



# THE PARISHIONER

THE FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, WOODBRIDGE 1738-2020

An Open, Welcoming, and Affirming Church

Sunday Worship 10:00 a.m.

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CT Conference Website: [www.ctucc.org](http://www.ctucc.org)

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January 2020

## Pastor's Column

One December 23rd afternoon the phone rang as I was leaving my office. It was the director of a local funeral home. He asked if I would conduct a service for a couple whose son had been killed two days before. The coroner would release his body shortly and the family could gather in two weeks. Would January 6th work for me? Of course.

I met with the mother and father of the young man who's life we would be celebrating. He had been brutally murdered early on the morning of the 21st. The dad told me neither he nor his son believed in God and had little use for churches. Mom needed a way to say goodbye to her baby boy. The service was to be held at the funeral home. Neither thought anyone would show up, and the service was to be short. Since they asked me to officiate I explained it would be my job to offer words of hope. Mom's face relaxed a bit. Dad was impassive. I hadn't a clue of what to do or say.

I can't imagine what it is to lose a child. They said their grief was only heightened by the Christmas just past. All the decorations, the seasonal carols, the hope of family gatherings and the story of a newborn babe seemed to taunt them in their tragedy. All my go-to funeral texts — Romans 8, John 14, 1 Thessalonians, Psalm 139, etc.— seemed inadequate and hollow in the face of their catastrophe.

Epiphany arrived. Driving to the service I still hadn't decided what scripture to read or what to say. It was then, was once again, God's grace brought me up short. With her impeccable timing, and out of her mighty power and love, the Holy Spirit made a suggestion: read Matthew's story of the Epiphany and what immediately follows. At the funeral home I was surprised to find standing-room-only in our small chapel. As is my practice I followed the liturgy in our Book of Worship. When it came time in the service I read Matthew 2:1-21. As I did, the Spirit shared with us another story of horror and hope.

You know how it goes. Wise men from the East discerned a new king had been born in Judea. They made their way to Herod's palace looking for the new king, only to find the older one. Their quest terrified Herod and all Jerusalem, for two kings could only mean civil war. When the wise men continued their search, Herod asked that they let him know where the toddler lived so he could honor him as well. They found the boy with his family in Bethlehem and lavished him with gifts due his royal standing. These travelers were the first gentiles to recognize God's messiah, Jesus. An Epiphany! From there things went south. Wary of Herod, they left by another road and the family became refugees as they fled retaliation from the enraged king. In their wake, Herod's death squads killed all the children two years and under in the little town of Bethlehem. The Spirit suggested this, too, was part of the Epiphany: that into the geopolitical world of Roman Judea, with all its murder, chaos, fear and oppression, God decided to move into their neighborhood and experience the world in which they lived. That morning the Holy Spirit reminded us that Jesus continues to come to us in love and compassion, living with us in our pain and suffering, liberating us to live the law of love whatever our circumstances.



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The service continued with its prayers and commendation. I was about to share the benediction when dad asked if he could speak. He stood and turned to the small community gathered around him and his wife. He invited everyone to join them at home following the burial. There was a moment of stillness. He took a deep breath and opened his heart. "I arrived here this morning empty and afraid, knowing full well there is no such thing as God. But I have felt God's presence and experienced God's love, right here, right now. Thank you for being here today and sharing with us your hope." With that, the Spirit changed the spirit in our little spot of the world.

I don't recall experiencing anything like that before or since. It was the feast of the Epiphany, God's revelation to the gentiles. And dad shared with us his own epiphany: that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it, has not overcome it, and will never overcome it.

#### Prayer

O Lord of Light, bless and be with all who live in darkness in such a manner that we may experience your presence. O Lord of Light, bless and be with us all so we may be your lights in the world. This we pray in the name of the one true light, Jesus Christ. Amen. Make it so.

### **NOTICE OF CONGREGATIONAL MEETING**

The membership of The First Church of Christ, Woodbridge, is hereby called to meeting on Sunday, January 26, 2020 immediately following the Sunday Service in the meetinghouse at 11:00 a.m. in order:

1. To receive and act upon the Treasurer's Report for 2019,
2. To receive the final report of the Board of Stewardship on the pledge drive,
3. To receive and act upon the Board of Trustees' recommended budgets for 2020,
4. To elect a Treasurer, members of the Board of Stewardship, and members of the Nominating Committee,
5. Update on the First Church Renewal Process
6. To transact any other business appropriate to come before the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted, December 20, 2019      Bill More Moderator



## **Church Council**

HAPPY NEW YEAR! January can seem like a time to relax after the hectic holiday season and plan for the year ahead. Before looking ahead, as usual, I find myself reviewing the year gone by. This past year has been filled with many successful events including those of the Christmas season notably the annual Decorating Bee and potluck which resulted in the beautiful wreaths that decorated the exterior of the Meetinghouse and Parish House. The 2019 edition of the Carol Sing was a joyous and funny event under the direction of our em-presarios, Roger Calistro and Al Jarvis, and was followed by a wonderful reception organized by the Events Committee. The advent season also included the annual Christmas Pageant, and conclusion of the increasingly successful Stocking Project. Please join me in thanking the scores of individuals who blessed us with their time and talent both during December and over the course of the year.

At the December meeting Council continued to focus on the First Church renewal process hearing a report from the open session run by Jack Jones the previous Sunday. We continue to urge members and friends to talk about their ideas for the future of First Church both within our board/committee structure and through continued discussions among congregants. Council also focused on the elections coming up at the Congregational Meeting Sunday on January 26, 2020, where we will be electing a Treasurer, additional members of the Board of Stewardship and members of the Nominating Committee. At the meeting the congregation will approve the Annual Operating Budget and a separate Capital Budget for 2020. I want to take this opportunity to ask anyone who has not fulfilled their 2019 pledge, to do so and for those yet to pledge for 2020 to make the commitment to help fund the church. We will get a report from Stewardship on the 2020 pledge drive at the congregational meeting, but Trustees needs to know before then what pledges to expect for the year in order to finalize the proposed operating budget. Thanks to the Trustees for their leadership in developing the annual budgets



Council will be meeting twice in January. The first meeting, on Monday the 6<sup>th</sup>, will focus on the usual reports and also continue the discussion of the First Church renewal process. The second meeting, on Monday January 20 will convene specifically to approve the proposed 2020 budgets which must be approved by Council before they can go to the congregation for approval. Everyone is welcome to attend both Council meeting and encouraged to attend the important Congregational meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

Bill More, Moderator

## **First Church Renewal Program**

An initial conversation regarding our restoring assessment was held after church December 8. The subjects to be discussed were “What is FCCW now?” and “What should FCCW be going Forward?”. The discussions were lively and friendly. Speakers pointed out that we are a small New England Congregational church with a beautiful campus. We have a declining active family with difficulty filling leadership positions and have financial challenges. The sense of the discussions is that we would like to have a larger active family and improve our finances. Individuals pointed out that we have been a Faith-Based church for generations providing a place for traditional practices of worship. It was pointed out that other forms of meeting opportunities may attract individuals with like values that are not attracted to traditional worship services. Individuals also expressed the desire to continue traditional services of worship.

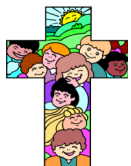
There seemed to be agreement that additional income is needed to support our long range vision. It was pointed out that First Church has extensive facilities and was suggested that First Church look at maximizing the income potential of the facilities.

The discussions moved toward ideas for projects or activities aimed at attracting additional people to our family. Individuals expressed the need to get more young adults and children involved in activities that they relate to and can support. There seemed to be a Christian focus in these discussions.

Additional conversations are desired for everyone to have a chance to express their thoughts. Look forward to more opportunities after the Christmas season. Notes were taken at this first conversation and will be placed in the church office for your review.

**Happy New Year!!!**





## Christian Education



### Weekly Bible Study

Wednesday mornings from 10:00-11:00 a.m. the Deacons and the Rev. Shepard Parsons hold a weekly morning Bible Study based in the Lectionary. We meet Wednesday mornings for fellowship and study. This is open to the community! Bring your friends!

### Music News

Adult Choir rehearsals are on Wednesday nights at 6 p.m.

Bell Choir rehearsals are on Mondays at 7:30 pm.

\*If you are interested in joining either group or just want to give it a try, we invite you to join us in the choir room adjacent to the sanctuary.



### Sanctuary Repainting Update

David Riccio and the Canning conservation advisory team were on site at the church for several days during the past few weeks scraping around to uncover and diagnose the types of paint on the walls. They were 'over the moon' when they climbed into the guts of the organ and were able to photograph the original 1860's grisaille design and colors on the rear wall. Canning have informed us that this work is *exceptional* and that they plan to use these findings in the development of their recommendations for our next re-paint. Their formal written report is due on December 27, 2019 and they will present their report and visuals to the congregation after church services on January 12, 2020, (Snow date Jan 19).

Please plan to attend.

B. Joyce Simpson



### Stocking Project Update

Thank you members and friends of First Church for the wonderful response to this year's Christmas Stocking project. Over thirty eight large shopping bags will be donated to the low income children in the Dixwell and Newhallville neighborhoods in New Haven. The Board of Christian Service coordinated this project with Lt. Colon of Districts 6 and 7. She and two other officers met at the church on December 12 and filled 2 very large police vans. The clothing, toys, and books (shown in the photo) will be distributed to families in need identified by the police officers in conjunction with the community leaders, including alders (formerly aldermen).

Jinny Schneider, Board of Christian Service



## **Columbus House Outreach Cooking Schedule and Coffee Hour Schedule 2019-2020**

Once again we must thank all our committees for cooking and serving at Columbus House. This ministry of our church happens on the Sunday before the third Monday of every month. Henry Gates has been so generous in shopping every month so that all we have to do is cook on Sunday and serve on Monday! Each committee chairman will receive by email or snail mail instructions and directions approximately 10 days before they are to cook and serve. The following committees are scheduled for September through August:

Monday, January 20	Garden Ad Hoc
Monday, February 17	Hospitality
Monday, March 16	Troop 907 Boy Scouts
Monday, April 20	Church Council
Monday, May 18	Music Committee
Monday, June 15	Trustees
Monday, July 20	Men's Fellowship
Monday, August 17	Open to Volunteers



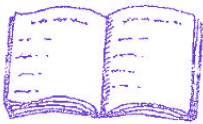
Jesse Hubbard, Coordinator

## **Lay Readers for Worship**

We would like to have two lay readers for worship on Sunday mornings. Anyone, including youth, who would like to participate is encouraged to sign up on the sheet either in the church or the fellowship hall.

## **Volunteers**

The Deacons also welcome anyone who would like to usher, donate flowers or serve coffee to sign up in the Parish Hall. You may also call the church office at 203 389-2119.



## **Marking Life's Passages**

<b>Births, Deaths, Baptisms</b>	December 14, 2019	Logan, Lennox, and Lance Stauffer Premature triplet Sons of Jeff and Mary Stauffer Grandsons of Paul and Cathy Hubbard and Christine Stauffer
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### **The Parishioner**

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***NEXT PARISHIONER DEADLINE IS WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2020 (a firm date).***