

THE PARISHIONER

THE FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, WOODBRIDGE 1738-2009

Sunday Worship 10:00 a.m.

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January 2010

NOTICE OF CONGREGATIONAL MEETING



The membership of The First Church of Christ, Woodbridge, is hereby called to meeting on Sunday, January 31, 2010, in the Parish House at 11:30 a.m. after the fellowship hour in order:

1. To receive and act upon the Treasurer's Report for 2009.
2. To hear the Audit Committee's report.
3. To receive the final report of the Board of Stewardship on the pledge drive.
4. To receive and act upon the Board of Trustees' recommended budget for 2010.
5. To elect a Treasurer, members of the Board of Stewardship, and members of the Nominating Committee.
6. To transact any other business appropriate to come before the meeting.

Dated December 12, 2009

Janet Maley, Clerk

Church Council

Your Church Council met on the evening of December 7, 2009. We began by reflecting on the nature of change and about our own values and Christian values.

Next, we sought to discern how best to respond to our own sense of scarcity versus abundance. In many ways we are a very blessed church. As of this writing, of the 97 pledges now in, over a third of those pledging increased their pledges, while about half remained at the same level of giving. We celebrate this generosity!

Yet, at the same time, we know that the total amount pledged to date (at the "Parishioner" printing of December 15) represents only 76% of that needed to meet the barebones 2010 preliminary budget we adopted in September. These fiscal realities, mixed with emotional discomfort and spiritual concern, permeated the rest of the Council's agenda for the night. How best do we proceed as a congregation?

While no decisions have yet been made, here is a foretaste of the difficult choices Council contemplated to try to bring expenditures in line with revenues:

Should we close the Church office one day per week?

Should we begin to have volunteer church members clean the parish house and church on a regular basis?

How about selling off some of our antiques?

Could we use recordings instead of live music at church?

Is it worth what we will save in the short run, if we neglect some of our buildings and grounds?

What would cutting back our Christian Service budget say about us?

Should we ask staff to begin paying their own health care costs?

What would worship be like without our Bell, Senior, and Children's choirs?

Should we *not* be blessed with significantly more pledges, these are some of the possibilities that we must face. The church is experiencing significant financial hardship, and difficult decisions will have to be made. Won't you consider what you can do to help the church thrive in these tough times? Please let us know if you can increase your pledge. Do remember that if, at any time, your situation changes, you can always adjust the amount you have pledged.



Pastors Corner

The Rev. Dr. Sara E. Penn-Strah

My Dear Friends,

As I write, the Advent Season is in full swing and we are anticipating the night of mystery, Christmas Eve, when the Word Made Flesh comes to earth. What a wondrous thing to celebrate!

Anticipation! We wait Christ's coming with great anticipation but we also prepare ourselves to be open to the new thing God wants to do through us.

In that mode of preparation, I have registered for a two-day workshop offered by Andover Newton Theological Seminary in early February. It is a workshop that asks what new leadership skills are needed for the new world that is emerging. It will be led in part by Brian McLaren who speaks and trains church people to think about the new forms church is taking. The basic premise is this: the leadership skills that once led to success in the church don't insure much of anything any more, except perhaps exhaustion and burnout. Being a preacher, teacher, counselor, caregiver, administrator, program planner, Biblical scholar, historian, ethicist and theologian all rolled into one doesn't do it either.

The workshop should help me develop a clearer understanding of the practices essential to effective and faithful leadership. It will help me help our church wrestle with what it means to be a church that can transform lives in this current day and in the future into which God will lead us. The Reverend Steve Sterner, Executive Minister for Local Church Ministries of the UCC, recently addressed the notion that a new sort of church might be emerging. Here's a paraphrase of some of what he said:

There is the "Existing Church" and the "Emerging Church." Neither is good or bad. Many churches have characteristics of both.

Steve would describe the Existing Church this way:

- The Existing Church is interested in perpetuating where it is, or where its memory is.
- The Existing Church has members. Membership requirements are few.
- The Existing Church looks to the denomination for resources for its life.
- The Existing Church blames the denomination if its life is not what it would like.
- The Existing Church has lots of committees and focuses on programs.
- The Existing Church is often pastor or program driven.
- The Existing Church has been stable or declining for several decades.
- The Existing Church draws its identity from historic theology and practices.
- The Existing Church sees technology as a tool to be used.

Steve would describe the Emerging Church this way:

- The Emerging Church is interested in moving to where its vision is.
- The Emerging Church is mission driven.
- The Emerging Church has less interest in structure and more interest in relational communities.

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The Emerging Church uses resources from multiple sources.
 The Emerging Church draws its identity from multiple connections and partnerships.
 The Emerging Church has disciples. There are expectations for being a disciple.
 The Emerging Church sees technology as part of its ethos.
 The Emerging Church does not look to the denomination for its survival.
 The Emerging Church is drawn to networks and relationships more than historical and theological ties.

In truth, we probably have characteristics of both the Existing Church and of the Emerging Church here as well. In the New Year, let's use these categories and descriptions to think about who we are and how we are called to be in ministry and mission together as God leads us to a new future.

I look forward to reporting on the workshop to you in the New Year.

May we share all the blessings of the coming year with one another.

Sara



Worship in January

December 27: The First Sunday of the Christmas Season. Intergenerational Worship. 9:50 a.m. Christmas Carol Hymn Sing. Sara Kroon preaching.

January 3: The Second Sunday of Christmas. Holy Communion; intergenerational worship. John 1:1-9: 10-18.

January 10: Epiphany 1: Baptism of Christ. Isaiah 43:1-7 (Through Isaiah, God says, "I have redeemed you; when you pass through the waters, I will be with you; they shall not overcome you." Luke 3:15-17, 21-22.

(John the Baptizer talks about the one who is coming; and then when he baptizes Jesus a voice comes from heaven saying "you are my son, the beloved with you I am well pleased.") We will renew our baptism.

January 17: Epiphany 2: John 2:1-11 (The wedding at Cana - an extravagant sign of Jesus' identity); 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. (We are united in one spirit.)

January 24: Epiphany 3: 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a. (We are all gifted by the Holy Spirit); Luke 4:14-20 (Jesus preaches in his hometown synagogue. He quotes Isaiah about being anointed to bring the Good News). What does it mean to bring the good news? We are all given gifts by the one spirit to make the good news happen.

January 31: Epiphany 4: HYMN SING: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (love passage). Luke 4:21-30: (The people in Jesus' hometown synagogues react in anger to his prophetic claims and try to throw him off the cliff.) What does it mean to bring the Good News? Sometimes it means telling hard truths. What have been some hard things for you to learn about God or following Jesus? What has made it possible for you to hear or follow them?





Grow Your Church: a Semi-Regular Column with Facts about Church Growth

Across the nation, about 50% of new church members tend to become inactive with the first 12-18 months of joining a church. What is the most important factor in preventing this drop-out?

New members who make six significant relationships within the first six months of joining a church usually remain active members. What is a significant relationship? Becoming involved in some group in the church—fellowship groups like choir, being befriended, being invited to take part in a mission project, etc. If you want your church to grow, seek out and make friends with new people!

End of Life Healthcare Decisions

On Sunday, January 17, Rev. David Schneider, a member of our church, will preach on the theological and ethical issues in the making of end of life health care decisions, both for yourself and when acting on behalf of someone else. After the service, Dave, who is also an attorney, will join with Pastor Sara, Dr. Dick Fearon and Dr. Scott Whyte, and additional members of the church who are health care providers, to lead a discussion on this topic which is of importance to so many of us. We look forward to your joining with us.



Learn How You Can Help Our Church Grow—It's Easy!

Recent demographic studies indicate that 60-75% of the population in our Connecticut communities are “de-churched”—people who have grown up in the church but left it as adults. Even though they do not attend church regularly, the majority of these folks describe themselves as “spiritual,” meaning they believe in God, they pray regularly, they read the Bible and even participate in some kind of regular devotional experience. Most of them also say they would probably attend a church if someone they know invited them! Surprisingly, they also add that, even though they know people who are active church members, those people do not invite them to visit their church. Therefore, they wonder whether they would be welcome if they did decide to visit. Some even report that when they did visit a church, they were not made to feel welcome!

Mike Penn-Strah, our conference’s South Central Regional Minister, agrees that most churches are not welcoming to guests. But, that is not because they don’t want to attract new members. Indeed, every congregation, including ours, is eager to grow. But most church members have not learned the simple and effective ways to welcome guests and turn visitors into committed and cherished new members.

On Sunday, January 24, from 4:00-6:00 p.m., Mike will lead a workshop in our Parish House to help us learn some simple, fun and effective ways to reach out to and welcome de-churched people into our church. Everyone is welcome. Come and learn how you can help our church grow!

Position Seekers Networking Group – Discussion #2 - January 6th

We have formed a new networking group sponsored by First Church focused on those out of work or underemployed in these difficult economic times. We welcome any and all workers who are position-challenged to join us. Being out of work can have a significant extended effect upon our local families which we all need to be aware of. We also welcome others who are not position seekers but who can provide advice, guidance or support. Local business-people are especially encouraged to attend!



Our Networking Group had a successful first meeting at the beginning of December where we assessed our mutual interest areas and topics to plan our agenda for future sessions. We will be meeting again on Wednesday, January 6, 2010 from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the Parish House Board Room. This meeting’s focus will be on resume preparation and critique and the current thinking about resumes. If you have one, please bring it to the meeting for review.

We are exploring common interests in the job search, discussing local business conditions, and providing support and recommendations for job seekers. We may bring in speakers from local business organizations to provide their insight on the business climate and potential opportunities. We will share information on lessons learned and experiences and recommendations. Anyone with an interest in the local business climate is welcome to attend! Bring your own sandwiches, coffee will be provided. Please join us! Rich Forselius

...from the Christian Education Board



The Christian Education Board would like to extend a big thank you to all who helped with the Trimming Bee; it was truly a joyous event. What a great gift it was to see so many busy hands at work, young and old together, passing down this great tradition of wreath making. They certainly add a special beauty to our sanctuary and parish house. Each individual wreath is a unique treasure...take time to observe them. And, what about that star! All this happens in an amazing two and a half hours, including the hanging. The evening ended with a great potluck dinner, Christmas carols, and the Lord provided the snow!



If you participated in the annual “Christmas Stocking” gift giving, you are a blessing. Approximately fifty children were provided beautiful clothing, and necessities, as well as toys. You helped to make a child's Christmas special by helping Fair Haven Parents' Ministry provide for them. In Luke's Gospel Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Providing for these children helps them “see Jesus” at work in their community. Thank You!

I hope everyone enjoyed The Christmas Pageant December 20. What joy it was to see the children perform the Christmas Story. We know the “story” but we are fulfilled when we see it through the eyes of a child. A big thank you goes to Marie Robert for heading up this year's talent, to Kathy Hunter for helping the children with their costumes, and to a host of angels who helped with readings.

Dates to Remember-

January 3 - No Church School - All in Worship

January 10 - Church School

Youth Group 4:00-6:30 Skating Party

January 17 - Church School

January 24 - Church School

Youth Group

January 31 - Church School

February 7 - Youth Group Fund Raiser - “Souper” Bowl Lunch!

Following Worship-save the date.



Women's Fellowship News

A Special Thank You . . .

We thank everyone who participated and contributed to our Holiday House Tours and Boutique. The purpose of our Women's Fellowship is fellowship among the members and their friends. In planning this event throughout the last six months we have deepened our friendships. We appreciate the people who have contributed sandwiches, cookies, knitted apparel, hand made items, floral arrangements, decorations, graphic designs, paper goods, donations for the raffles and silent auctions, and many days of work which combined to make this event a success. And a very special thanks to all of you who provided your beautifully decorated homes for us to enjoy.

When the Parishioner went to press, we had not finalized the reports for the event, but preliminary figures look fantastic! The proceeds will be used to fund our Christian Outreach donations, our pledge to our Church, and future Women's Fellowship programs. Thank you ALL!!!



Spring 2010 Rummage Sale

When you clean out your closets at the end of the seasons, please remember the Women's Fellowship Spring Rummage Sale. Clean clothing in good condition would be welcome at the time of the Rummage Sale. (Please do **not** bring donations to the Parish House ahead of time.) Thanks so much.

ROUND TWO....

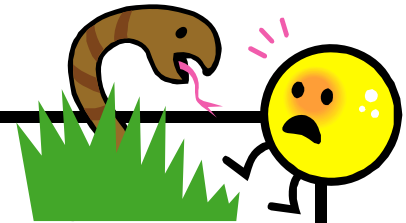
ENCORE! ENCORE!

PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM...

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH, DEAR FRIENDS....

We really got into it in November...Proverbs, that is...and we all wanted to keep the momentum going, so we're going to continue where we left off with our pop quiz about things-Proverbial. Re-read the whole of Proverbs, make some notes about things you'd like to discuss about it, and there will be the usual lottery of questions to be thought about, analyzed, and commented on by everyone attending our meeting. Member of our Circle or not, join us Monday, January 18, at the Parish House at 12 Noon. Bring your lunch and your Bible. The rest is yet to come....

...CIRCLE 4 – THE STUDY/OUTREACH SUPPORT GROUP



Columbus House Outreach Cooking Schedule 2009-2010

Everyone who has had the opportunity to cook and/or serve has truly felt it to be a worthwhile experience – we hope you will help if and when called upon. Any questions about this mission opportunity, or to volunteer, please call Julie at 393-0796. Thank you!

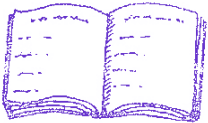
Thanks to the many volunteers who have worked to bring a hot meal to the residents of Columbus House this year. You will be sent a reminder and instructions with a list of people who can assist you with any questions. The following committees/groups are scheduled:

Monday, January 18	Board of Christian Service
Monday, February 15	Board of Stewardship
Monday, March 15	Robert/Glusac Family
Monday, April 19	Youth Group



For \$130 you can sponsor a meal at Columbus House! Call Carole at the church office, 389-2119.

HAPPY NEW YEAR



Marking Life's Passages

Baptism

November 29, 2009

Olive Grace Hubbard, daughter of Matthew and Andrea Hubbard, granddaughter of Paul and Cathy Hubbard, great granddaughter of Katy Hubbard and Robert and Rachel Conniff

Leave behind more than an empty pew. Remember the church in your will.

The Parishioner

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NEXT PARISHIONER DEADLINE IS WEDNESDAY, JAN. 20, 2010 (a firm date)