



The Cornerstone

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

NOV/DEC 2024

The Pastor's Pen

We are now moving into the holiday season with November giving us a day of gratitude in the celebration of Thanksgiving and in December Advent and Christmas, reminding us to wait in hope for a birth that promised to alter the course of history. And as we celebrate those seasons, music becomes an essential part of our celebrations. Just, imagine, for an instant, what our world would be like without music. What if, suddenly, all music were banned from our lives? How flat, dreary and sad we would become! No sounds inviting us to “gather together to ask for God’s blessings,” no heavenly voices, singing, “Peace on earth, good will to all;” no nostalgia, reminding us of the ideal “White Christmas,” no Silent Nights” or “Holy Nights.” Though musical taste differs greatly, almost without exception, human beings respond to music. Babies fall asleep to lullabies, and even clinical depression has been alleviated by music. The great German composer, Beethoven, once remarked, “The one who truly understands my music will never suffer from despair.” So, we should not be surprised that when the Berlin Wall came down on November 9, 1989, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with its glorious “Ode to Joy,” changed for the day into “Ode to Freedom,” was played with Leonard Bernstein as the conductor!

Music uplifts, but it can also challenge and provoke, and indeed throughout human history, including the present moment, music has also been banned, because it has challenged the status quo. In October we had a wonderful concert of Beatle music, celebrating the Fabulous Fours’ musical invasion of our nation 60 years ago. The Beatles were banned in many countries, including the former Soviet Union, but their music had a way of seeping through the censorship anyway. Even in our own nation, certain Beatle tracks were banned from the radio immediately following 9/11: Ticket to Ride, because it was deemed a reminder of the ticketed passengers who died on 9/11 and Ob-La-D, Ob La Da, Life Goes On, because it was thought insensitive to the suffering of 9/11.

When the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan after the Soviets departed, all music was banned, even that of the dominant ethnic group, The Pashtuns, whose musicians were often whipped in public for playing music. When the Taliban were overthrown by the United States, music began to be heard again--all kinds of music. Now, sadly and tragically, with the Taliban in charge once again, music has been silenced. One song, for example, that tells the story of love between a Muslim man and a Christian woman is deemed totally degenerate and “The Peace Song,” praising God and declaring that Pashtuns are filled with love for the whole world and desire peace for all people, is judged to be morally and religiously corrupting.

Indeed, music can and does challenge the social order and sometimes even helps to change it. I recall years ago, reading an article about Beatle music coming to the former Soviet Union and how it helped to undermine the rigid power of the Communist Party. The Communist regime in East Germany did not want Beethoven’s music played because he was a harsh critic of monarchy and authoritarian regimes and an ardent supporter of the French Revolution, whose ideals of “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” were a call for radical change and revolution.

Yes, music does usher in change, everything from spiritual calm to social protest. Who does not remember the sight and sound of Civil Rights’ marchers as they joined arms and sang, “We Shall Overcome?” My generation “The Baby Boomers,” was stirred to action by Bob Dylan’s voice, insisting, “The Times They Are A-changin’” and Peter, Paul and Mary singing, “Blowin in the Wind.” And how can I forget when the Beatles first made their appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show, and the next day, the school was abuzz with excitement. Almost without exception teachers and parents alike were aghast at what they heard and saw. They realized that what was coming would be not only a revolution in music but also in culture. Even today there is a great divide between people about how they view the era of the 60’s. For some it was the best of times; for others, the worst. No doubt about it, however: music was part of the change.

What would our world be like without music? Yes, it would be drab and boring, and oh, so static. Throughout the ages human beings have made music, and in Christianity music has been one of the most effective means to tell the story of God’s love for the whole world. The Church throughout its history has expended tremendous resources on the flourishing of the arts: music, painting, architecture and sculpture, because the Church realized that such endeavors help to make us more deeply and wisely human, opening us up to a wider range of experience, feeling and thought. As we move into November, when we will celebrate the feast of Thanksgiving and sing, “Come Ye Thankful People, Come,” let us remember to be thankful for music. And as December arrives and we sing the songs of Advent and Christmas, let us also remember to take none of our gifts, including music, for granted.

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

Deacon's Desk

~Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. (Psalm 136:1)

The Power of Gratitude: Benefits of Giving God Thanks

excerpt by Lisa Appelo

Most of us know thanksgiving is a good practice. But do we know just how good? While practicing daily thankfulness may seem like another chore, there are so many reasons to intentionally cultivate gratitude! Let's unpack the power of gratitude with these benefits of giving God thanks.

1. Gratitude glorifies God.

This alone would be reason to give thanks to God. Our gratitude glorifies God as we exalt not the gifts, but the Giver. Gratitude helps us realize all we have comes not because of us, but from God.

2. Gratitude helps us see God.

Gratitude opens our spiritual eyes. There's a beautiful cycle in giving God thanks: the more we thank Him, the more we see Him working in us and around us. Gratitude helps us sense God's presence, His personal care and His perfect timing.

3. Gratitude puts us squarely in God's will.

We often make God's will out to be some big, mystical plan when sometimes, it's simply obedience. And part of His will for us is to be thankful, not just on the sunny days but on the hard ones as well.

4. Gratitude brings peace.

Count your blessings. Gratitude helps us see that God's hand is all over our circumstances. And God tells us when we give Him our thanks, He gives us supernatural peace.

5. Gratitude draws us to God.

Gratitude for the magnitude of God's undeserved kindness draws us to Him. We see that when Jesus healed 10 lepers. As Jesus walked by, all 10 cried out for healing. "Go, show yourselves to the priests," Jesus commanded and as they went, they were healed! Certainly they were all happy, but only one was thankful. Only one came back to Jesus, fell at his feet and thanked him.

6. Gratitude brings contentment.

It's said that gratitude makes what we have enough. If we aren't grateful for what God has given us, getting more won't satisfy us either. Being thankful is the key to contentment.

7. Gratitude deepens faith.

Keeping a record of God's past faithfulness is a faith boost when we face new difficulty. My gratitude journals are testimonies that on my hardest days and in the worst circumstances, God's record of faithfulness is 100%.

8. Gratitude leads to joy.

The overflow of gratitude is joy. Realizing God's abundant goodness, even in the hard, is a gateway for joy.

9. Gratitude guards against envy.

Gratitude makes us realize God has given us far more than we deserve. Because there's enough for everyone, we can cheer rather than compare. A heart wholly grateful has no room left for envy.

10. Gratitude helps us live in the present.

Gratitude opens our eyes to the simple beauty of ordinary days. It lets us see this day and this moment as gifts and to take in the abundance right now.

11. Gratitude is a testimony.

When we thank God openly and acknowledge what He's done for us, we proclaim a personal, caring God to the world around us. We show that contentment and peace come not from what we have but Who we know.

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

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

Singing to our Seniors

We will sing for our home bound friends again after our worship service on December 1, weather permitting. Because it is the holiday season, we will sing two songs, one for Thanksgiving, "We Gather Together" and a Christmas selection, "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing". Our home bound friends really enjoy this, so make every effort to be part of the holiday joy! All are welcome to join us. This always brings a smile to the faces of those we sing for, and it brightens our day, as well.

Faith Formation

Upcoming bible study after Social Hour. All are welcome.

November 10: Who Are the Blessed? Matthew 5: 3-12 and Luke 6: 20-23

November 17: Mary and Martha: Luke 10: 38-42.

December: The Art of Advent

December 8: Light and Dark: The Ancient of Days, by William Blake, 1793

December 15: Advent Invitation: The Light of the World by William Holman Hunt, 1900

Poinsettia Sale

For anyone wishing to donate a poinsettia plant for Christmas Sunday, Dec. 22, please complete a Floral Fund envelope by Wed., Dec. 18, and submit to the church office or place in the Sunday morning offering plate. The cost is \$9 per plant. Following Christmas, the poinsettias will be brought to church members as designated by Pastor Sandra. If anyone would like to take a plant home, please indicate so on the envelope. Thank you all in advance!

Christmas Services

December 22, 10:00 am: In the past we had pageants, then told the Christmas story through the perspective of the shepherds, Mary and last year, Joseph, the silent one, who in the Bible speaks no words! This year Sandra will tell the story of the song, The Twelve Days of Christmas. People hear it as a fun, but nonsensical song and certainly not at all religious! But it is actually a code song the Roman Catholics used to teach their doctrine in England when Roman Catholicism was out outlawed by the Anglican Church, beginning in the 16th century. Catholics then went underground, and this song was one way they taught their faith! The song became very popular, eventually sung in pubs, in schools, in social gatherings, no one really knowing what the song is all about. We will hear the story and sing the song.

December 24, 3:00 pm: Traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

We HOPE Doug Williams will be able to bless our worship with his beautiful voice, but his presence will most likely depend upon his schedule. The rest of the service consists of carols, sermon and the passing of the light as we sing the final carols.

Christmas Luncheon

Deacons have not yet worked out the details, but we hope everyone will gather in the Social Room after church on December 22 to enjoy a Christmas luncheon together.

Small Angels Ministry

We continue to partner with St. Paul's Luther 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.

Pastoral Coverage

Thank you to the Rev. Carolyn Young for preaching on October 27 and November 3, while Sandra was in Spain. Carolyn has been with us many times, but not recently, since she has been a permanent pulpit supply minister in Bridgeport for the past 15 years. She just completed her ministry there last summer. She thoroughly enjoys our church and we enjoyed having her back!

Walking The Camino De Santiago

Susan Keenan and Sandra successfully walked the last 117 kilometers (70 miles) of the famous pilgrimage, The Way of St. James, leaving for Spain from Boston, on October 21 and returning to the U.S. on November 4. James was one of Jesus' brothers, and the **story** is that he eventually ended up in Spain. We don't know for sure if he actually went there, but we do know that if he did, he eventually returned to Jerusalem, where he was betrayed and beheaded in 44.

His followers were said to have put his body on a boat, guided by angels, through the Strait of Gibraltar to land in northern Spain in Padron, near Finisterre (on the sea.) Queen Lupa, the Celtic Queen of Finisterre was asked to help with the burial, but legend says that she sent two wild bulls to mock James, but when the bulls arrived at the site of the body they turned into oxen and carried the body to the site of a marble tomb, which Queen Lupa was said to have provided. The body was buried there along with two of James' followers.

In 814 a hermit by the name of Pelagius had a vision in which a star led him to an ancient tomb with three bodies. He told the local bishop, who designated this as St. James, and a monastery was established. King Alfonso of Spain in 842 added his support to make this a special site. News spread, and people began to travel to Santiago as a pilgrimage site. In the Middle Ages as many as 250,000 people a year made the pilgrimage. Infrastructure began to grow up--bridges, places to stay, hospitals, eateries, etc. Santiago was one of three major pilgrim sites in the Middle Ages, along with Rome and Jerusalem. It became known as a plenary indulgence, meaning that if one fulfilled all the requirements of the pilgrimage, earthly sins were forgiven. (Plenary means full.)

The pilgrimages eventually tapered off, especially after the Protestant Reformation began in 1520 with its grave suspicion about indulgences. The Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries, which raised reason to new heights, offered the question: Where is the proof that James even went to Spain? Susan and Sandra were not expecting all their sins to be forgiven on account of their walk, but they walked for the sheer joy of it! The full walk is over 500 miles with many different routes through Portugal, France and Spain. Sandra and Susan followed the last part of it in Spain, which promised to be easy, suitable for children as well as older ladies!

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

Men's Breakfast Club

Meets one Thursday a month. Contact Tim Barth: tbarth525teb@sbcglobal.net

Bell Choir

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

Directed by Lisa Durkin: usnavynurs@aol.com

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



All Souls' Day Remembrance

On All Souls' Sunday (November 3), we remembered the faithful who have gone before us and honor departed loved ones. As part of that observance, the names of First Church of Christ members who have entered the Church Triumphant in the past year were read in worship. A precious time. All too short.

Ginny Johanson	Diane Rogers
Bob Porter	Barbara Andrews

As we pass through life, let us not take for granted others who have shared their light among us. We remember family, friends and acquaintances, including:

Frank Ahern	Jerilyn Withington
Clarence Ellison	Leslie Alvord
Gladys Ellison	Jim Day
Joan Ellison	John Paul Varrone
Karl Ellison	Janice Mauldin Jenkins
Robert Tempest	Isabelle Ortega Panzanella
Arlene Rizza	Deborah Brooks
Joseph Rizza	Christine Grief
Jane Keown Oliver	Louise Podzus
Joann Kovalich	Bob Sapak
Michael Nye-Madden	Rev. Stoddard (Todd) Williams
Tom Madden	

Committee and Club Updates

Men's Breakfast Club will get together next on Thursday, November 21 and December 19, 9:00 am at Uncle Bob's Ham and Eggers in Plainville.

Frances Richards Club: Back by popular demand, Lynn Boyan will be returning with her "Sea Glass" items. Due to 3 other shows that she has booked, she will set up a smaller display of items for us this time which will mostly be her home-made jewelry. This could be a perfect time to add some beautiful and unique items to your Christmas shopping. Lynn will join us when we meet next on Wednesday, November 13th, @ noon in the Social Room. Mark your calendars now and hope to see you there. We will be planning our December Holiday Luncheon at this next meeting.

Church Committee meets next on Monday, November 18 and December 16, 7:00 pm, in the Chapel.

Deacons meet next on Monday, November 11 and December 2 at 7:00 pm via Zoom.

Trustees meet next on Thursday, November 7 and December 19, at 6:30 pm at George's.

Finance Committee: Income and expenses in the operating budget are still running close to plan through the end of October. The pledge process is underway and most pledge cards are back. Thanks to everyone for getting your cards in. Planning for the 2025 budget is now in progress. A preliminary budget was presented to the church committee at the October meeting. It will be finalized at the November meeting.

The Yoga classes are in session in the Social Room, on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. They are scheduled to end on December 12th. The Special Ed teacher currently renting 2 rooms on the lower level of the wing and 1 room on the second level is considering expanding 1/1/25. We will be emptying out the nursery room on the second level to make it available for rent.

We continue to collect money for the food donation program for the Farmington Food Bank and the Friendship Service Center in New Britain.

The grocery store gift card program continues to be a great way for us to raise money for the church at no extra cost to those that participate. You can purchase cards in \$50 or \$100 denominations for Stop and Shop, Shop Rite or Big Y. Anyone wishing to participate can see Malcolm in the Social Room after church service each Sunday. You pay face value for the cards and the church gets 5% of every sale.

Our fund raiser concert on 10/6 was a success. We had a profit of \$4,750.

Missions and Outreach: During the month of October the congregation participated in the Neighbors in Need offering. Missions and Outreach is currently collecting non-perishable items to fill four Thanksgiving baskets – three for clients of Covenant to Care and one for Farmington Social Services. Lists of needed items are in the Social Room, and these items are to be left on the table in the Social Room. In December the committee will once again place a giving tree decorated with the names and ages of children served by Covenant to Care. Missions would, as always, like to thank the congregation for their ongoing generous support during this busy holiday season.

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.



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**

Social Hour

We continue to use pre-packaged snacks for Social Hour. Thank you to Jean and Tim Barth for providing the snacks,. Please consider signing up to put out the snacks, make the coffee and then clean up. The sign-up sheet is in the Social Room.

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

****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.**

