the budget. One of the main objectives was to not cut any staff, and the revisions reflect that.

However, this budget shows that staff will be kept at current salary levels, with no 2009 increases.

Dollars for sabbaticals and supplementary administrative support have also been removed for 2009.

- Inflationary increases for maintenance and operations have been cut, except for fuel and electric.

- Board and committee budgets were cut, including Outreach, Christian Education, Stewardship, Executive, and Music.

- The good news is that the Endowment funds have not been touched.

The motion to approve the 2009 budget as presented was passed.

We Thank You!

Thank you to all who donated baked goods, candy, jam, herbs, and crafts for the Christmas Fair, to all our church artists who donated paintings for our first artwork sale, to all who volunteered their time to work preparing and serving lunch, to all who staffed the tables, to those who helped with set-up and clean-up, and to all who came to shop and have lunch! A special thank you to Beth Ross for her help and encouragement.

Through all your efforts we were able to raise over \$800 that will go directly to the Board of Outreach for distribution, and a like amount that the Colonizers, Ladies Aid and Tuesday Circle women's groups will distribute through their outreach. Colonizers supports a child a Family Village Farm in India through the UCC Child Sponsorship program and each of the groups support food banks, shelters, and other agencies serving the needy in our area.

The Christmas Fair Committee

Thank you everyone for the wonderful response to donations of Thanksgiving Dinners. We enabled 50 families to have a delicious turkey Thanksgiving dinner.

Kevin and Beth Ross

Thank you to Hope Reinhard and her Cheshire High School group of students who helped to mail out the Advent Mailing this year. This was a big project and this group willingly accepted the challenge with great success. We so appreciate all of the help that Hope and her group have provided this year with mailings, baking cornbread for Thanksgiving and coming in weekly to do some dusting.

First Congregational Office Staff

We would like to thank the entire congregation and staff for all of the love and support that we received in 2008. We received so many gracious gifts - two beautiful baby blankets from Caring Crafts accompanied by a lovely visit from Lisa Canas, a delicious dinner from Meals Ministry made with love by Grace Knipe, a very special baptism ceremony along with the gift of "Following in the Footsteps of Jesus" frames, and so very much more. Our church family has kindly blessed us with an outpouring of love and support. Thank you all so much!

Chris, John, Patrick & Stephen Fitzmaurice