

Advent and Christmas at First Church

Wednesday Advent Communion Services — Nov. 30; Dec. 7, 14 and 21 — 6:30 to 7:10 PM

Christmas Concert — Sunday, Dec. 11 — 4:00 PM

Family Christmas Experience — Sunday, Dec. 18 — 3:00 to 5:00 PM

Christmas Eve Candlelight Services — Saturday, Dec. 24 — 6:30, 8:00, 9:30 and 11:00 PM

"Happy Birthday, Jesus!" Party (age 5 thru grade 3) — Saturday, Dec. 24 — 6:30 to 7:30 PM

Christmas Day Worship Services — Sunday, Dec. 25 — Traditional and Wind at 10:00 AM



I WILL NEVER FORGET the Advent season of 2005. Christy and I were aware that she was pregnant, and we were the only ones who knew.

What an Advent! Mary and Joseph's last weeks came alive for us. I began to think in a new way of all the issues they faced. There must have been hope-filled joy. God had given them an incredible gift. He had spoken to them. He was with them

and He was watching over them in a dynamic way.

Yet, despite the great gift, it must have been hard. The circumstances of God's gift kept them from sharing that joy with others. Friends and family might have looked down on them because Mary was pregnant before marriage. Besides, who would have believed them if they told the truth?

The only one they could share their joys and fears with was God. They became completely dependent on God. They were alone with Him, yet they were filled with hope. It was, in many ways, a double gifting. They received the gift of hope-filled expectancy along with the gift of dependency.

I can identify with Mary and Joseph. God, in His good pleasure and purposes, has called me to dependence on Him. He has also given me a hope-filled expectancy. Christ will come, but while I wait, I am drawn to a deeper dependence on Him.

I wonder if He has called us at First Church into a deeper dependence on Him as well. I believe God has given us a special opportunity.

Dependence is an incredible gift, yet it is not usually the gift we want. We like feeling we are in control. Usually, we don't like to be brought to the place of need before God. But despite our feelings, dependence is a wonderful gift, for in it God gives us more than we can imagine. The Holy Spirit fills our needs and gives that expectant hope, like the hope given to Mary and Joseph.

How do we respond when God calls us to deeper dependence? In short, we embrace the gift and seek Him in prayer with all that we have. We pray with hope. We trust that God will meet us at our place of need. We know that Jesus will come.

This Advent, I invite you to join with me and embrace God's gift. I will be spending more time in prayer. I hope you will as well.

—Pastor Deryk

Advent Sermon Series

Alone, yet filled with

Hope



All Alone with God

First Sunday in Advent

NOV. 27

Message by Pastor Deryk

Text: 1 Kings 17

A God of the Impossible

Second Sunday in Advent

DEC. 4

Message by Pastor Mike

Text: Luke 1:26-38

A Hopeful Song

Third Sunday in Advent

DEC. 11

Message by Pastor Deryk

Text: Luke 1:46-56

A Joyful Song

Fourth Sunday in Advent

DEC. 18

Message by Pastor Deryk

Text: Luke 1:67-80

A Dad's Love

Christmas Eve: 6:30, 8, 9:30, 11

SAT., DEC. 24

Message by Pastor Deryk

Text: Galatians 4:4-7

Looking Ahead with Joy and Wonder

Christmas Day: 10:00 AM

DEC. 25, Traditional and Wind

Message by Pastor Deryk

Christmas Silver Tea

Our annual **Christmas Silver Tea** will be held on **Wednesday, December 14**. The Women's Fellowship extends a warm invitation to women of all ages to share in this lovely tradition at First Church.

The delightful Silver Tea will be held in the Worship and Fireside Rooms, beginning at 12:30 p.m. with a time of worship, followed by **Christmas carols with the children of the First Church Nursery School**.

Following the program, tea, punch and delicious cookies will be served. Please feel free to bring a friend to share in this most enjoyable and heartwarming experience! If you plan to attend, please call **Kathy Stone** at 860.571.8942 by December 13. (If you forget to call, walk-ins will still be welcome.) And homemade cookies would be appreciated!

BASIC MONEY MANAGEMENT CLASS

starts **Sunday, November 27**, and runs through **December 18**, as highlighted in the last issue, meeting in the Fireside Room during the 11:00 a.m. service. Led by **Anton Hertle**, the class is designed for those who want to get better control of their finances. It teaches the principles of how to make money serve you, instead of you serving money. For sample topics, go to firstchurch.org/allclasses. Registration is not required.

WOULD YOU DELIVER PLANTS? Christmas "Angels" are needed to deliver the lovely memorial plants from the Meetinghouse to our homebound members and friends after Christmas. Please sign "An-

gel" after your name in the Friendship Register or call **Sybil Lyon** at 860-633-2840, and come to the church on **Tuesday, December 27**, between 9:00 a.m. and noon, to pick up your assignment. (Call the church office if you have signed up but find you are unable to help that day.)

MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers): On **Thursday, December 1**, our theme will be what was originally scheduled for November, "**Meaningful Dinners**," sharing ideas about how we make our nightly dinners fun and interesting for all family members. Enjoy great morning snacks and this wonderful opportunity to get to know other women who have preschoolers. MOPS meets on first Thursdays from October through May, 9:15 to 11:15 a.m., in the Fireside Room. Childcare (\$5 per child), which starts at 9:00 a.m., is available. For details, call **Debbie Hertle** at 860.529.1575, ext. 303.

ANGEL TREE CHRISTMAS — Will you help make Christmas more meaningful to a child of a prisoner? Our **Angel Tree Christmas Party** for over 100 children will be held in Keith Jones Hall on **Saturday, December 3**, noon to 3:00 p.m. We would love volunteers to help set up from 10:00 a.m. to noon, help at the party, and help to clean up until about 5:00 p.m., and volunteers to deliver gifts to children who couldn't attend the party. For details, or to donate toward the purchase of food, supplies and gifts, contact **Wendy Parker** at 860.371.0367 or wendysparker@gmail.com.

THE NUTS ARE IN! Women's Fellowship is selling pistachios (\$8 per pound) and sliced almonds (\$7 per pound). The proceeds are used to support many worthwhile Outreach programs. So stop by the table in the Wells Fellowship Area on **Sundays**, pick up a few bags to enjoy during the Christmas season, and help support those in need.

URGENT FOOD BANK NEED — Due to the power outages following our autumn nor'easter, the shelves have been largely depleted, and food donations are down as well. *One in every six children in this country goes to bed hungry!* We must help them and so many others who are in dire need. There is a **white wooden box** in the Wells Fellowship Area for your gifts of nonperishable food items. Monetary donations are also greatly appreciated, with checks payable to First Church of Christ, memo "Food Bank." Call **Howard Page**, at 860.563.3275, with any questions or suggestions.

STORM CLOSINGS — Under conditions severe enough for us to cancel services or close the church, we will post announcements on our website's home page—www.firstchurch.org—and the church's Facebook page—facebook.com/FirstChurchPage, and also, if possible, on our main phone line recording (860.529.1575). In addition, we publicize churchwide closings on Channels 3 and 30, and radio station WTIC (1080 AM and 96.5 FM). You may also check online at wfsb.com, nbconnecticut.com, or wtic1080.com. Occasionally, some ministries may make their own decisions; when in doubt, please be sure to contact your ministry leaders.

New Class, Sacred Rhythms, Starts January 4

This six-session DVD study links the disciplines of the Christian faith to the most compelling desires of the human soul. Sessions include *Desire: Longing for More in the Spiritual Life*; *Honoring the Body: Flesh-and-Blood Spirituality*; and *Cultivating Your Own Sacred Rhythms*.

The class will not only study each discipline but *experience* it during class time. Led by **Pastor Mike and Cindy McDowell**, we'll meet in the Drawing Room on **Wednesdays, January 4** through **February 15**, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. All are welcome! The study guide is \$10; register with Arlene at 860.529.1575, ext. 211, or arlenee@firstchurch.org.

Middle School Snow Jam Weekend Nears!

January 20 to 22, all in grades 5 through 12 may join us for an awesome weekend at Singing Hills in Plainfield, New Hampshire! There will be snow sports, skating, wild games—and time to discover what it means to be a follower of Jesus! Call **Todd Willard** at 860.529.1575, ext. 205.

Christmas Shopping at the Outreach Gift Shop

Do your Christmas shopping at this delightful shop and support worthwhile causes at the same time!

Open after each service on **Sundays**, and also on **Wednesday nights during Advent** from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m., the shop offers a beautiful assortment of unique gifts from many countries. Stop by and visit—the store is located in the Marsh Building, the first door on the left as you walk from the Meetinghouse.



Christmas Joy!

Our Church is filled with **poinsettias** during the week of Christmas, due to the generosity of the congregation. **You may add to the joy** by making a memorial contribution to the **floral decorations** or to the **Memorial Fund**. **Suggested donation is \$35.**

This completed form and your check (payable to "First Church of Christ") should reach the church's Finance Office by **Thursday, December 8**. Either mail them to First Church or place them in the drop box located just outside the Finance Office.

Please check one: **Flowers** **Fund**

This information (except phone number) will appear in the Bulletin:

In loving memory of: _____

Given by: _____

Your phone number: _____

Midweek Advent Services

A special feature of the Advent season at First Church is our midweek service of prayer and Communion, offered in the Meetinghouse **Wednesday evenings from 6:30 to 7:10.**

This is a time for prayer, for singing Advent and Christmas carols, and for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. A different member of our family of faith speaks briefly at each service—**Heart-to-Heart**—focusing this year on their prayer lives. **Pastor Mike** invites you join us for these special services.



Sarah Papertsian

Papertsian, who has begun working for a mission organization that focuses on bringing the love of Jesus to the Muslim world. In January, she will relocate to Arizona. Sarah is their Campus Coordinator for the Mobilization Department.

Our second speaker, on **December 7**, will be **Chip Darius**, a safety consultant and certified EMT. Chip plays the tuba, is active in Men's Ministries,



Chip Darius in Haiti

and serves on the Outreach Committee. Chip and Marla have five children.

On **December 14**, we will hear **Terry Shook's** testimony. Terry is a member of the Outreach Committee, who also assists with the Alpha Course. God has called Terry into mission work, resulting



Terry Shook

in multiple missions to the Dominican Republic and Haiti. He is the supervisor for interventional cardiology at St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center.

Lastly, on **December 21**, **Janice Johnson** will share from her heart. Janice is wife to Burt and mother to Anneli and Per. She volunteers at ABC Women's Center in Middletown, where she works with teenage girls, and is involved with First Church's Prayer Ministry.



Janice Johnson

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

6:30, 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 PM

CHRISTMAS EVE at First Church is an unforgettable experience. We light our chandeliers, and the Meetinghouse is full of the joy Christ's Birth brings! **Pastor Deryk** will



give us an uplifting message—**A Dad's Love**—and the music will be truly glorious!

Plan to be with us for this holy moment of celebration, and invite family, friends, and guests to be with you in God's House that evening—at **6:30, 8:00, 9:30 or 11:00.**

*Childcare is provided during the 6:30 and 8:00 p.m. services for ages 5 and under, and our 14th annual **Happy Birthday, Jesus! Children's Party** will be held separately during the 6:30 service (see below).*

Happy Birthday, Jesus! Party

During the 6:30 service, children from age 5 through grade 3 are invited to the Fireside Room for a celebration of the Birthday of our King—with games, crafts, Christmas carols and birthday cake! (Those in grade 4 and up are encouraged to attend church with their families.)

NOTE: Anyone who can attend one of the later services and **help with the party** during the 6:30 hour should call **Debbie Hertle** at 860.529.1575, ext. 303.

Help is also needed for childcare for preschool and younger during the 6:30 and 8:00 services, for whom age-appropriate activities are planned. Won't you lend a hand on this special evening when so many visitors come to our church?

Caroling on the Broad Street Green

Also, don't miss the ever-popular **caroling on the Broad Street Green**, a community-wide event led by First Church Pilgrim Fellowship, with brass accompaniment and a brief message by **Todd Willard**. There will be candles and song books for everyone! It is a joyous gathering at **5:00** on Christmas Eve!

2012 D.R. Mission Trip Info Meeting Is Set for December 4

First Church is very pleased to announce the **seventh intergenerational mission trip to the Dominican Republic**, set for **July 6 to 14, 2012.**

The team will be doing construction projects and conducting medical clinics, along with food distribution, evangelism, programs for children, and more.

This is a life-changing trip both for the people we serve and for the team members. No specific skills are required—if you have an interest, God has a plan for you!

If you would like to know more about this opportunity, please join us in the Fireside Room on **Sunday, December 4**, from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m., for an informational meeting. Pizza will be provided.

If you are unable to attend this meeting, please contact **Dana Crompton** at 860-635-1530 or dcrompton@sbc-global.net for more information and also to be placed on our email distribution list.

AFFIRM Singles' Advent and Christmas

We are currently collecting change to support our sister church in Peru and to provide Christmas gifts to needy children. Experience the true joy of Christmas by giving of yourself to help those in need! **All single adults** are invited to take part in our **Friday schedule:**

Dec. 16 — Come one! Come all! On Friday, December 16, we'll bring good tidings of great joy by singing Christmas carols to the residents of the Nathan Hale Facility and to the homebound. Show the love of Jesus and the meaning of Christmas with this fun opportunity. We'll meet at the church at 7:00 p.m.

Dec. 23 — Merry Christmas party

Dec. 30 — New Year's Eve party

Please join us on Fridays at 7:00 p.m. in the Fireside/Worship Rooms for a time of fellowship and edification as we seek to grow in our love of the Lord and one another. For more information, visit our Web page — www.firstchurch.org/singles.

BOOK OF LIFE

ENTERED ETERNAL LIFE

David T. "Dick" Hopper, November 6, 2011

John J. Delisio, November 14, 2011

Joan (Field) Viele, November 16, 2011

Our Church unites in an expression of heartfelt sympathy to their families.

BORN

Sophia Isabel Rodriguez, daughter of Felix and Carol (Calzetta) Rodriguez, October 23, 2011

Sadie Brooke Lathrop, daughter of David and Kristen (Stevens) Lathrop, October 28, 2011

Love never ends.

1 Corinthians 13:8a (ESV)

First Church

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST IN WETHERSFIELD

CONGREGATIONAL

860.529.1575 • Fax: 860.721.7861

250 Main Street, Wethersfield, CT 06109

Website: www.firstchurch.org

Email: info@firstchurch.org

Sunday Worship

Traditional Services in the Meetinghouse:

8:00, 9:15 and 11:00 a.m.

Wind Contemporary Service
in Keith Jones Hall: 11:00 a.m.

First Church on Facebook

www.facebook.com/FirstChurchPage

Dial-A-Message: 860.529.1785

Uplifting Messages

Provided by Caring Ministries

What will you leave behind?

Please remember First Church in your will.

e-GIVING reduces paperwork and helps keep track of your yearly pledge. For info about contributing electronically via a monthly automatic withdrawal from your bank account, call the Finance Office, 860.529.1575, x218.

Atessa M. Afshar Associate Minister
Wayne E. Luman Director of Caring Ministries
Marcia J. McCann Dir. of Children's Ministries
T. Michael McDowell Associate Minister
Donald W. Morgan Minister Emeritus
Deryk P. Richenbourg Senior Minister
David C. Spicer Minister of Music & the Arts
Todd E. Willard Associate Minister

OUR MISSION

We are a community of Jesus followers who love God, love one another, and make disciples.

SPIRE DEADLINE

Material for the January issue of *The Spire*, which will be mailed/emailed on Dec. 28, must be submitted to Dave Gilbert by noon on Thursday, Dec. 15, at daveg@firstchurch.org or 860.529.1575, ext. 225.

DATED MATERIAL
Mailed Nov. 22, 2011

PERIODICAL
POSTAGE PAID
at Hartford,
Connecticut

The Spire (USPS 441-830) is published monthly, except July and August, by The First Church of Christ in Wethersfield, 250 Main Street, Wethersfield, Connecticut 06109.

POSTMASTER — Send address changes to: *The Spire*, 250 Main Street, Wethersfield, CT 06109-1893

Christmas Concert

Sunday, December 11 • 4 PM

CHOIRS • SOLOISTS • FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

This year's Christmas Concert will include many of our favorites! The *Gloria* by **Antonio Vivaldi** is among the most well-known and loved compositions. Written in the early 18th century, this short work is still inspiring us. We usually use excerpts from this throughout the season.

Harpist **Joan Ceo** will join the trebles of the choir to present portions of *A Ceremony of Carols* by **Benjamin Britten**—absolutely exquisite music! One minister remarked that this work brought her to her Christian faith!

Christmas Day, by **Gustav Holst**, contains or hints at such carols as *Good Christian Men, Rejoice*, *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen*, *The First Noel*, and *Come, Ye Lofty*.

The setting of *O Holy Night*, arranged by **Robert Hebble**, will feature **Raymond Calderon**, **Christopher Dukes**, and **Mark**



Hale—our own three tenors from years past and present. Other solos will be *Sweet Little Jesus Boy*, by Robert MacGimsey, sung by Chris, and an aria from Handel's *Messiah*, which will be sung by **Stewart Battle**.

All attending will have a chance to sing carols as well as hear our Cherub, Carol, Pilgrim Youth and First Church Choirs, and Cantata Singers. The **Wethersfield Choralaires**, directed by **Scott Rioux**, will offer pre-concert music beginning at 3:15 p.m. Invite your friends!

The entire offering will benefit children of our sister church in Peru, children in the Dominican Republic, and children in Uganda.

Also, please bring a nonperishable food item to be donated to our local **food bank**. Due to the recent power outages, its shelves have been largely depleted.

Family Christmas Experience

Join us on **Sunday, December 18**, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. in Keith Jones Hall as we watch the *VeggieTales* version of "**The Little Drummer Boy**" (starring Junior Asparagus), a lonely child who finds the true meaning of Christmas when he stumbles upon the birth of the baby Jesus.

We will watch the movie, enjoy sharing family Christmas traditions with one another, and make a lovely centerpiece for your Christmas table.

Please bring a plate of cookies to share during our refreshment time. Hot chocolate and coffee will be provided.

Please sign up on the *Wells Area poster*, beginning *Sunday, November 27*, so we can have enough supplies for all!

Advent Booklet

Pick up a copy of a **new Advent devotional booklet** from an usher following one of the worship services on the **first Sunday of Advent, November 27**.

Living the Gospel Life's Advent issue provides, each day, a brief and compelling devotional insight along with a prayer, Bible reading, and a thought-provoking challenge to apply God's life-giving Word to one's life, as we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Christ's Nativity and His becoming one of us for our salvation.

New Worship Schedule Is Considered

Discussion meeting is set for Sunday, December 11, at 12:30

November 21, 2011

Dear First Church Family of Faith,

- Do we really need three traditional services? Would our congregation be better served with two?
- Do we need to add another Wind service, due to capacity issues?
- What are the best times to have the services?

Over the last few months, a group of Deacons and myself have struggled and sought to find answers to these questions. A few factors led us to begin these discussions. Among them were a survey that was done by the church in the spring and our Sunday morning attendance, but mostly it was because we wanted our Sunday morning schedule to be the best it can be.

After much discussion from the group, and the Deacons as a whole, we wanted to share with you some thoughts and conclusions. This issue is one that affects all of us, so we desire your valuable input as we continue together in the conversation.

When we looked at the question of the traditional services, we realized that, based on numbers (averaging a total of around 550 for all three services) we no longer need three and could, in fact, make much better use of our resources with just two traditional services. A little research revealed that both the 9:15 and 11:00 services have been in steady decline for about ten years. We also noticed that the 11:00 has had a greater rate of decline than the 9:15—on the two Sundays prior to the October 29 snowstorm, the attendance was only 150 and 129. The 8:00 service is the smallest but has the most consistent attendance.

Once we knew that we need to move to two traditional services, additional factors arose that are helping us to decide on the times of these services.

First, the highest comfortable average attendance for a single Meetinghouse service is around 350-400. Higher than that is fine on an occasional basis, but the seating can be tight and other aspects less than ideal. (To understand how full that is, please note that we have reached 350 only once this whole year.) What that means for a switch to two services—still averaging 550 total—is that one of them must average at least 150-200 so that the other one can be expected to average no more than 350-400. If, for example, we were to have the two services at 8:00 and 10:00, we could expect the usual 75 at 8:00 but then 475 at 10:00, which would mean being Christmas-Eve-full at the average 10:00 service, and some Sundays even more than that. Of course, that would be unacceptable.

Second, we would like to make sure that Sunday worship services finish before noon, so that people can be home or elsewhere for the rest of the day. Also, we are very concerned about the

current 11:00 attendance and wonder if an earlier time slot might encourage more people to come to the later traditional service.

We also believe that we will eventually need a second Wind service. However, we do not think it will be productive to begin a second contemporary service at this time with renovation of that building still very much on the horizon. When the Marsh building is being worked on, all First Church services will most likely be held in the Meetinghouse. If we start another Wind service at this time, we might have to stop it during the renovation. Also, we do not know yet what the final capacity will be for Keith Jones Hall—the issue for a new service might take care of itself with the renovation.

After considering all facets of a new schedule with just two traditional services, we feel that the best options are as follows:

- First service at 9:00, second at 10:30 or 10:45
- First service at 8:45, second at 10:30

The Wind service would be held at the same time as the second traditional service. (We looked into having Wind at a different time but see that as almost impossible.)

With 9:00 as the first service, we would need to choose between 10:30 and 10:45 for the second, which involves a number of factors on which we hope you will reflect and provide feedback. A service time of 10:30—a full half-hour earlier than 11:00—has a greater chance of more people moving to that service than a time of 10:45. However, a service at 10:45 would offer more transition time between services (the same duration as we have now)—better for the musicians, parking and fellowship, and especially helpful on Communion Sundays. On the other hand, if 10:45 means that the numbers will stay close to the same as they are now at 11:00, we will have a problem.

Of course, we could retain that good transition time by setting the first service at 8:45, allowing us to hold the second service at 10:30—the only question being how many people would consider 8:45 too early.

We need to discuss these options, knowing that there are pros and cons for each time.

Moving from four services to three will be hard for some. Every service will be impacted. However, the result of our moving the service schedule around, I believe, will be better for us in the long run. In an ideal world, churches would be able to accommodate all their parishioners in a single worship service. Wouldn't it be great to worship together as one body! Obviously, that is not possible for us, but moving to three services—two traditional and one contemporary—will not only enhance our worship but bring us closer to the unity we all desire.

What are your thoughts? How can we make the Sunday morning schedule the best it can be? I recognize there are no easy answers to this. However, I do believe that our conversation together before God will bring out what is best for us moving forward. So please think and pray about this. I would like to hear your thoughts. We will have an informal meeting in the Meetinghouse after the services on December 11 to discuss more.

Pray with me and the Deacons for God's leading.

Pastor Deryk