

# COLUMNS

First Congregational Church East Hartford, Connecticut

*Over 300 Years of Ministry!*



## February 2009

### Sunday Schedule

- Feb. 1** *Fourth Sunday after Epiphany*  
10:00 a.m. **Morning Worship with  
Communion & Sunday School**  
11:15 a.m. **PYF Grinder Sale  
Souper Bowl**  
11:30 a.m. **JYF**
- Feb. 8** *Fifth Sunday after Epiphany*  
10:00 a.m. **Morning Worship &  
Sunday School**
- Feb. 15** *Sixth Sunday after Epiphany*  
*Winter Weekend*  
10:00 a.m. **Morning Worship &  
Sunday School**
- Feb. 22** *Last Sunday after Epiphany*  
10:00 a.m. **Morning Worship &  
Sunday School**  
11:30 a.m. **Annual Meeting & Luncheon**

The **Senior Choir** rehearses each Wednesday evening at 7:30 p.m. and on Sunday morning at 9:00 a.m. unless otherwise notified.

**Children's Choir and Youth Choir** rehearse immediately following morning worship on Sundays (11:15-11:30 a.m.) unless otherwise announced.



**Ash Wednesday** is February 25. A beautiful formal worship experience with communion will be held in the Mary & Martha Chapel at 7:00 p.m.



**Coffee Hour** - Everyone is invited to Coffee hour following worship. Members of the **Board of Missions** are serving for the month of February. Each week the Board of Deaconesses provides the refreshments. Please be generous with your donations to the *Coffee Fund* in the basket on the table in the dining room.



**Winter Weekend** at Silver Lake will be February 13-15, 2009. Join us for a weekend of fun, fellowship, and friendship in the hills of Sharon, CT.

Everyone - young or old, single or married, with children or without children - is welcome to share in this unique experience.

Our theme this year is "Biblical Occupations". Please see *Louise* to reserve you place.

Price: \$80.00 individual  
\$150.00 couple  
\$190.00 family of 3 or more



### Work Project

### 2009 Adult Mission Team

From February 28-March 7, five members of First Church, seven from south Church and four other participants will be traveling to St. Lucie County, Florida as a traveling Adult Mission Team. The United Church of Christ has organized an effort there which includes provision of lodging for mission teams and identification of housing repair projects which will enable local families to return to their homes. The team will provide its own transportation. Those going from First Church are *George, Erin, Dennis, Ted, and Rich*. A full report of their experience will be shared with the congregation at the Lenten supper on Thursday, April 2.

### Offering Envelopes



**2009 Offering Envelopes** are ready to be picked up for those who requested envelopes. They are located on the table just inside the dining room.

## Sunday School:

Feb. 1, 8, 15, 22

Children will begin in worship before going to their classes



### Youth News

JYF is a youth group for students in grades 6-8. We meet on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays of each month, 11:30 a.m. -1:00 p.m.

**Sun., Feb. 1**

11:30 a.m. Grinders can be purchased from PYF

**Sun. Feb. 15**

No Meeting (School vacation)



JYF will be having a plant sale at the Flea Market in May. We are looking for donations of plants, clippings, and pots. If you have clippings to share please root them now in order for the plant to have a good root structure. *Elizabeth* would like your donations by April 19, if possible. Call *Beth* if you have any questions.



## Annual Report

**Annual Report** information was due in the church office January 15, 2008!! The Annual Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, February 22, 2009. Several Reports still need to be turned in. Every board, committee, club and scouts are asked to submit a report. Remember, what you submit is part of the history of First Church.

### **EHIM**

East Hartford Interfaith Ministries  
Human Needs Fund Office  
*Beth*, Coordinator  
(860) 289-4919

## Calendars

Along with Columns this month, you will find a calendar with church meeting dates and events through July 2009. Please keep in mind that the events listed are subject to change as the year progresses. **Continue to check columns and the weekly bulletin for changes and additional events.** Combining these two mailings is a measure of efficiency. We will save paper, envelopes, and postage, as well as the time it takes to assemble two complete mailings.

## The Board of Christian Education

will meet Monday, February 23 at 7:30 p.m.

## The Board of Deaconesses will meet

February 2 at 1:00 p.m.

## The Board of Deacons will meet Monday,

February 9 at 7:00 p.m.

## The Board of Stewardship will meet

Monday, February 9 at 7:00 p.m.

## The Board of Missions will meet on Sunday,

March 1 at 11:15 a.m.

## The Board of Trustees will meet Thursday,

February 12 at 7:00 p.m.

## Guild – W.E.B. will meet on Tuesday,

February 10 at 11:00 a.m.

## W.E.B.

**Women Empowered and Blessed** is a group comprised of members of the **Guild**, the **Business & Professional Women's Group** and **Mother's Club**. All women of the church are invited to attend.

**W.E.B.** will be having a pot luck supper on Thursday, February 21, 2008. Please contact anyone from WEB for reservations.

The **Nominating Committee** has begun its' work to fill all open positions on the various boards and committees of the church. We ask that all board chairpersons contact a member of the committee with suggestions or special needs they foresee. Any church member wishing to serve in a particular capacity should contact a committee member and make their interest known.

### Gift Cards

The entire congregation is asked to participate in our mission to St. Lucie, Florida, through the purchase of any general use gift cards other than *American Express*. Gift cards will be used by the team to purchase needed household items beyond the budget of UCC Disaster Ministries.

Gift cards can be purchased and placed in the offering plate, mailed to the church office, or handed to anyone participating in the mission trip this year and they will take them along to Florida.



## CANCELLATIONS

If there are any questions about Church closings, consult WFSB – Channel 3 (Station number 2 on most local cable providers,) or WFSB.com.

## The Pastor's Corner

### *Sabbatical*

Sabbatical is an unusual word. It is a derivative of the Hebrew word, Sabbath, which means rest and came to designate a wonderful day.

The origin of the Sabbath day can be found in the second chapter of Genesis where we are told that after six days of creating the earth God rested.

*And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and rested on the seventh day from all that work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. –Genesis 2:2,3*

In ancient Israel volumes of laws were written defining what work was allowable on the Sabbath and what was not. Ironically, following the laws for Sabbath rest sometimes resulted in an experience of more stress rather than less on that day.

Remember how Jesus spoke about the Sabbath? When he was walking along a grain field on the Sabbath the disciples plucked some grain to eat and were criticized by others for it. Plucking grain heads was considered impermissible work according to Sabbath law. But being hungry was not a relaxing way to spend the Sabbath either. Jesus rebuked the disciples' accusers with the line, *The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; –Mark 2:27*

From the Sabbath day grew other ideas. It became Jewish law that every seventh year would be a Sabbath year for the land, when it could not be planted or harvested but must remain fallow. This was rest for the land, by which the land would replenish itself and so sustain itself. (Modern agricultural study supports this idea.) Finally there was to be a grand fifty year Sabbath, the year after seven, seven Sabbath year periods. This was known as the year of Jubilee. On that year all slaves would be freed, debts would be forgiven, even property that was sold would be returned to its original owner. The year of Jubilee was a most holy year. It gave hope to everyone no matter their circumstances. It guaranteed that at some point at least once in a lifetime everyone would get a chance to start over, to begin afresh. It was the grace of God manifest in the social order. To read about Sabbath years and the fifty year Jubilee in the Bible turn to Leviticus 25.

Now I'm not a legalist but I wonder if it would be to our advantage today if we were to take the idea of Sabbath a bit more seriously. I don't mean the restoration of the old blue laws. We don't need to have Sabbath rest thrust upon us. Most of us can choose to take at least a day off each week for spiritual renewal and for re-creation. That is sometimes difficult for me to do but I could do it

more often if I were more determined about it. What pastors do not get is two and three day weekends and religious holidays. Our schedules are sort of out of sync with the majority culture. When others may be more relaxed we might be working harder. When others may have more free time we might have less.

Local church pastors today are given a special opportunity for personal and professional refreshment. It is called a Sabbatical. After every six consecutive years of ministry in a local church, a period of four months leave is allotted unto which the yearly vacation month can be added. This is the recommendation of the United Church of Christ to local churches and it is a part of my employment contract with First Church. First Church was not required to do this but considered that it would be valuable to me and so to the church as well. I realize that not everyone has such an opportunity. I am grateful for it.

It has been my privilege to serve First Church now for fourteen years. I have been ordained altogether for 33 years. After twenty five years of ministry, the last six of which were at First Church, I took my first Sabbatical in the year 2000. It was a wonderful time of spiritual revitalization for me. I was eligible for another Sabbatical in 2007. I chose not to take advantage of it then because of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the UCC in Hartford in which I wanted to take part. For a variety of reasons I also postponed it last year.

The dates of my Sabbatical leave this year will be April 13 through September 13. During this time Rev. Art Dunham, retired pastor from South Windsor United Church of Christ, will serve as worship leader and be available for critical pastoral needs. He is a fine pastor and a wonderful man. Money has been set aside for his remuneration. There will be no additional expense to the budget for when I am gone.

The pastor on Sabbatical is to include in that time those experiences which might lead to a regeneration of spirit and an increased insight into the practice of pastoral ministry. I am planning to participate in a number of continuing education events and a spiritual growth retreat. All the details are not yet settled. Next month I will share my particular plans for the use of my Sabbatical time.

Thankful for this gift,

Ted



## Library Notes

The Church Library has many books and videos by and about African Americans. Stop in and choose a book from the display on the library table. Among these are:

Africans in America by Charles Johnson, et al

Harriet Tubman by Catherine Clinton

I Have A Dream by Martin Luther King Jr

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by

*Maya Angelou*

The Audacity of Hope by Barak Obama

The Color of Water by James McBride

The Good Life by Peter Gomes

The Same River Twice by Alice Walker

Reposition Yourself by T.D. Jakes

Say It Out Loud by Annie Barnes

Days of Grace by Arthur Ashe

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Companion selected by

Coretta Scott K. King

Soul Food: recipes and reflections from African-

American churches by Joyce White

Amistad by Helen Kromer

## Stewardship Board

2008 was the year we celebrated all of the ways we travel with God. At the Annual Meeting, we handed out passports to be stamped whenever time or talent was used to further God's mission through the work of First Church. In October, we held a celebration party after church on Stewardship Sunday. The party was a lot of fun for all the attendees and passports for 2009 were distributed. On Stewardship Sunday, we also collected pledge cards for the 2009 budget. We received almost 2/3 of our pledge cards back that first Sunday. It was one of the best responses for returned cards in many years.

Silver Lake is a camp sponsored by the United Church of Christ. It is located in the northwest hills of Sharon, Connecticut. One week summer conferences are available to children entering grades 4 through 12. There is a wide variety of themes from which to choose. Scholarships are available. Please see *Louise* for a booklet and any questions you may have.



## Flower Donations:

*If anyone is interested in donating a larger flower arrangement for worship they are available for \$50.00. The standard size would remain at \$35.00.*

**"Care & Share"** Sunday is the first Sunday of every month when we bring items for Food Bank. You will find white envelopes marked Food Bank in the pews in which monetary donations may be made. All donations (including monetary) are gratefully accepted!! Thank you!!!

## Conversations for Our Future

A couple years ago, we made a plan to balance our budget and lessen our need to use realized capital gains, and we were heading in the right direction. As everyone knows, the stock market has lost significant value over the last several months. Although our portfolio is invested very conservatively, we have still felt the impact of this loss. As a result, we no longer have any unrealized capital gains and the income from our investments has decreased. Most of the experts believe that the stock market will rebound, but no one's sure how long it will take. If we stay on our current course, our fund balance should hold out through 2010, but First Congregational Church is here for the long haul, not just a few years.

Consequently, our Treasurer and Pastor feel that we should start having discussions now in order to be prepared for the future. In March, we will begin holding informal meetings. Everyone should plan to attend these meetings, where we will have conversations about where we want to go from here and how we want to get there. The meetings are to be positive. We are not yet in financial crisis and that is what we want to avoid. This will be an opportunity for you to talk and to listen. There are no bad ideas and we want to hear them all. No decisions will be made during these meetings—that will come later if necessary.

The idea is to put our heads together to ensure that First Congregational Church of East Hartford is here for 300 more years!