

# CROSSROADS

VOL. 73, No. 11

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH (UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST), STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT

DECEMBER 2015

## WORSHIP IN THE SANCTUARY – 10:30 A.M.

## FROM THE INTERIM PASTOR'S DESK DECEMBER 2015

**December 6 Second Sunday of Advent**

*Holy Communion, Deacons Fund  
and Food Trunk Offering*

**December 13 Third Sunday of Advent**

**December 20 Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**December 24 Christmas Eve**

**December 27 First Sunday after Christmas**

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### SUNDAY FLOWER MEMORIALS



To donate flowers for our Sunday worship service, contact the church office for more information or to request a form. The cost for a bouquet to decorate the chancel is \$60. Checks should be made payable to FCC Stamford with "Flowers" in the memo section and may be mailed to the church or placed in the offering plate on Sunday. Please contact the office for open dates.

Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds all waited and prepared for the coming of Jesus in the midst of turmoil, fear, and upheaval. So much so, the angels first words to these folks were "Do not be afraid." They took these words into their hearts and lived as though something other than fear could grow within them and in their world. They took in love and lived by love, knowing that love has the final word.

The past weeks have done much to heighten our sense of insecurity, making it difficult to prepare for anything but threat. We could take in the fear that pervades our world, but I wonder, could it be that in this time of Advent that the angels are coming to us in our turmoil and upheaval and announcing to us, "Do not be afraid!"?

Could it be in this time of Advent that the angels are encouraging us to take in love rather than fear knowing that love has the final word? Could it be that these angels encourage us to let love be the value that shapes our actions knowing that is where real peace begins? Could it be that these angels encourage us to let love of neighbor and enemy and stranger be our guiding light knowing that it is in these that we see God face to face?

*Susan*

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### SLOW DOWN! IT'S ADVENT!



*Do you find yourself yearning for a little calm  
in the midst of the rush towards Christmas?  
Join First Congregational Church on Tuesday evenings  
to pause, share a meal, and reflect on the Christmas  
story, and prepare a space for Christ in your life.*

**Tuesday Evenings, 6:30 p.m. in the church parlor  
(December 1, 8, 15, 22)**

A light soup supper will be provided by the deacons. Then we will spend time in prayerful reflection on the lives Elizabeth and Zechariah, Joseph, Mary, and the Innkeeper.

**HOMELESS PERSONS' MEMORIAL SERVICE  
MONDAY, DECEMBER 21 AT 5:30 P.M.  
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF STAMFORD**



On Christmas Eve 1981, FCCS became the first shelter for homeless individuals. This shelter was offered in response to the death of one homeless man in the streets of Stamford. Since then the need for shelters has continued to grow and the numbers of individuals who die alone in streets of the Stamford area and across the country continues to grow. Join us for this special service to remember those who have died in shelters and in the streets.

~

**The Christmas Pageant**

Takes place during the worship service on  
December 20.



**The Christmas Tea** will follow in the parlor. Please see Lynne Koellner to sign up to bring "goodies" to share with one another. Thank you for your generous donations!

~

**BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP**



The next meeting will be on **December 7** when we will discuss 2 books by Harper Lee. The books are the classic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1960 and *Go Set a Watchman* which was written in the 1950's but not released for publication until this year. The same characters are in both books which take place 20 years apart.

We meet in the church parlor at 7:00 p.m. All books are available in the church library.

See **Kathie Laug** if you have any questions.

**THRIFT SHOP NEWS**



*Our gift this month of \$1,000* is to support the Deacons Fund. For the past several years the Deacons have given Grade A gift cards to the residents of Pilgrim Towers and we are pleased to help them carry on this tradition.

*We continue to be grateful* for our behind the scenes volunteers, Bob Meyer, Joe Bryan, John Downing, Peter Birch and new volunteer Jim Shadford.

**Special Hours:** The Thrift Shop will be open on Sunday, December 6 after worship. This is in conjunction for the Trim a Tree project organized by Pam Shadford. We hope many of you will stop by to see us.

**Reminder:** We will be closed December 24 and December 31 and reopen on January 7. Hours are Thursdays – 10:00 - 3:00 or on the third Saturday of the month – 10:00-2:00.

*As always* we are thankful to all who support the Thrift Shop with their donations that make it possible to help others.

*Wishing you all a Merry Christmas  
and Happy New Year,*

The Thrift Shop Committee  
*Candice Bryan, Helga Downing, Jan Fuechsel,  
Kathie Laug, Elfriede Mallin, Jean Meyer, Pam Riley*

~



***Come to decorate a Gifting Tree on December 6!***

Our Advent event will begin after worship with a wonderful lunch prepared by our own renowned chefs Virginia Atkinson and Lynne Koellner.

Then each of us will decorate a small tree or wreath for gifting to a friend, neighbor, grandparent or even for yourself! We will decorate trees for our home-bound members as well. The trees and all the decorations will be provided, so come and let your Christmas spirit create a beautiful gift.

## COUNCIL



## CORNER

Prudential met on November 11, 2015. In observance of Veteran's Day that day, we took a moment to thank our church members and friends who are veterans. Thank you for your service. If you have a veteran in your family who you would like to add to a list of our church's veterans, please contact the church office.

We reflected on the congregational meeting on November 1. Thank you again to everyone who participated in the development proposal process. It was a lot of work over many months, and we are pleased with the level of engagement by the congregation. We'd like to recognize and thank our newly-elected building redesign committee for stepping up to guide us through the next phase of the process: Diane Sileo (co-chair), Lisa Bauerle (co-chair), Peter Birch, Pam Riley and Pam Shadford.

The Trustees (now bolstered by new members Nya Chambang, John Jelliffe and Warren Richardson) continue their work negotiating the contract with Copperline. Jason Schlesinger would like to have his application to the City complete in April or May 2016, with construction to start fall 2016 and be completed spring 2018. These are only estimates at present time, and we will keep you informed as we learn more information.

There are still open seats on the Trustees, and additional members are always welcome! Speak with our Nominations chair, Bob Godzeno, if you have interest or questions.

We will call a congregational meeting on Sunday, January 17, 2016 to discuss and vote on a motion to authorize the Trustees to sell the parsonage, and any other business that comes before the congregation.

The Stewardship campaign is leading up to Loyalty Sunday on November 22.

The search committee is hard at work interviewing candidates, sometimes meeting multiple times each week. We appreciate their dedication to their task and trust that they will find the right person being called to pastor FCC.

Several volunteer groups continue their work on (i) "redoing welcome" at FCC; and (ii) reviewing and simplifying financial recordkeeping and reporting.

*(continued next column)*

We discussed plans for the November 15 organ dedication (which has since happened and was a wonderful evening). Preparations are underway for Thanksgiving. Plans also are coming together for serving hot chocolate during Heights & Lights on December 6th, and Deacons and C.E. have a lot in store for us for Advent and Christmas Eve.

Missions continue getting out into the community, recently meeting at ARI and inviting Catalina Horak of Neighbors Link and Chris George from IRIS to speak to the congregation in November.

There is so much happening and so much work to do. FCC is alive – come be a part of it!

**Rob Godzeno, Moderator**

## LEARNING ABOUT CO-SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES



On the evening of Thursday, November 19, a meeting was held in our parlor to learn about co-sponsoring a refugee family. Chris George, director of Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS) in New Haven, spoke to the 25 people who gathered. He shared his years of experience with refugee resettlement in Connecticut. Perhaps you saw Chris interviewed on network news or heard him on NPR radio.

He spoke at length about the vetting process that takes place before a refugee family is cleared to come to the US – often three years of background and security checks, interviews, fingerprints, DNA testing while living in a refugee camp.

Chris then told the story of the refugee family redirected to New Haven just a few days earlier. That IRIS was able to receive this family on two days notice speaks to the process and procedures they implement to bring a new family into a community.

Finally the commitment involved to co-sponsor a family with IRIS was outlined. We will be in contact with members from other churches and organizations who attended the meeting in the coming months. It takes 10 committed volunteers to form the support team for 6 months. Ideally, we can join with others to form an interfaith group to lead us in welcoming a refugee family to Stamford.

***If you would like more information on our meeting, please contact Jean Meyer, Pam Shadford and Rev. Susan Gibson.***



*The Lord will come soon, will not delay.  
The Lord will make the darkest places bright.*

*Monastic Liturgy*

For the Mission Board, the words from the Monastic Liturgy guide the many activities that are being planned. Are we about the work that brings the Lord's coming to the darkest places? Is Stamford a brighter city because FCC is here? Are we a light to the world? That is our hope as we invite you to be a part of December's activities.

- **December 1** *World AIDS Day, Interfaith Service*, First Methodist Church 7:00p.m. This is an annual event that brings the whole city together.
- **December 11** *MISSION BOARD CHRISTMAS GATHERING* The Mission Board invites you to join us for a party in the Parlor at 7:00 p.m. for food, friendship, and reflection on the mission work of FCC. Nya will give us an update on South Sudan.
- **December 21** *National Homeless Persons Memorial Day* FCC @ 5:30 p.m. Another annual city event to remember those that have died homeless in the past year. FCC provides hospitality.
- **December 24** *FCC sponsors Christmas Eve at Pacific House.* In memory of the first homeless guests that slept in our Dining Room on Christmas Eve, we will sponsor a day of Pacific House services on Christmas Eve. The Thrift Shop will match the congregation's donations up to \$600 to make this possible.

Throughout the month of December we will be inviting you to participate in Inspirica's gift giving for the children.

We will keep you up to date about the interfaith sponsoring of a Refugee Family that FCC initiated on 11/19/15 and how other churches/synagogues/mosques are interested in collaborating.

Sometimes it seems like the darkness is winning. There is so much pain on our streets and around the world. How can we make a difference? This is the mission of the Mission Board and we invite you to continue joining us as we clear a path together for the Lord's coming.

*Anne Mochulsky, Tephilla Ponnuthurai,  
Katie McAllister, Anne Firmender, Warren Richardson,  
Maureen Matthews, Rev. Susan Gibson, Jean Meyer*

**PACIFIC HOUSE, ADOPT A DAY**



**Shelter for the Homeless**  
*a haven of hope*

FCC is again Adopting December 24 at Pacific House, Shelter for the Homeless. In remembrance of starting the first Homeless Shelter in Stamford in our Dining Room, we chose to fund December 24 in the "Adopt a Day" program again this year. The cost to run the shelter for one day is \$2,500. If you would like to be a part of this outreach, please make a check out to FCC with the notation "Pacific House, December 24".

**CALLING ALL CHEFS!**



Many thanks to Candice and Joe Bryan and Elfriede Mallin who prepared a wonderful meal for New Covenant House in November.

*This is a much appreciated service!*

Are **you** are interested in helping to prepare and serve a meal? We are always looking for members of our church who would be willing to volunteer in either the capacity of chef or helper.

*If you are one of those people, please come and see me, Helga Downing, or call me at 203-359-0494.*



~

**MISSION TRIP 2016**



Join the 2016 journey to the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Reservation. Talk to Jean Meyer or John Jelliffe if you would like to learn more about this trip.

~

## MAKE STOCK GIFTS NOW



Did you know that you can donate appreciated securities (stocks or bonds) directly to the church, deduct the full value of the securities on the date the church receives and sells the securities, and not have to pay income tax, ever, on the capital gains? Yes, you can! Now is the time to make such gifts so you can take your charitable deduction on your 2014 income tax returns and increase the size of your refund (or decrease your tax due) on your Form 1040 next spring.

You may have securities that are worth more than you paid for them (your income tax basis). If you were to sell those stocks yourself, you would probably pay federal and Connecticut capital gains tax of about 20% net combined total on your capital gains, which you could then contribute to the church as after-tax dollars in cash or by check. Donating the securities to the church directly avoids the capital gains taxes entirely and legally! Your tax advisor or financial advisor can assist you in picking which securities to donate.

Further, you may have received odd amounts of stock in various companies (often telephone or insurance companies) as “spinoffs”. You may be confused about the income tax basis of those spinoffs. Donating that stock to the church allows you to avoid the tedium of the basis calculation, while helping your church.

Making your donation in 2015 (please do not wait until the last week in December to do it!) enables you to pay the balance, if any, of your 2015 pledge, plus pre-pay your 2016 pledge now, at current stock market values, which may decline in the future. You may also direct the church to hold all or some of your donation for the church’s general benefit, until you later direct the church how that balance should be applied (toward a further pledge, to special offerings, etc.)

Interested? Please call me for details and a transfer form letter to our new stock receipt account at ScottTrade (no longer at Morgan Stanley) by Monday, December 22 at 203-325-4477 (office) or 203-327-3795 (home).

*Steve Ayres,*  
*Associate Treasurer-Endowment & Stewardship Board*

## STEWARDSHIP BOARD REPORTS MANY PROMISES



Your Stewardship Board (Lynda Stack and Steve Ayres) is pleased and grateful to report our receipt of 33 pledges through Loyalty/Stewardship Sunday, 11/22/2015, totaling \$93,272., 67% of our Congregations’ accepted and ambitious \$140,000 goal for 2016. We thank you! This is a great start!

We still need pledges of about \$46,000. to meet that aspirational goal. We would love to have many more pledges. We would also love to exceed our goal for 2016! What a wonderful blessing to this church that would be!

If you have not yet pledged for 2016, please use the orange, brown and black pledge card sent to you by letter in November and mail or deliver it to the church. You may also use the pledge card from your pew rack and place that pledge card in the Sunday offering plate. If you need a pledge card, please ask me.

Some of you contribute regularly to our church but have not yet pledged. Please give us your plan by submitting your pledge card for 2016. Contributions without a pledge go into “open plate” and make planning for the church’s financial future more difficult. Our church depends on you, our members and friends, for its financial support. We all recall God’s promises to us. Let’s make our own promise to God’s church by pledging to First Congregational Church!

*Steve Ayres*

**Be part of our church's mission,  
support *Downtown EATS* by:**

- Volunteering to help on the 2nd Saturday each month (10:00 a.m.-1:00p.m.)
- Donating non-perishable food and toiletries

**This month the following items would be especially helpful:**

- Small boxes of cereal, easy-open cans of soup, meals, tuna and fruit
- White socks

**Please bring donations on Sunday, December 6.  
*Downtown EATS* this month is December 12.  
Collections will be ongoing on  
the first Sunday of each month.**

**Thank you for your continued generosity!**



## HOW OUR CRÈCHE CAME TO BE

In the fall of 1987 members of the newly commissioned Board of Parish Life met to explore ideas for enhancing the life of the parish. One suggestion was to place a Crèche on the front lawn of the church during Advent. At one time there had been a manger scene with live animals in Latham Park. This was discontinued because of the Church-State issue. A Crèche project was too much for the Board to undertake immediately and the idea was set aside for action later. Helen Croot, Chair of the Board, kept the idea in her thoughts. Helen suggested to the 1987 Friendship Fair Committee that the project be underwritten with funds from the fair. Five hundred dollars was allocated to purchase needed materials.

Bob Godzeno succeeded Helen as Chair of the Parish Life Board in 1988. He began looking for a design for use in making a Crèche. There were plenty of pictures, but no designs. He consulted Bud Smith who recalled that the EZ-Build Company had marketed patterns for handicraft workers, but had discontinued the line. A friend of Bud's in the hardware business still had an EZ-Build pattern for a Crèche with full-sized figures. Bud purchased it for five dollars. The instructions included paper patterns, a material list, and directions on tracing and painting cut-out figures. Bud agreed to cut out the figures and to construct the stable described in the instructions. He revised the plans to make it easier to dismantle and store the stable. Bob Godzeno transported the lumber from the lumber yard. He delivered the lumber for the framework to Bud Smith and the plywood for the figures, and the sides, back and roof of the stable to George Clarke's garage for staining and tracing the figures. After this was done, the plywood was taken to Bud Smith to be cut out, and then brought back to the Clarke's where Bob and George painted one side white and the other side black.

*(continued next column)*

Bob took the figures to his home in Norwalk to trace details from the paper patterns and to indicate the location of each color. Betty Ayres and assistant pastor Barbara Libby helped with the painting, introducing our young people to "painting by numbers."

By November 17, 1988 the painting was completed.

Erection of the Crèche on the front lawn of the church was planned for November 27. Bud Smith, Jim Moninger, Bob Godzeno and George Clarke managed to assemble the stable before rain halted the work. The figures were put in place November 29. A spotlight was centered on the crèche. It was dedicated December 4.

Those who helped:

Youth: Amy Ayres, Joshua Barratt, Sherry Condaris, Robby Godzeno, Emily Herr, Cindy Signore, Lauren Sileo, Buffer Works

Adults: Eleanor Appling, Elizabeth and Steve Ayres, Linda Condaris, Bob, Jeanne and Robby Godzeno, James Moninger, Ivan (Bud) Smith, Barbara Arata, George Clarke, Helen Croot, Barbara Libby, Lidabelle Pollard

Each year thereafter at Thanksgiving time volunteers are recruited by Bob Godzeno or Rob Godzeno to help erect the crèche and later near New Year's to disassemble it for storage in the closet off the carpenter shop.

I thought you might enjoy the story and appreciate my faithful crew, many of whom have helped countless times in good weather and at times really bad weather. One member always jokes that once you join the crèche crew, you're on it for life. I certainly hope she's right; new volunteers are always welcome. Thanks, crèche crew for being part of this fun-filled holiday tradition.

**Bob Godzeno**

### DECEMBER

#### BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

- 1 Timothy Wallace
- 3 Nicoline Sawabini
- 9 Jonathan Tenca
- 13 Don Perry
- 16 Denise Brown
- 18 Robert Skovgaard
- 21 Diane Sileo
- 25 Chin Vo
- 30 Doug Wyse

# Willy of the Crooked Lake

*Willy of the Crooked Lake* tells the story of a lost dog on a hot highway in the summer, how he was rescued and adopted by a new family, and how he lived out the rest of his days on a beautiful lake in the Finger Lakes of western New York State.

"I was Willy's veterinarian beginning with his rescue, and I am delighted that he is now the star of a children's book. This story will charm children and adults alike, and the artist has captured Willy in various circumstances in a way that will tug on your heart strings. Willy certainly landed in a good home with my friend, Martha. I'm very pleased that the book will benefit our local Finger Lakes SPCA. I promise that you will enjoy this book!"

—Susan Farmer, DVM



## Gary Pierce Brown and Bonnie Brooke Mitchell

Gary Brown, former pastor here at FCC from 1980 to 2007, will return to be with us for a special purpose on Sunday, December 20th. Gary has written and self-published a children's book which features the true story of the Brown family's rescue dog, Willy, and is entitled, "Willy of the Crooked Lake." The book is a fundraiser for the local Finger Lakes SPCA in upstate New York and the money raised will fund a dog room in their new River's Edge Farm facility dedicated in memory of Gary's wife, Martha -- and of course, in memory of Willy. "Willy of the Crooked Lake" has a soft cover in color and 36 black and white pages with many illustrations by Gary's artist friend, Bonnie Mitchell, of White Plains.

On Sunday, December 20th, Gary will hold a book signing during our Christmas Tea, complete with a stamp of Willy's actual paw print. Copies will be available for a minimum donation of \$15 per book to the Finger Lakes SPCA. Come say hello to Gary and get a copy of the book for your children or grandchildren! If you aren't able to be there on the 20th but would like a copy of the book, fill out a card before December 20th with your name, address, email address and number of copies requested, along with a check made out to FLSPCA for at least \$15 per book, and drop the card and check off at in the church office.

## FALL BUDGET MEETING UPDATE

Thank you to everyone who attended and participated in our annual fall budget meeting. It is encouraging to have so many members actively engaging in discernment about our church's future.

In Jesus' time and even in the early history of our own church, people cast lots or drew straws to discern God's vision. We do things a little differently today, usually by voting. But the results are still the same. We believe that God works through whatever process we use to make our path clear for us.

For those who were not able to attend the meeting: the congregation adopted an operating budget for 2016, authorized the Trustees to accept Copperline Partners' development proposal, and created a committee of Lisa Bauerle, Peter Birch, Pam Riley, Pam Shadford and Diane Sileo to guide us through the redesign of our physical space. Thank you especially to these committee members for stepping up to lead us. Because the meeting ran long, we decided not to take up the question of selling our parsonage at this meeting. We will take that up at another congregational meeting sometime soon.

While demolition and construction at our 1 Walton Place church property won't start for some time, we all recognize that the weeks and months ahead will be challenging ones. I firmly believe we will endure them and thrive together as a congregation, as we have done through all of the challenges we have faced in recent years. It is encouraging that of the 66 people who voted on the proposal, 46 have already committed (by writing their names on their ballots or verbally) to "Stand with FCC" and help us do the tough work ahead of us, regardless of the outcome of the vote. I'm sure many others are committed too, and just haven't had the chance to tell us yet!

Recognizing that this was not the individual vision all of us had for the church, now is the time to come together around this collective vision and move forward. Listen to one another, lean on and encourage one another, and most importantly, pray for one another. Remember the values lifted up in our 2014-2015 visioning process, which will give us strength for the days ahead: Community, Faith, Evolving, Affirmation, Compassion and Courage.

Disruption during this process will be unavoidable, but it will be temporary. We must all commit to doing what we can to minimize unnecessary disruption and share the burden of disruptions that cannot be avoided. We can do this, together and with the Spirit. At the end of this journey awaits a changed, renewed and updated physical structure that will support our many ministries in a changing world. ***Thank you, Rob Godzeno, Moderator***

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First Congregational Church  
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#### **LECTIONARY READINGS**

**December 6:** Mal 3:1-4 or Bar 5:1-9;  
Luke 1:68-79; Phil 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

**December 13:** Zeph 3:14-20; Isa 12:2-6;  
Phil 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

**December 20:** Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:46b-55 or  
Ps 80:1-7; Heb 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

**December 27:** 1 Sam 2:18-20, 26; Ps 148;  
Col 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52