



First Congregational Church

62 Colony Street
Meriden, CT 06451

203-235-5704

www.fccmeriden.org

The Visitor Comes to you each month to keep you informed of the many wonderful things going on all the time in **YOUR CHURCH**. We welcome your articles, letters and other items of interest.



February/March 2012

9-AM TO 1PM	MONDAYS
OFFICE	OFFICE
HOURS	CLOSED
TUES.-	
FRIDAY	



No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey you are welcome at the First Congregational Church of Meriden!

Visitor Editor:

**Pat Magrath &
Jackie Ward**

Music Director:

Barbara Mase

Pastor:

Rev. John W. Clarke

ESTABLISHED 1729

STEWARDSHIP 2012

This letter is a **Thank You** letter to all of you who have been so faithful in your stewardship commitment this past year and for keeping your pledge up to date. As we move into 2012 we still have a number of pledges for 2012 that we have not yet received. If this letter comes after you have made your pledge, please know that **we are grateful**. If you have not yet made that important pledge, please do so now. **We will make our pledge goal if everyone who pledged in 2011 does the same for 2012.**

The bible tells us that the evidence of a spiritually empowered life can be best described in a list of nine qualities as found in Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. Galatians 5: 22-23, "**The fruit of the Spirit,**" it says, "**is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** It is noticeable that leading the list is **love**."

When speaking of your stewardship I would define love as the ultimate quality of the **Giving Christian**. **Love is** the motivating power that drives all of us to do the right thing, say the right word and show the right attitude.

I would suggest that the gifts we give to the ministries of our church are wrapped in the beautiful covering of love that has been given to us in Jesus Christ.

I want to encourage you to continue being a **Giving Christian**. I continue to be moved by your loving response to the news of my retirement, but make no mistake we must welcome a new pastor with the same expressions of love you have graced me with these past nine plus years. When I look ahead I realize that no one better understands the importance of continuing that response in the future than you.

I remain very optimistic about our future because I know that faithful people like you will continue your financial commitment to your church by sending in and we hope increasing your pledge for 2012. Please, if you have not yet pledged do so today and if you have never pledged begin a new tradition by pledging to the ministries of your church right now! You will not regret it, you will grow because of it.

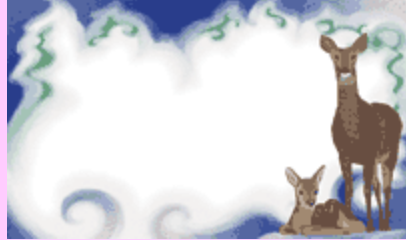
Thank You So Much!

John

NURSERY SCHOOL NEWS

Winter 2012

This winter we have learned all about many animals and how they spend their winters, made food for the birds and observed all the changes in the environment.



What do the animals do in the snow? We have asked that question and the children have come up with many ideas of how the animals get through the winter!

We will even enjoy a visit from the Hungerford Nature Museum. The museum will bring in 5 different land animals; the children will wonder what animals they will bring. Will they be lions? Tigers? Bears? The children will predict what they think the animal handler will bring. They will get to touch all the animals so they will surmise that the animals will not be dangerous – but it sure makes it exciting!

February will bring talk of the groundhog, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and Valentine's Day! The children will celebrate their love for their families and their friends!

Stop in anytime and visit, we'd love to see you!

Pastor Clarke's new book of sermons for Lent and Easter can still be ordered.

“THE VIEW FROM THE CROSS”

The dedication page reads.....

This collection of sermons is dedicated to the congregation of the First Congregational Church of Meriden, United Church of Christ. For nearly ten years they have nurtured, supported, and allowed me to preach, teach, sing, pray and write as ministry with them. There are no adequate words to say a proper “Thank You” to them all! I hope that these sermons can communicate to them a proper “Thank You,” for all they have done and meant to me.

The seventeen sermons in this book reflect, I hope, the journey of faith that all of us must take as preachers, teachers, and fellow travelers along the way. There is good news to be discovered on our journey. There are some good and some not so good people who will travel with us. From time to time we may even find ourselves unsure if we are good or able enough to continue without help. At some point we may want to step off the well-traveled road and take stock of what it is we are doing.....

So I invite you to participate in the sermons offered here. They are written for your enjoyment and with an eye toward a better understanding of what Jesus went through for our sake.

As usual all profits from the sale of the book will go to Mercy Touch Orphanage in Zambia. The cost is \$15.95, and when you order it from me 40% of the total cost will go to the kids at Mercy Touch. They and I thank you so much!

The Pastor's Pen– February 2012

Dear Friends,

A new year looms large as we continue our journey of faith.



We, that is Us, are moving forward in ministry and we are doing so with a kind of energy that is truly quite inspiring. As I write this letter your Administrative Council/ Search Committee are in the process of listening to and interviewing three top of the line candidates to become this churches next settled pastor. Their decisive and ambitious handling of this most important task speaks volumes about how important they all feel about what they are doing. And **YOU**, the members and friends who are reading this letter will be the beneficiary of what they are doing.

Some of you will remember how searches have been done in the past. The church decided not to go the conventional route this time around and because of deciding to be very pro-active it is anticipated that we will in fact have my replacement in place the day that I officially retire in June of this year. It is and will continue to be an exciting time in the life of this congregation and I believe it will signal the beginning of a period of growth for this congregation. Having said all that, let me also say that we must all work toward the establishment of an attitude of gratitude for the ministry that **YOU** have been entrusted with.

Pastor's Pen cont....

And I say **YOU** because the further into the process that **YOU** become the less involvement there can be from me. I have to stand back and watch and be available when needed, but there is no sense in pretending that I can be objective about all of this because I cannot. That is why I am so very pleased with the way in which the committee is attending to their business. It allows me to focus on insuring that the next person to sit at my desk will find a smooth transition and will in no way feel that they are entering a church that is uncomfortable with itself. Indeed, I anticipate it will be just the opposite.

By the time you receive this letter some of you will have heard all three people preach and as the committee moves forward it will come to a decision to recommend one of those three to you for a vote. Until that time, let's all work together to move into this new phase in the life of this church and do so with the same kind of enthusiasm that we do everything!

WE BELONG TO CHRIST.

JESUS CHRIST IS CENTRAL TO WHO WE ARE. We know God especially in Jesus, who lived, loved, died, rose from the dead, and is present today. Because we belong to Christ, we welcome, love, pray, and serve.

The God we know in Jesus is also known by many names. We share a tradition among Christians speaking of one God as “Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” We also speak of God in ways that enrich our faith – God as mother, rock, liberator, savior, and friend.

We affirm historic creeds and statements of faith, not as tests for belief, but as inspired words of faithful women and men who came before us. We discover God through the Bible, through prayer, and through engaging the world.

No single statement fully expressed who God is; but where there is justice, peace, and compassion, we see the living God at work in history. To such a God, we belong.

Lastly and once again referring to the same document quoted above:

JESUS DIDN'T TURN PEOPLE AWAY, even those often rejected by others. **We don't intend to either. We are like a "company of strangers," made family by the grace of God. God welcomes, claims, and loves all people. God also feeds our hunger, forgives our sins, and frees us from aimless wandering.**

This is no idle chatter. The UCC has been bold in extending an invitation to all. For example, our historic denominations were first to ordain an African American pastor (1785), a woman (1853), and a gay or lesbian person (1972).

If this means we are "LIBERAL", I THANK GOD FOR THE TITLE!

**Blessings to you,
John**

WE HAVE A NEW CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR

As you know by now, **Jackie Ward** is retiring effective February 3rd. By the time you get this newsletter, it is likely that Jackie's retirement party has come and gone. So—what now in the office?

Well, the what now is that our own **Pat Magrath** is taking over in the church office. Pat has been church secretary at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church for better than seven years. She found herself on the short end of a financial reduction and with it the possibility of being without a job.

To say that one door closing means that another is opening would be an understatement. On the very day that Jackie was letting people know that she was retiring, she was on the phone with Pat and both discovered the news of each other's employment stories. Jackie told me what was happening and asked if it would be OK to mention it to Pat and the rest as they say is "history!".

So when you call the church office or stop by, Pat will be here to greet you. Her hours will be the same Tuesday through Friday from 9:00—1:00. We are so lucky to have

someone who is familiar with our church family here at 62 Colony Street and the larger church family throughout Meriden. We are a lucky group to have her and a lucky group to have had Jackie.

And the church once again makes a successful transition without missing a beat. Please be sure to welcome Pat and to work with her as together we move forward in ministry.

Blessings,

John

Walk for Warmth



The 2012 Walk for Warmth will take place at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 3rd, "stepping off" from The First Congregational Church. All ages, including community residents from The Greater Meriden Area, federal, state and local government officials, staff and friends will join us for this two mile walk to raise fund to provide assistance to households in The Greater Meriden Area needing help with the heating costs. Last year's event raised in excess of \$21,000.00, which provided help to more than 70 households. The day will be filled with fun and excitement, including complimentary soup and hot chocolate and an exciting auction. Thank you for your support!

FROM
THE
PASTOR



PASTORS PEN
AGAIN.....

The Pastors Pen Again.....February

I was asked on Sunday following worship why it is that the United Church of Christ is often seen as a denomination that is one if not the most “**Liberal**” protestant denominations in the country?

Great question!

First of all let me give you some general definitions of what the word, “**Liberal**” means: **Open-minded – broadminded – moderate – noninterventionist – freethinking & tolerant.** Without getting into too much of a debate over the political nature of the word, let me stick to what I know, theologically speaking.

We in the UCC have a long and very solid emphasis on education. I bring this up first because it is often the case with people who say we are “**liberal**” that they do not put the kind of importance on education that we find so necessary. Since we established the first churches and educational institutions in the United States we understand that without open-minded, freethinking people who understand the value of being moderate and noninterventionist we run the risk of becoming just the opposite.

PASTORS PEN AGAIN....

Theologically speaking to be liberal means to value the Word of God, but to not allow that Word to be used in a way that will bring harm to another. It is to be aware of the importance of the languages that our Bible was originally written and being able to interpret what and how those languages are saying to us in our world today. Understanding church history and how that history informs our lives today as the people of God is critical as we see new and often popular but not well grounded religious groups grow. All of this is to say that from the time the pilgrims landed on our shores, we have built and maintained and valued the church and in so doing we have discovered how important it is, as our denominational campaign says to truly understand that, **“God is still speaking.”** It is being a part of a church that says out loud and often, **“That no matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey you are welcome here.”** It is in knowing that in articulating those things we stand open to the charge of being too **“Liberal”**, by those who will not allow God to speak anymore. It is in knowing that as a denomination we publicly acknowledge the worth of all people and in knowing that our churches and our people are willing to stand on the foundation of the one in whom we have our being, even Jesus Christ or Savior. Below are some words that come from a pamphlet we distribute to folks who are visiting with us at worship. These words do a far better job of explaining who we are than I can do alone:

6 YEARS FOR THE THRIFT SHOP!!!!!!!

Bill and Carol Graham, along with all their volunteers recently celebrated 6 years of being open. January 5, 2012 was the anniversary date. First Congregational Church members are extremely grateful for all the hard work by everyone!! Unfortunately, business continues to reflect our economy. At the present time and due to the lack of pickups, they will be closing on Fridays. The hours are Thursdays and Saturdays 9:00—12:00! Thank you for your support!!!



MARDI GRAS JAZZ FEST

In a little over two weeks, the place starts hoppin', so come on down for a Mardi Gras Jazz Fest with the Riverboat Ramblers at The First Congregational Church, 62 Colony Street, Meriden. The Jazz Fest starts at 3:00 p.m. February 19th. Call Bruce at 203-631-8423 for ticket information, or stop to pick up tickets at Prentis Printing at 35 Pratt Street, 8:30 to 5:00 weekdays. You may also stop in at the Church Office from 9:00 to 1:00 Tuesday through Friday to pick up your tickets. See flyer inserted for additional information. Hope to see you at the Jazz Fest!!!!

C O N N E C T I N G
CHURCH & H O M E

Our sympathy goes out to Bob Hill and his family for the recent loss of his father, Robert W. Hill, Sr. Mr. Hill died January 18 at Miller Memorial. The service was held at First Congregational Church and officiated by Rev. Clarke

Gert Buchanan is at this time at Westfield Health Care until she is able to return home.....

Carleen Kenyon is recuperating from hip replacement surgery at Southington Extended Care




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February 2012

			1 7:30 p.m. NA	2 Neighborhood mtg. 7-9 Thrift shop 9-	3 5:00 p.m. AA 7:00 pm-State AI Anon	4 Thrift shop 9-12 10 am-8 pm
5 Boy Scout Sunday 10:00 FCC - Retirement-	6 6:30PM-N/A OFFICE CLOSED	7 8:30A-N/A 5PM-AA 7PM-N/A	8 7:30PM- N/A	9 9AM-THRIFT SHOP 7 PM—CASA DE GOZO	10 5PM-AA	11 9AM- THRIFT Hall in Use
12 10:00AM- FCC 10 TCC 2 CASA	13 6:30PM-N/A OFFICE CLOSED	14 8:30AM-N/A 5PM-AA 7PM-N/A	15 7PM-N/A	16 9AM-THRIFT	17 5PM-AA 7-ARC	18 9AM- THRIFT 6-12 HALL IN USE
19 10AM FCC/ CAMP CLAIRE SUNDAY	20 6:30PM-N/A OFFICE CLOSED	21 8:30AM-N/A 5PM-AA 7PM-N/A	22 7:30PM- N/A	23 9AM-THRIFT 7PM-CASA	24 5PM-AA	25 9AM- THRIFT CASA DE GOZO ALL DAY
26 10 AM- FCC 10AM- TCC 2 CASA	27 6:30PM-N/A OFFICE CLOSED	28 8:30AM-N/A 5PM-AA 7PM-N/A	29 7:30PM- N/A			



March 2012

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 9AM-THRIFT 7-NEIGHBOR HOOD MTG	2 5pm-AA 7 ST. ALANON	3 9AM-THRIFT 10-WALK FOR WARMTH
4 10-FCC 10-TCC 2-CASA	5 6:30PM-N/A OFFICE CLOSED	6 8:30AM-N/A 5PM-AA 7PM-N/A	7 7:30PM- N/A	8 9AM-THRIFT	9 5PM-AA	10 9AM-THRIFT HALL IN USE ALL DAY
11 10-FCC 10-TCC 2-CASA	12 6:30PM-N/A OFFICE CLOSED	13 8:30AM-N/A 5PM-AA 7PM-N/A	14 7:30PM- N/A	15 9AM-THRIFT	16 5PM-AA 7PM ARC	17 9AM-THRIFT 8-12 CASA 6-12 N/A
18 10-FCC 10-TCC	19 6:30PM-N/A OFFICE CLOSED	20 8:30AM-N/A 5PM-AA 7PM-N/A	21 7:30PM- N/A	22 9AM-THRIFT	23 5PM AA	24 9AM-THRIFT
25 10-FCC 10-TCC 2-CASA	26 6:30PM-N/A OFFICE CLOSED	27 8:30AM-N/A 5PM-AA 7PM-N/A	28 7:30N/A	29 9AM THRIFT	30 5PM A/A	31 9AM THRIFT 12-8 HALL
				MARCH 11TH.....		



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH
THE DOWNTOWN
COMMUNITY CHURCH
62 COLONY STREET
MERIDEN, CT 06451**

**RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED**