



# The Cornerstone

News from the First Church of Christ, Congregational, United Church of Christ  
Unionville, CT

JAN/FEB 2025

## *The Pastor's Pen*

W. H. Auden wrote a long poem in 1941/42 called *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*, consisting of a series of monologues delivered by the various characters in the Christmas story as well as a chorus and a narrator. The language of the characters is modern, and the events unfold in contemporary time. The poem's depiction of the world's future is quite dark: knowledge degenerating into subjective visions; life after death an eternal dinner party where all the guests are twenty and justice replaced by pity as the cardinal virtue. Yet for all the poem's darkness, I have always resonated with the description of the time after Christmas:

“Well, so that is that. Now we must dismantle the tree,  
Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes---  
. . . As in previous years we have seen the actual Vision and failed  
To do more than entertain it as an agreeable  
Possibility, once again we have sent Him away,  
Begging though to remain His Disobedient servant,  
The promising child who cannot keep His word for long.”

The “time being” is understood as the actual time in which we live, the time when bills must be paid, dishes washed, and all manner of routine concerns attended to. Christmas morning is gone, and like new parents, who have expectedly been waiting for the baby to arrive and then must settle into the routine of ordinary life after the birth, we too must do the same. Ordinary time is upon us, as Epiphany disappears into the past, and as Auden tells us in his poem, it is “the most trying time of all.” The color green is the liturgical color until Lent, when the purple theme of repentance rears its head and asks us to do what no one really wants to do. We contemplate the long winter months ahead, unrelieved by Ash Wednesday on the horizon, and we may indeed feel that we are facing a trying time.

And yet there is a spirituality of winter, when our piece of the earth, frozen and painted with a hard crust of sand and salt, does not easily yield up tender mercies. When the buds began to appear in the early spring, promising that a burst of color will soon appear, it is much easier to believe in new beginnings. Most of us find that our spirits pick up in the spring, but in the winter months, when ice and snow threaten to keep us indoors, we may find our spirits tired and discouraged. But there is no denying that winter does grace us with its own form of beauty. Who does not love the scene of large, white snowflakes, descending to the ground, even if the sky is a somber grey without a hint of sunshine behind the clouds? When a fresh snowfall blankets the earth with a powdery softness and when the sun finally does break through the clouds, the snow glistens like crystals we can hold in our hands. Ice storms are hazardous, but don't we all marvel at the ice encased tree branches that crackle in the morning sun? The temperatures may be dangerously low outside, especially for those who are homeless, and we may find ourselves worrying about their survival, just as we might also wonder how our early New England ancestors survived the winter without the conveniences of modern heating systems.

Indeed, winter can be a very hard season, not only for the homeless but also for others who suffer from seasonal disorders, when the lack of sun leaves them feeling sad and lonely. The body does, after all, long for sunshine and light, which we need to make vitamin D. And yet the winter is more than a season to endure. The stillness and quiet of winter invite us to a deeper inner awareness. Some people find that they rest more in the winter, and others discover that they have an easier time meditating without all the distractions of outdoor activities. An avid gardener told me recently that she looked forward to the winter when she did not feel the compulsion to do much of anything. “When my hands are in the dirt,” she said, “I love it, the feel of it between my fingers, but I don't find myself open to thinking. It's all activity. In the winter I think more deeply and more clearly.”

We all have our own approaches to winter, so whatever yours is, I hope it helps you to live the season fully. Some years ago, a woman I knew moved back from southern California, because she grew tired of all the sunshine and warm weather. “I missed the cloudy days, she said, and I also missed the snow. There is something about the change of the seasons that compels us to look more deeply into life.” So look---look deeply and look far. Look at the snow fall to the ground. Gaze at the grey sky, clouded with a shield hiding the sun. And remember, the sun is always behind the clouds.

Yours in Christ,  
Sandra

## Pastoral Coverage

In case of  
emergency,  
please contact the  
following:

**Church office: 860-  
673-2796**

or

**Rev. Sandra Olsen:  
(860) 347-4100**

or

**Diaconate  
Chair,  
Cindy Nye:  
(517) 402-1000**

## SANDRA'S OFFICE HOURS:

*Tuesdays & Fridays:  
11:00 am-2:00 pm, and  
after church on Sundays  
until 2 pm.*

Feel free to drop by, or  
make an appointment  
by calling the church  
office or contacting  
Sandra: (860) 347-4100  
[sandraleeolsen@gmail.com](mailto:sandraleeolsen@gmail.com)

## Deacon's Desk

~ *Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34)*

### I Asked God

A poem by Claudia Minden Weisz

I asked God to take away my pride,  
And God said, "No."  
He said it was not for Him to take it away,  
But for me to give it up.

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole,  
And God said, "No."  
He said her spirit already is,  
While her body is only temporary.

I asked God to grant me patience,  
And God said, "No."  
He said patience is a by-product of tribulation;  
It isn't granted, it is earned.

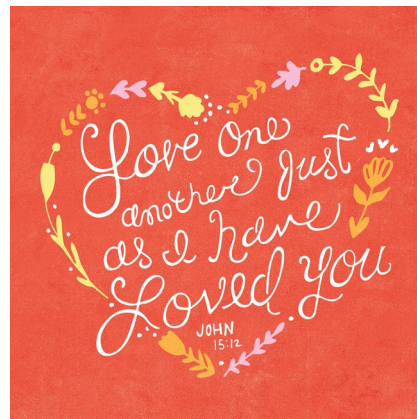
I asked God to give me happiness,  
And God said, "No."  
He said "I give blessings;  
Happiness is up to you."

I asked God to spare me pain,  
And God said, "No."  
He said, "Suffering draws you apart from  
Worldly cares and brings you closer to Me."

I asked God to make my spirit grow,  
And God said, "No."  
He said I must grow on my own,  
But He will prune me to make me fruitful.

I asked God if He loved me,  
And God said, "Yes."  
He gave me His only Son, who died for me.  
And I will be in heaven someday.

I asked God to help me love others  
As much as He loves me,  
And God said,  
"Ah, finally, you have the idea."



## **Prayer Concerns**

Please contact the church office with prayer requests, thanksgivings, or remembrances to be included in the weekly notices.

## **Transportation Ministry**

Church Member Volunteers are always available to provide transportation to and from church. We encourage anyone who is in need of a ride to please contact Dayle Kane at (860) 404-5149 or [daykane@comcast.net](mailto:daykane@comcast.net)

## **Want to be kept up-to-date?**

## **Get on our Church email list.**

You will be notified of all the current news and upcoming happenings of our Church. You will not receive any junk mail or be bombarded with jokes or chain letters. It is a great and inexpensive way to be kept informed. If you are not on the list and would like to be, or if you have a prayer request or any other news to share, send an e-mail to: [jgebby@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jgebby@sbcglobal.net)

# **Annual Budget Meeting**

Our annual Congregational meeting to consider the 2025 budget will be held on Sunday, January 19, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE WORSHIP SERVICE. We will remain in the Sanctuary for the budget discussion and vote and then go to the Social Room for a winter potluck. A signup sheet will be posted on the refreshment table in the Social Room. Please contact Malcolm if you cannot attend and wish to cast an absentee vote: [malcolmhmcDonald@gmail.com](mailto:malcolmhmcDonald@gmail.com)

## **Faith Formation**

Join us for discussion of these biblical texts in Sandra's office after the social hour.

**January 26:** Mark 2: 1-12 and John 9 Sickness and Guilt. In our modern age, we usually do not connect sickness with guilt. Sickness is a problem with the body and guilt is a soul or spirit issue. Are the two ever connected? Does guilt ever make us sick?

**February 2:** The Temptations of Jesus: Matthew 1-11 What do you think Martin Luther meant when he said, "The worst temptation of all is to have no temptations?"

## **Pastoral Coverage**

While Sandra's daughter, Caitlin, loves to trek in Nepal, Sandra has had a desire to visit Nepal long before Caitlin was born. This February she will be going to Nepal through Overseas Adventure Travel. The trip is 2.5 weeks. She will leave on Thursday, February 6 and her plane lands at Kennedy Airport early Sunday morning, February 23. The Rev. Carolyn Young will be filling in for those three Sundays.

## **Sock Drive**

The Frances Richards Club voted at its last gathering to again sponsor an Annual Sock Drive. Socks are one of the most needed articles of clothing. Donated socks may be placed on the back table in the Social Room throughout the month of January, until the last Sunday, January 26. The socks will then be delivered to the Friendship Service Center in New Britain. Thank you in advance for your "warm" donations!

## **Looking Ahead**

Ash Wednesday this year is on March 5, which initiates the 40 day Lenten season. We will hold an Ash Wednesday service at 7 PM. Easter is April 20, and during the Lenten season we will hold some Sunday morning faith forums. More information will be in the March/April newsletter.

## **Small Angels Ministry**

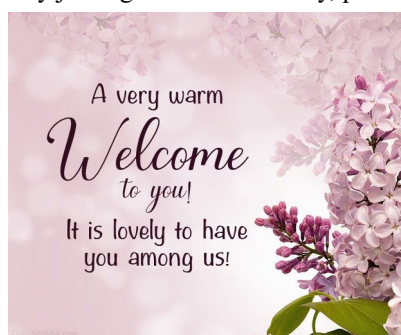
We continue to partner with St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Terryville to provide diapers, baby formula, baby food, wipes, etc, for families in need. Please bring any such items to church to donate, or write a check to the church if you are unable to purchase them yourself. Susan Keenan goes to St. Paul's once a month to assist.

## **Thank You!**

Last month we celebrated our Music Director, Michael Korman, being with us for 10 years. We are so very grateful for the beautiful organ, piano, and choral music that he provides us with each week. And thank you to all of you who donated so generously to our gift to him.

## **Join Us!!**

We are excited to announce that we will be welcoming some new members into the congregation in the Spring. If you are interested in officially joining our church family, please let Sandra know.



## Committee and Club Updates

**Men's Breakfast Club** will get together next on Thursday, January 30, and February 27, 9:00 am at Uncle Bob's Ham and Eggers in Plainville.

**Frances Richards Club:** Just a reminder that the Frances Richards Club does not meet in the months of January and February. Happy New Year to all!

**Church Committee** meets next on Monday, January 13 and February 16, 7:00 pm, in the Chapel.

**Deacons** meet next on Monday, January 6 and February 3 at 7:00 pm via Zoom.

**Trustees** meet next on Thursday, January 30 and February 20, at 6:30 pm at George's.

**Finance Committee:** Early expense exhibit preparation is reflecting a final year end deficit of about \$3,000. This compares to a full year planned deficit of \$10,879. The main reasons for the lower deficit than planned are: A \$3,000 unplanned donation from a zoom participant; \$1,000 from the unplanned author presentation last Spring; \$2,000 higher rental income due to the Special Ed teacher needing more space than planned. Additionally, heating costs were under plan by approximately \$3,000.

The budget has been approved by the Church Committee and has a planned deficit of \$13,234. This is about \$2,000 higher than 2024. One of the reasons is that we have slightly fewer pledging members. Fewer pledging members has been a trend for the last couple of years. Obviously not the direction we want to be trending, but is reality. Thank you to everyone for getting your pledge cards in.

The annual budget meeting is planned for January 19th after the worship service. Exhibits are in process.

The Verizon cell tower rental contract is currently being negotiated. The current contract is a 5 year year contract ending in February of 2026. The contract allows either party to renegotiate the contract effective February 2025. Verizon has informed us that they do not intend to continue the lease at the current level and have offered us 2 choices: Have them buy out the lease for \$350K and put an easement on the building for 40 years; or, only pay us \$1,400 per month for the lease vs. the \$2,040 we currently receive, which would be a \$640 per month reduction, \$7,680 annually. The \$350K buyout sounds enticing, however, IF, the day ever comes that we need to sell the church it would be very tough to do since that would restrict any buyer on what they could do with the property. It was not recommended by our Commercial real estate broker to take this option. Through Jill Kovalich's work relationships, we are consulting with an attorney that has some experience in cell tower negotiations. Verizon has given us a revised offer of the same number on the buyout or a new monthly lease amount of \$1,600 per month. This is progress, but there is more work to do. The hope is that an update will be presented at the budget meeting.

**Missions and Outreach:** November saw the filling and delivery of four Thanksgiving baskets – three for Covenant to Care and one for Farmington Social Services. In December Missions and Outreach coordinated the collection of eighteen Christmas gifts for children served by Covenant to Care. On Christmas Eve the congregation also participated in the Christmas Fund offering, which serves retired and impoverished ministers. As always, Missions would like to thank our congregation for their continued, generous support. Suggestions for new projects are always welcome.

## Sanctuary/Chapel Etiquette

Please continue to limit talking while Michael is playing for us. **The Prelude is a time of contemplation and preparation for the service.** Socializing in our worship spaces disrupts this for people in attendance, and interferes with Zoom participants' ability to hear and enjoy the music. Please try to finish conversations in the Social Room or Narthex before entering the Sanctuary or Chapel. **At the end of the service, please feel free to exit quietly during the Postlude if you do not wish to stay and listen.**

## Building Use

Remember to be aware of the classes and other groups meeting throughout the building, especially the **yoga classes held in the Social Room on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:15 to 10:45 am.** Meetings are listed in our weekly bulletin. Additional times may be scheduled as classes are added or changed. If you are not sure if an area is being used, please call the church office to inquire, and be cautious about going into rooms that might be occupied. Thank you for staying out of these areas during those times, and also for being considerate about noise levels in the building while classes or groups are meeting.



### SMALL GROUP OPPORTUNITIES AT FCCU:

#### HSSS (High School Sunday Series)

A small group Bible study for high school and middle school age young people, following the Children's Moment in worship.

Meets at Dunkin Donuts in Unionville. Adult Leader: Tim Barth.

#### Frances Richards Club

Women's group. Meets the second Wednesday of the month (except January and February) for fellowship, special activities, and lunch.

Contact Donna Williams: [pyroartist@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pyroartist@sbcglobal.net)

#### Men's Breakfast Club

Meets one Thursday a month. Contact Tim Barth: [tbarth525teb@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tbarth525teb@sbcglobal.net)

#### Bell Choir

Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m. (except July and August).

Directed by Lisa Durkin: [usnavynurs@aol.com](mailto:usnavynurs@aol.com)

**New small groups are welcome and encouraged. To begin one, contact the church office.**



## Grocery Store Gift Cards



Purchase gift cards for Stop & Shop, Big Y, or Shop Rite, and buy your groceries as you normally would. **It costs you nothing extra!** Our church receives 5% of the amount of the gift cards that the congregation purchases. **You may purchase cards from Malcolm in the Social Room after church, or send an email to the church office to make other arrangements: [fccunionville@att.net](mailto:fccunionville@att.net)**

## Social Hour

Please consider signing up to help with our Social Hour. This entails putting out the snacks, making the coffee and then cleaning up at the end. There are plenty of pre-packaged snacks to use, or you may bring in something else of your choosing. The sign-up sheet is in the Social Room. This is also a great way to get to know another church member, if you would like to pair up with someone else.

JOIN US FOR  
**Social  
HOUR**

## Get Involved!

**Hospitality Team** is open to those who want to provide a warm welcome to all who come for worship and fellowship. If you'd like to be part of this team, call Russ Sylvester at (860) 678-9474.

**Choir** provides the uplifting anthems we hear in worship each week, and is open to all who wish to praise God through the gift of music. To learn more or offer your gifts of music and singing, contact Music Director Michael Korman or drop by for rehearsal any Sunday morning before Worship.

**Handbell Choir** needs more musicians to continue to bring their beautiful songs to our special services. Practices are Wednesday nights at 7 pm in the Conference Room, September through June.

**Cleaning:** We can always use more assistance with keeping our space beautiful. Please email the church office if you can help in any way, either regularly or occasionally/as needed. **We could really use some help with vacuuming the church once every three weeks. Please see Tim if you are interested.**

**Special Events:** Throughout the year, we have a number of events and activities that would greatly benefit from extra volunteers. These include our concerts and clean-up activities. Please consider asking how you can help when you see an event that you're interested in being a part of.

**Transportation:** We have several members who regularly need rides to church on Sundays, as well as some with more occasional transportation needs for special events. Please consider adding your name to our list of drivers. You may do so by contacting Dayle Kane: (860) 404-5149 or [daykane@comcast.net](mailto:daykane@comcast.net)

**\*\*If an unanticipated transportation need arises on the morning of a service, please call Susan Keenan (860) 690-1350 or Cindy Nye (517) 402-1000 for assistance. Please try to call by 9 am so they have time to find a ride for you.**

