

# Honor *the* Past

A History of the First Congregational Church of Greenwich  
1965-2015

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∞ A HISTORY OF THE  
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
OF GREENWICH

## 1965-2015

*Edited by* Pat F. Larrabee

Also by The First Congregational Church of Greenwich

## The First Three Hundred Years

THE HISTORY OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
OF GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

1665 – 1965

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This book is dedicated  
to the many fine people of First Church,  
both the members and staff, past and present.

Your vision, dedication, loving, faith, generosity and  
hard work have made this church  
such a warm, caring and beautiful place of sanctuary.

You inspire me and I can't thank you enough.

☞ *Pat Fulkerson Larrabee*

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# Foreword

I am humbled by the mere thought. The First Congregational Church of Greenwich was founded 352 years ago, before The United States became a country. First Church was also instrumental in founding the Town of Greenwich. Hence the name “First Church.” The current building is perched on a hill overlooking Binney Park, the equivalent of the town commons where Memorial Day and Fourth of July festivities are celebrated annually. To this day the building’s physical location is a beautiful reminder how, over the course of its 350 year history, the members of First Church have always stood for and supported the biblical principles that founded our great nation, “Liberty and Justice for all.”

The history of First Church is long and layered, especially the last 50 years. Therefore, from the very beginning, we knew that we needed a highly qualified person to gather, research and publish the ongoing and unfolding story of a congregation that has supported and empowered countless men, women and children over the years. After much discussion by the congregation’s leadership it was unanimous that our church historian Pat Larrabee be commissioned for the project.

Pat was born and raised in the suburbs of Chicago, graduated from Smith College where she was elected into Sigma Xi, the scientific research society, and has a masters from Johns Hopkins University. She taught high school chemistry and physics for a few years. She and her husband Tad have lived in London and Bangkok, Thailand, and have two sons and five grandchildren. Now retired from her career as a computer programmer/systems analyst, Pat volunteers at First Church as Webmaster, Historian, Head Usher, Scripture Reader organizer, former deacon, and creator of our cemetery database in Excel, among other things.

Her main hobby is genealogy. A year after they moved to Old Greenwich she discovered at the New York Public Library’s genealogy room that she’s an eighth great-granddaughter of Robert and Elizabeth Feake (“the Winthrop Woman”), two of the settlers who bought the land (that Pat and Tad live on) from the native people in 1640. In 1990 Pat enjoyed playing Elizabeth in the Cameo Theatre play adapted from the *Winthrop Woman* book, and enjoyed the cast’s meeting with author Anya Seton.

I will never forget the first time I laid eyes on Pat. It was the second week of my new pastorate. I was on my way into the church when I noticed a woman kneeling beside one of the tombstones out in the church’s ancient cemetery. From a distance she appeared to be praying. However, as I walked closer, it became clear to me that she was on her knees scrubbing the dirt and moss off the old stone, which itself was an act of devotion. What I witnessed that day is vintage Pat, a hands-on historian, who in this book, has preserved and honored the sacred history of First Church body, mind and soul.

Faithfully,  
Rev. Richard S. DenUyl, Jr.  
2017

# Preface

The title of this book is the first part of our 350th Anniversary's wonderful slogan: "Honor the past, celebrate the present and lean into the future", created by Rev. Richard DenUyl. We are grateful and happy that our present and future are very bright! We have much to honor and celebrate.

In late 2010 Rev. David Young asked me to resurrect the Historical Committee since the church's 350th Anniversary was in 2015, and we needed to prepare for it. That committee had gone dormant for a few years. David assured me that the job only involved gathering and cataloging all the church's historical documents so that we would finally know all that we had. I enjoyed working with Excel for cataloging, and it was a worthy project, so I agreed.

Many wonderful people who had been on the previous Historical Committee agreed to help sort and catalog. Rosemary Lamie was our staff representative and participated in reviewing photos and offering helpful advice. In early 2011 we had our first meeting. My husband, Tad, and I did most of the gathering of boxes from various attics, file cabinets and closets throughout the church. Over the two years of the cataloging process, we gathered the equivalent of 68 boxes! The two closets in room 104 were nearly overflowing with this material, and the youth group needed some of that space. The job was so big that the committee easily convinced me that we should meet for two hours every other week to keep sorting. It took us about two years.

It was incredibly lucky for us that the UCC Library in Boston held a one-day workshop near Hartford on the topic of how to organize your church's historical collection. Thanks to their excellent presentation and booklet full of guidelines, I ordered acid-free storage boxes, acid-free manila folders and plastic coated paper clips to replace the old rusty ones. The sextons arranged eight long tables in a large square in the middle of room 104, and we put the empty acid-free boxes on three sides of the square with a category written on paper signs in front of each box. The old boxes were a mixture of types of papers, so we had many decisions to make as we went through them. Some items were not easy to categorize. We also cataloged the contents of the Women's Fellowship closet, the safe, and the bank safe deposit box.

Our process included throwing out excess duplicates and giving items that had nothing to do with our church to the local organizations which they belonged to. After all of our sorting and weeding, we were left with only 35 boxes. Next we went through each acid-free box, replacing the old manila folders with new ones and labeling the tabs of the folders in pencil and filing them by date of the contents. We also wrote down the folder contents category by date and box type onto sheets of paper that I entered into Excel. The result of that catalog of our archives in Excel is now on the church network and printed in a three-ring binder in the church office. It gets outdated each time someone donates old files or the staff finds more documents and places them in the Historical Closet, so this is an ongoing process.



Next I had to evolve from being a cataloger-organizer into a reader of the contents. I finally agreed to be called the Church Historian. That took a few years and I am still learning, but I love it. I am happy to write much of this book for the anniversary and solicit and organize others who volunteered to write about specific topics.

The many wonderful events of the 350th anniversary caused me extra work in doing historical presentations that year, so progress on the book suffered, but my knowledge of church history grew. One benefit of going through old ledger books was that I found buried in one ledger the originals of our Certificate of Organization in 1931, plus the original Certificate of the Dissolution of the Ecclesiastical Society, the separate group of our church who cared for the property. Steve Summerton put these signed, notarized legal documents in our bank safe deposit box. Another benefit was when Pat Mendelsohn and I decided to write what we first called “Fun Facts” about church history as an ice-breaker for the early 350th Anniversary planning committee meetings. These evolved into 52 “Flashbacks,” which were read by a different person each Sunday of our big anniversary year. Creating so many of those got me re-reading *The First Three Hundred Years 1665-1965* by Elizabeth Clarke, Carolyn Colegrove’s three books on Old Greenwich (*Sound Beach*, *Becoming Old Greenwich* and *3 Shore Acre Drive*) and our many oral histories. This brought me a new enjoyment and appreciation of the many aspects of our church history. Clarke’s excellent book on our church history has been our role model in writing this book. We are all greatly in debt to her and her committee.

My research methods for this book were largely to use the information from the annual reports that I had scanned in OCR (searchable) mode so I could put them all in one folder and run a search for any keywords. I then used the same table of contents order used in the booklet created by Helen Sickles Hull Allen, *The Last Quarter Century 1965-1990*. Oral histories (the transcriptions of which we scanned and loaded onto our church website) were very helpful as well. A few times Google books and other online research sources helped as well. A few times I used Google books and other online research sources.

## Acknowledgements

I want to express my deep gratitude to the members of the Historical Committee. Tad Larrabee, my love and always-agreeable resource, lugged many boxes and is a true historian. Linnea Stenberg, Sheila Tolmie, Mary and Bob Ferry, Betsy Heberling and Anne Wachsmann helped with all the years of sorting and cataloging the church artifacts. Rosemary Lamie gave fine advice and Lynn Robertson helped review photos.

There were many others who generously gave of their time and expertise to help research, write, edit and format this book. Richard DenUyl wrote the touching Foreword and Pat Mendelsohn and Marcia Livingston both did a fine job as overall editors and proofreaders. Chris Hartwell wrote about the many years he headed the Outreach Committee; Rosemary Lamie wrote the Church School topic; Barbara Norrgard wrote the Radio, Prayer Shawl, Prayer Chain, Worship, Chancel and Energy topics, and Linnea Stenberg wrote about the Memorial Gifts, Communications, Wellness, Membership and Stephen Ministry committees. Craig Symons wrote the music topic; Lesley Schless wrote the Adult Education, Preschool and Day Camp topics; Chris and Betsy Moore wrote the Inclusiveness topic; Tad Larrabee wrote about Building and Grounds and the

1960's Meetinghouse expansion project; Bob Mendelsohn wrote part of the pastors topic; Kathy Riley and Lu Baldwin did much work on the Women's Fellowship topic; Hilary Lawrence helped with the staff topic and Pat Mendelsohn, chair of the 350th Anniversary Committee, wrote about the year-long celebration events. Laura Pugliese lent her expertise in designing the page layout, and graphic designer Meg Sherman created the book cover. I am ever grateful for their patience and fine skills. Phil Bradford researched self-publishers, and many ladies of the Women's Fellowship helped identify people in old photos at one marathon session of Nights Off. Others who answered my appeal for stories and anecdotes are Ruth Reed, Larry Haviland, Art Delmhorst, Fred Laffan and Barbara Norrgard. Additional proofreaders include Erna Olson, Annette Bergh, Rosemary Lamie, Ginny Breismeister, Mary Ann Chidsey and Lynn O'Gorman. I am grateful to all of these people and am also grateful to my sister, Kay Huey, for her digital help on old photos and her encouragement.

When I mentioned to Olga Hartwell, a former corporate executive and a new divinity student at Yale, that I was feeling unsure that I would be able to do the church's history justice in this book, she wisely said, "Just listen to your voice." She helped me more than she can know and has my deep gratitude. Similarly, Sally Colegrove very supportive.

This book is truly a group effort and we are all indebted to these fine people. It shows how much we all love this church and know how much this church has given to us and to the larger community.

*Pat Fulkerson Larrabee*

# Addenda to *The First Three Hundred Years 1640-1965*

These are stories that never made it into *The First Three Hundred Years 1640-1965* for various reasons. We felt they were too interesting to not include them even though they are not within the 50 year time span of this book. We all know that history continues to evolve as new information is discovered. Our church history evolves as well and sometimes these discoveries are wonderful, sad and fascinating.

## Blackleach Burritt (1778 - 1779)

(Ed. Many thanks to Joe Zeranski of the Greenwich Historical Society for bringing Blackleach Burritt's name to our attention. He noticed that Burritt was not in our pastor list on our website. Internet research provided the anecdotes. : [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackleach\\_Burritt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackleach_Burritt) and [https://archive.org/stream/familyofblacklea00burr/familyofblacklea00burr\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/familyofblacklea00burr/familyofblacklea00burr_djvu.txt) )

Rev. Blackleach Burritt was licensed to preach in 1768, after graduating from Yale in 1765. He preached extemporaneously and was known for his physical strength, agility, fluency and love of argument. He was regarded as somewhat visionary and unpractical, if not perhaps eccentric. But mostly, he was known for being a patriot with strong feelings. The British press referred to him as that "most pestiferous rebel priest and preacher of sedition." A Tory newspaper said he was "an egregious rebel who frequently took up arms."

Near the end of 1778 he was installed as the pastor in our church. He only lasted four months. In the early morning hours of February 11, 1779, he was captured by the Tories for being so outspoken for the American cause.

He was sleeping at the parsonage with his wife Martha and their eight children. When he refused to open the door, the raiders broke in by shattering the windows. The raiders feared an attack by his fellow patriots, and did not allow him time to get dressed. They dragged him out into the cold night, joining other prisoners and plundered items. Martha, seven months pregnant, left the children at home, and followed with his clothes in hand, begging them to give him a chance to put on some clothes. They finally allowed it after giving her a hard time and ordering her to leave. But she kept following, pleading for her two cows. She followed them all the way to the water's edge, where they boarded the prisoners onto a boat. As the raiders couldn't carry away all the plunder, one of the officers finally said, "Let the damned Rebel Minister's wife have one of her cows!"

Burritt was taken to the Sugar House Prison in New York City, where he was detained for about 14 months and nursed back to health by William Irving, the father of Washington Irving. Two months after his capture, his wife gave birth to a son. He met him upon release, when he joined the family in Westchester County, where his wife had fled to be with friends. There he continued his ministry. The strain of war was terrible, but he was sustained by faith, a passionate patriot, preaching of freedom.

## 1918 – Clifford Henry (1896 - 1918)

(Sources: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret\\_Mitchell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Mitchell) plus our cemetery records)

One World War I veteran buried in our cemetery is Clifford Henry, a handsome Harvard graduate who loved poetry. He was killed in the war on October 17, 1918 in St. Mihiel, France. His name and death information is inscribed in a bronze plaque by the flagpole at the edge of our cemetery, along with other local men who died in World War I.

I discovered his connection to *Gone with the Wind* by accident in 2014 when I googled to find his birthdate for the spreadsheet of our cemetery records. A few years earlier, our Church Administrator, George Handley, asked me to check that all of the flags had been placed correctly on the graves of all veterans before Memorial Day. George said to be sure to check that there was one by Clifford Henry's grave, among a few others. That raised my curiosity since I didn't know what was special about Clifford. My Google search of "Clifford Henry" "1918" led me to a Wikipedia article about Margaret Mitchell. I was sure that was a mistaken lead until I read the article, jumping to the keyword "Clifford." It turned out he was in the ROTC at Harvard and enlisted when he graduated. He was sent to basic training at Camp Gordon by the northeast side of Atlanta. A fellow soldier, Stephens Mitchell, Margaret's brother, invited him to dinner. He and Margaret quickly fell in love. He invited her to meet his parents here in what was then called Sound Beach, and they became engaged before he was shipped off to France to the war.

She went on to write *Gone with the Wind* and online books say that Clifford was her role model for "Ashley" and was the love of her life. She didn't name the character Clifford because she was concerned her husband would be jealous that she still held a flame for her former fiancé. It's likely that she asked Clifford's parents in Old Greenwich not to tell anyone that Ashley was based on Clifford for the same reason. Clifford's mother, Mrs. Ira Henry, was active in our church in those days. As far as we know, Clifford's parents never revealed the secret to others in town.

## Rev. Allan Lorimer in 1927

(Source: an interview with Allan Lorimer July 16, 1977. Edited by Andrea Karls and The Rev. Dr. David L. Fountain).

In 1927, our regular church attendance was down to about a dozen people. The senior pastor, Rev. Dr. Barney, was becoming more of a fire-and-brimstone preacher and that didn't sit well with most folks. It was time to find someone new. Our pastor-emeritus, Sally Collegrove's grandfather, Ed Grant, was senior deacon at the time as well as Registrar of Columbia University. He went to talk to Henry Sloane Coffin, President of Union Theological Seminary, to find the most talented student there. Coffin said it was Allan Lorimer, but he

was only a freshman in a three-year program and Coffin couldn't let him leave because of that. Ed Grant said, "Dr. Coffin, you're in the Presbyterian Church but we're Congregational and we can do anything we want to." Allan Lorimer came here soon after that.

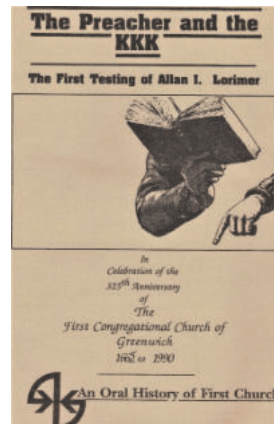
The second Sunday that Allan Lorimer preached was Palm Sunday, 1927. The church was packed to overflowing since everyone was anxious to hear the new young pastor who brought with him a fine bass soloist from NYC's Metropolitan Opera, Fred Patton. The Meetinghouse could only hold about 120 people then. The overflow crowd gathered out in the cemetery and ushers opened the windows as much as possible so people outside could hear. Lorimer was very nervous and had to speak very loudly. The ushers panicked upon taking the collection since there were only two small collection trays in those days. They borrowed men's derby hats to help take the collection, even from the people outside.

Sometimes pastors are called to be bold, following the examples of the prophets and Jesus, and to preach truth, even when it isn't popular. Rev. Lorimer was up for the task.

It all started when the Ku Klux Klan threatened Rev. Lorimer's beloved wife Mary's father in North Carolina in 1930. That made Lorimer so mad he preached a sermon saying that the three most dangerous institutions in America today are The Ku Klux Klan, The American Legion and The Anti-Saloon League, because they all had intolerant attitudes in those days. The editor of the Greenwich Press, Howard Palmer, was a member of our church. He came up after the service and said, "Allan, I've just been waiting for somebody to say that." And he said that all his friends who had been officers in the war agreed. He asked Lorimer's permission to publish the sermon and soon after, the Legion burned a cross on our church's front lawn. The American Legion demanded Lorimer's resignation. The Trustees and Deacons unanimously backed his right to speak his mind. He cried from appreciation.

Later, when he met with the American Legion men (dressed in their war uniforms) in the pastor's office, Allan Kitchel, the President of the Board of Trustees, unexpectedly arrived in his Colonel's uniform and Bill Cook came in his Major's uniform to support him. Lorimer said that free speech is one of the fundamental principles of the American Constitution, and the American Legion stands on the Constitution. Lorimer demanded an apology from the Legionnaires, and that ended that.

**NOTE:** When Rev. Lorimer began working here in 1927, he spelled his first name "Allen." In the week of December 20-27, 1931, he began spelling his name as "Allan." Perhaps it was as a fond tribute to the fine support and friendship of Allan F. Kitchel, son-in-law of the Binneys.



## Lorimer and Binney Park

(Source: an oral history on Allan Lorimer)

In *The First Three Hundred Years*, it was well documented that Allan Lorimer tried to influence Mrs. Binney to get her husband to buy the 10 acres of swampy land for sale by

A. M. Boles that is now the northern half of Binney Park. Her daughters Helen and Mary were also trying to get their father to buy that land.

However, in a later oral history, Allan Lorimer told the story of how Mr. Edwin Binney was trying to buy the southern 10 acres from its owner, Cyrus Miller. Mr. Binney said, "He's a skinflint and he wants to keep it for future development, but we don't want any apartment house there. I'd like to buy it and make it into a beautiful park in memory of my son June, but Cyrus knows all about me and knows that I want to buy it, so his price has gone way, way up. So I'd like to ask you if you'd be good enough to talk with Cyrus Miller and give him a community story." Mr. Binney said he'd pay up to \$30,000, the same price he had paid for the northern 10 acres.

Lorimer met Miller at the Edgar Allen Poe Cottage in the Bronx, which Miller had converted into a tourist attraction. He took Lorimer through it and then said, "Did Ed Binney send you here as his agent? Tell me why I should sell you my property for a measly \$30,000." Lorimer said, "Right, I couldn't put that any more succinctly." Miller said, "What's your argument?" Lorimer said, "I haven't any. Goodbye!" Miller said, "Wait a minute." Lorimer said, "Goodbye, Mr. Miller. I'm sorry you told me this Edgar Allen Poe Cottage was not the original and that there are very few people who know it. And you didn't even rehabilitate the original. You put up a fake house and nobody knew it. If that's the kind of man I know I'm going to have to deal with, I know I won't get to first base. I don't know anything about that kind of business. It's too flimflam for me. It's against my ethics. Goodbye." Miller said, "Wait a minute" and took Lorimer to lunch at a club in the Bronx.

They talked about religion and morals and Miller began asking questions. He said, "Not one of my employees has ever stood up to me like you have, that's why I first admired you." After several lunches together, Miller became a good Lutheran and Lorimer got him to agree to sell Ed Binney the 10 acres for \$30,000!

## The President Grover Cleveland Letter

Page 23 of our church's *Cornerstone Laying Ceremony of 1835* booklet lists the contents of that cornerstone, among which is a letter from President Grover Cleveland. When we dug out the contents of that cornerstone for the church's 350th anniversary, we found a letter from the secretary of President Cleveland merely giving his regrets at not being able to attend our cornerstone laying ceremony. It was disappointing that the letter didn't contain more than that.

## Rev. Eliphalet Jones, our pastor from 1669-1673

(Sources: Many thanks to church member Ken Conover for this information on his ancestors.  
<http://www.firstchurchfairfield.org/about/history/>)

On page 53 of the First 300 Years book it says Eliphalet's mother was Susanna, when his mother was actually Rev. John Jones' first wife, Sarah. Susanna was John's second wife with whom he had no children. Rev. John Jones became the first Pastor of the First Congregational Church of Fairfield, CT, in 1644. Eliphalet and his wife had no children, so he was not the ancestor of our pastor John Jones (1710-1711.)

# Professional Staff

## Pastors, Associate & Assistant Pastors

(For a full list of all pastors who have served our church, please see the Appendix.)

### 1960s

The Reverend **Merton E. Libby** was called as Associate Pastor in 1956 and continued to run the church after Dr. Vincent Daniels' death in 1963. The Reverend **Harry B. Adams**, who at the time was a professor of Homiletics at Yale Divinity School, drove from New Haven each Sunday to preach for a year after Vincent's death. Merton preferred doing administrative work and pastoral services to preaching and left in 1972 after 16 years here. He moved to Palmdale, California, where he passed away in 1995.

In 1964, The Reverend **Francis ("Duke") E. Potter** accepted our call from the old First Church in Springfield, Massachusetts. Duke was a genial, informal man whose hobby was sailing. He didn't wish to live in the parsonage next to the church, so we bought him a new parsonage at 22 Watch Tower Lane. He and Merton helped us celebrate our 300-year anniversary in 1965-1966. We also purchased a parsonage home at 5 Deepwoods Lane for Merton's family in 1967. Duke served First Church for eight years until the summer of 1972, when Merton and Associate Pastor **R. Alan Johnson** also left. Duke moved to Camden, Maine.

The Reverend **R. Alan Johnson**, who was Associate Pastor here from 1969 to 1972, and ordained here in 1969, had done a fine job with our youth groups. Alan next became the senior pastor in Sharon, Connecticut and is now Secretary for Evangelism and Membership Growth for the UCC Board of Homeland Ministries.

### 1970s

The Reverend **Alexander ("Zan") Harper** became our Interim Pastor in August, 1972, and recruited Dr. **Herman Reissig** out of retirement to join him here as Interim Associate Pastor. Zan graduated from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and Yale Divinity School. He and his wife Jean left here for New Britain in February 1973. He regarded his six months with us as one of the richest of his life.

The Reverend Dr. **Herman Reissig** gave many challenging sermons and stayed with us for 13 years, when he retired a second time in 1985. He was so popular that we asked him to stay on as Pastor Emeritus. His sermons on his struggles with his own faith were quite remarkable, which inspired a posthumous book of his writings gathered by Patty A. Tirana and the Herman F. Reissig Memorial Committee, titled *Uneasily in Love with God*.



He was passionate about the social consciousness and outreach of the Church. He had a distinguished career as a pastor and as International Relations Secretary for the United Church of Christ. His sense of humor showed when he wrote:

“An interim minister is usually expected to stay for a few months and then to disappear back to where he came from. I found life among you so appealing that, hearing no violent objections, I decided to stick around. And when on a July Sunday in 1973 you, to my astonished ears, elevated me from the lower class status of interim pastor to the ecclesiastical nobility of Pastor Emeritus, I had to stay around, if for no better reason than for the ego-inflationary pleasure of seeing my name with that title in the newspaper and Sunday bulletin every week.”

Also, he wrote notes of gratitude to his secretary, Joan Cleworth, for her excellent work:

March 14, 1977

Dear Joan,

Even with the aid of a high-powered microscope, I could not find one single, solitary error in the copies of the latest sermon, not even where you had to read my execrable handwriting.

Yew dunt make mistakes, like I do.

Once again, my thanks.

*Herman*



He passed away in Florida in 1985.

The Reverend Dr. **Paul Wesley Yinger** was a graduate of DePauw University and Union Theological Seminary. Dr. Yinger was a nationally known preacher and thinker. He had a theatrical flair and had served innovative ministries in New Jersey and California. He had been a successful fundraiser for the Graduate Theological Union in California and was a member of the prestigious Aquinas Society. He came here from New Jersey in 1973, right after having heart bypass surgery. He stayed at First Church for three years, living in the parsonage at 22 Shady Brook Lane in Old Greenwich. We sold both the 22 Watch Tower Lane and 5 Deepwoods Lane parsonages in 1973 to buy the larger house at 22 Shady Brook Lane. He and Harriett entertained more than 900 people there in the last six months of 1973. He retired in June of 1976 after more heart surgery, remained active and passed away in 1992.

In late 1973 we hired The Reverend **James A. Fung** as Assistant Pastor to take over the leadership of the Junior and Senior High Fellowships. The next year he was ordained and became full time. His work extended into church school, hospital and parish calling, and study seminars. He left in 1976, optimistic about the future of our church.

The Reverend **Ann G. Suzedell** began in 1976 as Interim Associate Pastor and did a fine job working with the youth groups and Confirmation class, along with Sally Colgrove. Ann left in January 1977 to take up a full time call in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

We called The Reverend **Thomas Lowell Stiers**, who had been pastor of the North Haven Congregational Church in Connecticut, as Associate Pastor to First Church to replace Merton Libby in 1974. In Tom's first months at First Church he interviewed many town and religious leaders to help him better understand Greenwich and its residents. The 1960s and 1970s were troubled times due the Vietnam War, civil rights, and Watergate. There was loss of membership in all churches. With Tom's guidance we had a gradual rebuilding.



He wanted to build a stronger relationship between First Church and the Connecticut Conference of the UCC. Harry and Betty Woodman and Richard and Ruth Pope led First Church in this relationship. Tom was on the Church and Society Committee of the Conference. Our church groups began to use the UCC's Silver Lake facilities more frequently. First Church worked for social justice and peace through the Connecticut Conference of the UCC and the national offices of the United Church of Christ.

In 1975, Tom won a Rockefeller Brothers Award for Outstanding Young Ministers. When Dr. Yinger retired in 1976, the church named Tom Senior Pastor and invited him to move his family into the parsonage at 22 Shady Brook Lane. We installed Tom in 1977. He soon asked the Church Committee and the Board of Trustees to create a Pastor's Advisory Committee to strategize and coordinate the work of the two boards. This form of governance helped.

In 1978, Randy Bradham switched from being our Treasurer to our first Church Administrator, which freed up much of Tom's time for his other pastoral responsibilities. Tom received his Doctorate Degree from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1981.

Winnie Downes, a member of the congregation, arranged for Tom to help lead a tour group to the Middle East in 1982. They saw biblical sites in Athens and Corinth, and toured the Nile Valley, Jerusalem and Christian sites in the Galilee, Ephesus, Santorini, and Istanbul. This was Tom's first trip to the Middle East and it gave them all a new appreciation of the geography of the Scriptures as well as the complexities of the worlds of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Tom took quite a few more trips after that. For instance, he took a sabbatical leave in 1985, living for a month in St. George's Cathedral in East Jerusalem, Israel and visited Jewish, Islam, and Christian holy sites.

In 1982, Tom, Evelyn Ferris, Carolyn Colegrove and Hia Young interviewed Dr. Ida Scudder and Emily Lent, and transcribed those taped interviews, which helped to keep our church oral history alive.

Tom along with Tom and Sally Sawyer led a small group from First Church on the church's second journey to Yoro, Honduras, in 1987. They joined a group from Christ Church in Silver Spring, MD, whose pastor, Jim Todhunter, was a classmate of Tom's at Union Theological Seminary. The group helped build a church school addition in Yoro.

For years Tom was involved with other organizations outside our church. He enjoyed teaching Bible studies at Hill House, Pilgrim Towers and Edgehill as well as at First Church. He was on the Executive Committee of the UCC from 1985 to 1991. The Connecticut Conference elected him as its chair in 1988, after he chaired their budget committee. He also had been chairman of the Church and Ministry Committee of Fairfield West and secretary of The Living Pulpit.

In 1982, Tom's wife, The Reverend **Brenda J. Stiers**, graduated from Yale Divinity School, and First Church ordained her in 1983. She served for a while on the UCC Board of World Missions. In 1987, she began work on her D. Min. at Princeton Theological Seminary. The Council of Churches and Synagogues named her Executive Director in their 50th anniversary year. The Riverside Church in New York called Brenda to be their Executive Minister in 1994. In 2000, she became the Executive Director of Greenwich YWCA. Brenda was our first pastor's wife who became a pastor herself. She gave several sermons here. She was a leader on the Commission on Aging in Greenwich, Council of Churches and Synagogues of Lower Fairfield County, National Council of Churches, and on the Board of Advisors of Yale Divinity. She worked for the homeless, hunger, and elder organizations. She was simply great.

Tom felt a need to help the congregation develop a spiritual, biblical understanding to be better involved in the outreach ministries. The Bethel Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin began a unique Bible training program. In 1985, Tom took two weeks of training in how to teach Bethel Bible. This is a two-year illustrated curriculum dividing scripture into 40 categories. Tom recruited a dozen lay people to train to teach Bethel Bible to over 140 church members. These Bible students became church teachers, deacons and trustees. These classes lasted eight years until 1993.

On September 11, 2001 during the Tuesday morning staff meeting someone called about a plane hitting the World Trade Center. No members of First Church had died. Rabbi Mitch Hurvitz, Brenda and Tom organized a town wide service at Temple Shalom that evening. Several members of Temple Shalom had been killed that morning. Due to concern about our friends in the Muslim group in Stamford, Prill Meyer took food to the Muslim Center. On Friday noon we held a town-wide worship service here. In October the local Imam and the woman lay leader of the Stamford mosque participated in Sunday morning worship at First Church. On Christmas Eve a Muslim group arrived before our 11:00 pm service with chocolates for everyone! This was the beginning of our new relationship with the Stamford Islamic Center. On October 14th, Mrs. U. Alevi and the Imam gave a dialog sermon with Sally Colegrove and Tom.

On September 1, 2003 Tom retired from First Church after 29 years here, and his family moved to Macungie, PA. He then began a series of interim ministries at The Riverside Church in New York City, Church of Beatitudes in Phoenix, AZ, and Plymouth UCC in Seattle, WA. In 2012 he and Brenda retired to Boulder, CO, to be near their younger daughter Heather and her family. Sadly, Brenda passed away the next year.

At the 2003 annual meeting when both Tom and Sally were leaving, we granted the honorary title of Pastor Emeritus to both of them as a token of our deep gratitude for all that they both did for us for 29 and 27\* years, respectively. They are by far the longest-staying pastors in our church history. (\*Sally was a volunteer the first two years, plus 25 years as our pastor.)

We called The Reverend **Paul S. Fraser** as our Associate Pastor in 1977. He and his wife Suzanne added immeasurably to our church family and worked well with everyone. Paul preached sermons, planned Religious Education Committee meetings, led Bible studies, taught Confirmation class and SPF, comforted the hospitalized and shut-ins and welcomed new members. He moved on to the Congregational Church at Greenfield Hill, CT in 1980, and is now interim Pastor at First Congregational United Church of Christ in Hampton, IA.

The Reverend **Sarah-Anne Colegrove** was our only pastor who grew up in First Church. Sally's ancestors founded First Congregational Church. She was descended from all of the seven original proprietors of First Congregational Church, through her father's side of the family, as well as from Elizabeth Feake, who bought Old Greenwich land from the native people with her second husband in 1640. Her grandfather, Edward J. Grant, was Church Clerk in 1927 when the Church Society, which dealt with religious matters, was dissolved, and the Ecclesiastical Society of the First Congregational Church of Greenwich absorbed its functions. After graduating from University of Connecticut, Sally worked at Greenwich Hospital. In 1976, Tom Stiers asked Sally to help Ann Suzedell teach the Confirmation Class since Ann was new at that. The next year Paul Fraser asked Sally to help lead the SPF group as well. In 1978, when Robin Telesco left to take a new job, Tom asked Sally to become Director of Youth Ministries. She was also accepted

at Yale Divinity School the same day! In 1983, she graduated from Yale, was ordained here and became Assistant Pastor.

In 1980, Sally began the College Pilgrim Fellowship, CPF, with about 25 young adults who got together for reunions and fellowship at holiday seasons. These young people felt committed to First Church even after they graduated. In 1982, the CPF took its first retreat to Silver Lake.

Sally wanted our young people to realize that there were desperately poor people in America, and to help others less fortunate than us. The first mission trip she took with the SPF was in 1980 to the Appalachian South Folklife Center in West Virginia. It was a wonderful trip, and they repeated it in 1984. The Senior Pilgrim Fellowship also gave hours of service to First Church by painting the lines in the parking lot in late April 1985. They worked at St. Luke's Community in Stamford in 1982 doing painting and other projects on a weekend, but Sally wanted a more challenging mission trip right here in New England.

She asked the Homeland Board of the United Church of Christ: "What do you have in New England?" They said: "We just got a videotape from something called H.O.M.E.. (Homeworkers Organized for More Employment). We'll send it to you." The videotape convinced her. In 1986, four adults and 10 teenagers went to H.O.M.E. in Orland, Maine and continued going there for 17+ years. Our young people constantly inspired Sally with their creativity and willingness to undertake large projects, especially when they could help others.



H.O.M.E. Craft Show during Coffee Hour

Sally also wanted the young people to have the opportunity to perform because music and theater here in Greenwich was on such a professional level that most kids never have the chance to perform. *Godspell* was a fabulous vehicle for a youth group because it taught everyone associated with the show almost the complete text of the Gospel of Matthew. Those who have been in *Godspell* never forgot it.

Usually, at least eight adult advisors were in the youth room for an SPF meeting. Most of those advisors, who had many different skills and abilities, were together from about 1986 to 2003. Not only were they a friendship group, but also they were a steady presence and gave the young people a great sense of security.

When First Church decided to become a part of significant mission events overseas, we participated in the annual One Great Hour of Sharing offerings. Tom Stiers asked Sally to go to Honduras in 1986 along with a group from another church. She went, but vowed to never return there. She was scared out of her mind by the Central American war. Tom led a group there the next year and luckily the situation had improved. Tom told Sally that she needed to go back to Honduras. She was not really happy with this idea, but she went and found that things had changed quite dramatically and that she could feel safe in Honduras. She became committed to taking our kids to Honduras and

felt that they needed to be sensitized to what the rest of the world really was like. We have a responsibility to be citizens of the world and work for dramatic change. This mission came from Sally, from our church, and from the larger UCC.

The church promoted Sally to Associate Pastor in 1986. The next year she served on the Greenwich Hospital Institutional Review Board and was a member of the Greenwich Youth Services Council. In 1998, she became Senior Associate Pastor. Sally served as President of the Greenwich Fellowship of Clergy and continued as Chaplain of the Sound Beach Volunteer Fire Department in 2000. She was also Dean of the Arts Alive Conference at Silver Lake Conference Center over the summer and also held the same position at Pilgrim Lodge for the Maine Conference.

At the 2003 annual meeting when both Tom and Sally were leaving, we granted the honorary title of Pastor Emeritus to them both in deep gratitude for their decades of fine service to our church. Sally is now Senior Pastor of Windham Hill United Church of Christ in Windham, Maine.

## 1980s

The Reverend **David T. Taylor**'s ministry here was stimulating and one of great learning. We called him as Associate Pastor in 1980. He came with his family from Northfield, Litchfield, CT and moved into our parsonage at 15 Forest Ave. He was the First Church delegate to Greenwich Community Housing, Inc. and later on their Board of Directors to help advocate for more affordable senior housing in town. He headed the Worship Committee, enjoyed leading the Confirmation Class, served on the Adult Education Committee, our One Great Hour of Sharing Committee, and the Greenwich CROP Walk for Hunger among many activities. David resigned early in 1983, when he accepted a position in the UCC Office for Church in Society, in New York City. He is now Senior Pastor of First Church of Christ Congregational, in Glastonbury, CT.

The Reverend **Dale M. Greene** was just out of seminary and became an important addition to the staff in 1980. Because she was middle-aged and divorced, she was an asset to our staff to counsel those target groups. The Search Committee wanted both David Taylor and Dale Greene, but there was only one Associate Pastor opening in the budget. Eventually an angel couple paid Dale's salary for her first three years, believing that we needed both David and Dale. Dale was hired as an Assistant Pastor and assisted with worship, funerals, counseling, visitations and leading our Singles group plus the Sexuality Education Task Force. She was ordained in 1981, and she and David Taylor were installed together later that year. Dale and her daughter, Jenny, lived in our 106 Sound Beach Avenue parsonage and moved to 15 Forest Avenue after David Taylor's family left. Dale had a major health issue in 1983, but thankfully recovered. She was promoted to Associate Pastor that year as well. Dale pushed for inclusive language in our By-Laws and other publications. She even got married women here to use their first and last names in publications instead of Mrs. "Jones"!

One of her favorite memories was Music Sunday, May 1984, when she baptized Marilyn and Rick Derr's baby girl, Kate. Because of the crowded church, the baptism had to be in the chapel, after which Dale carried the baby to show the congregation. As she walked, she almost danced because our honored guest, Dave Brubeck, spontaneously played "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know" in a jazzy rendition!

Dale took a well-deserved sabbatical in 1987. She retired in September 1989 to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, leaving a void that was hard to fill. She's a sensitive, caring person

whose ministry was notable especially for wise counseling and her beautiful pastoral prayers. She moved back to our area to be near Jenny's family and began attending our church as a parishioner. It was great to see her again!

The Reverend **Meg Boxwell Williams** began here in 1982 as Director of Children's Ministries. She worked closely with Mary Ann Chidsey and the Church School Task Force, chaired by Wynnkie Delmhorst. She also coordinated the Third Saturday Group, a social gathering for "youngish" singles and couples. In November 1983, we ordained Meg. In 1984, she was musical director of the SPF show, helped teach the Confirmation class, joined the Preschool Committee, and became a member of The Greenwich Child Care and Parenting Council. Meg became Assistant Pastor in early 1986 and co-directed the Children's Choir. In 1987, she resigned to work at Greenwich Hospital. She currently works at the State of Connecticut Greater Bridgeport Community Mental Health Center.

The Reverend **Dean Ahlberg** began as a seminarian, as a "Parish Associate" in 1983, and was a great help both in Senior Pilgrim Fellowship and in our All Church Retreat. He assisted Sally Colegrove with the youth groups until 1985. He now is Senior Minister at First Church of Christ, Congregational in Redding, CT. His father, Ralph, was our Interim Senior Pastor from 2003 to 2005.

In 1983, The Reverend **William C. Hart** came out of retirement to serve as Interim Associate for six months. He was so well liked that he stayed on until the beginning of 1987 when he retired again.

The Reverend **Jean Milan Simpson** was a seminarian/Parish Associate from 1985 to 1987. With Tom Stiers she ran a monthly bereavement support program that included a brief worship service with communion, followed by discussion and concerns. Jeannie also helped with the summer church school program and the all-church picnic. She left to complete her degree at Yale Divinity School. Later, she was ordained here and called to serve as the Associate Pastor of the First Congregational Church in Darien.

The Reverend **Marie P. Reed** began as Interim Assistant Pastor in 1987 to help with visitations of all kinds. She left in 1988 to work at the Presbyterian Church of Noroton and, sadly, passed away in 2015.

The Reverend **David L. Fountain** became our Associate Pastor in 1988 after he had been Assistant Pastor at Memorial Church at Harvard University and Interim Associate Pastor at Old South Church in Boston. He preached, taught and counseled here, and worked on Christian Adult Education, especially the Church in Society discussion group, the Church School Task Force and new membership. He was the first to begin to use media for our message. He helped make videos for our stewardship campaign.

With the able help of Sue Baker and the committee in 1989, David oversaw the Second Hour program, developed a three-part instructional series for the Diaconate and a series to assist standing committees in developing relationally and spiritually. Alan Toy, Bob Small, David and several others produced the annual meeting slide presentation.

The Lay Preaching effort in the summer was the result of his work with Jim Sotzing and eight able beach preachers. David worked on three ecumenical efforts, helped on the "Issues & Action" publication, and church outings. In 1990, he collaborated with Andrea Karls to produce the booklet "The Preacher and the KKK" about that cross-burning event with Rev. Allan Lorimer in the early 1930s. David helped get oral histories recorded and transcribed to help capture our church history. David, Melissa and Caleb Fountain moved to Colorado where David was called to be Senior Pastor at the First Congregational Church, Longmont. His two-year ministry here was at once brief and remarkable.



The Reverend **Susan M. Craig** had been Family Life Associate and later Parish Associate in 1987. She and her husband, Brad, had been on the SPF Advisor Team and were part of a very active group that year. Susie began work at Yale Divinity School and was accepted here as an In Care divinity student. She became our Director of Children's Ministries in 1988. With David Fountain, she guided the children to write prayers and litanies, participate in drama and read scripture, as well as the more usual activities.

In Susie's Children's Sermon in 1990, she asked, "What would God most want us to recycle?" "Love", answered Willie Bonnell.

Susie worked on making the church school handicapped accessible. She was ordained in 1992 and took on full-time duties as Assistant Pastor. In 1996, she became staff liaison to the Christian Outreach committee, conducted a survey of the congregation to help allocate our resources locally, nationally, and internationally. She joined our final visit to Hungary in 1995 to inspect the progress our dollars had made possible and learn more about the challenges of entering the free world. "It was a life-changing experience," she said.

She worked with the Women's Fellowship, their retreats at Silver Lake, the Hats Off book group and later the Rummage Room Board. By 1997, Susie became Director of our Church School, working with the Church School Task Force and helped Sally Colegrove and Rick Woodman teach the Confirmation Class. This trio continued for many years. Susie was the staff liaison to Hats Off. They read *Coming Home*, which sparked excitement about Cornwall, England and led to a trip to England. In First Church's initial trip to England, a group of 28 spent 12 days exploring castles, cathedrals, and Cornwall. It was a wonderful experience in faith, education and fellowship, ending with a reunion of First Church internationals in London. Later they went to the Amish country.

Susie became the staff liaison to organize the return to Honduras in 1998 with a group of 38 to deliver medicine to the clinic in Pinalejo and begin a three-year partnership with our medical missionaries there.



**Hats Off Amish Country Trip:** From left: 1st row: Ginge Liddel, Janet Johnson, Marcia Hobbs  
2nd row: Barbara Van Buren, Catherine de Villiers, Lois MacDonald, Ann Robinson, Ray Henry, Tamara Ng-Yow 3rd row: Anne Echedy, Pat Myer, Lynne Lehman, Dorothy Esposito, Ruth Reed, Nan Snyder, Carolyn Colegrove, Penny Lehman

Susie restarted our Cancer Support Group that was needed periodically over the years. She became Co-Chairman of the Middle Atlantic Area of the Northfield League, Inc. In 1998, Susie was promoted to Associate Pastor. Under her leadership, Hats Off had another first as they traveled the coast of Maine, staying near Bath. In Children's Ministries, she encouraged our high school young people to be a strong core in our teaching staff. Their commitment spoke volumes to our children.

Susie was promoted to Senior Associate Pastor with Christian Outreach still a focal point of her ministry in 2003. By 2005, Susie was our only full-time, resident pastor and institutional memory before David Young arrived. She was our "rock." As Rosemary Lamie wrote: "The true inspiration and direction of our Ministry to Children and Families is indisputably Susie Craig. It is her deep love and respect for our children and her awareness of what they can teach all of us that makes all that we do authentic and responsive."

Susie remained on our staff for 19 years. In 2007, Susie and Brad left for Maine to start a new phase of their lives. Susie was Associate Conference Minister for the Maine UCC Conference for seven years, then Interim Minister at The First Congregational Church of Wiscasset, Maine, and is now retired.

The Reverend **Brigitta Remole** began as an Assistant Pastor in 1989. She quickly got involved with pastoral visits, leading the Hats Off book group, giving Caregiving talks and joining the Hospice Cancer Care Team of Greenwich Hospital. She was ordained in Stamford in 1990, promoted to a full-time position and entered into all aspects of ministry here. Brigitta went on maternity leave in August 1991 for the birth of her daughter Erin. In 1992, the church promoted Brigitta to Associate Pastor, but later she decided to return to school. We accepted her resignation with regret. Brigitta is now the first woman Senior Minister at Plymouth Church UCC in Seattle. She was called there based on a recommendation from Plymouth's Interim Minister Tom Stiers.

## 1990s

We called The Reverend **William T. Federici** to be our Assistant Pastor in the summer of 1991 to assist part-time during Brigitta's maternity leave and Tom's sabbatical. Bill did pastoral care and counseling, new member recruitment and nurture, worked with the Adult Education Committee and taught the class of Stephen Ministers. He was ordained in New Haven in June and worked on his Master in Sacred Theology degree at Yale. He initiated a "Behind the Sermon" series, a popular half-hour on the Bible text being preached that morning. The following year, Bill began the "Curmudgeons' Club," a weekly lunch and reading/discussion group for men. He was impressed by their willingness to take on not-so-easy material and by the depth of conversation. In 1993, he began teaching the Pastor's Class of 8th graders and, with Betsy Kreuter and Rick Woodman, teaching the Confirmation Class. He led the Adult Education groups in 1996 in Bible Study, Literature and Comparative Religions. Bill also led a significant healing ministry for the congregation. He wrote: "My mother, a sincere Roman Catholic, told me the proudest moment of her life was the day I was ordained a minister in the UCC. She adored this church, and the people who are its life and blood." Bill left our church November 1, 1997, for reasons of personal and professional growth and began his sabbatical. We were sorry to see him and his buoyant spirit go. He is now Senior Pastor of the United Church in Washington, DC, with services in English and German.

The Reverend **James Ebert** began here in 1998 as Assistant Pastor and contributed to our youth programs and large new membership growth. He was ordained here in 1999. He was well loved and highly appreciated for leading the JPF and Pastor's Class of 8th graders, directing them in two original Christmas plays and taking them on local trips to broaden their exposure. He taught adults, formed Bereavement Support group with Mary Ann McDevitt, our parish nurse, helped train 13 new Stephen Ministers, studied Clinical Pastoral Education at Greenwich Hospital and co-sponsored a seminar there on dying. To support our efforts to help Honduras, he travelled there with our group in 1999 after leading the Pastors' Class in the most successful bake sale in church history. They raised over \$1000 for medications and supplies.

James resigned in 2001 to return to Yale Divinity School. Later he made a major career shift to management of Major Gifts at Northwestern University, Kellogg, Trinity College and now at Yale, his alma mater.

## 2000s

We hired The Reverend **Ashley Grant** as Pastoral Associate and Director of Middle School Ministries in August of 2003. She was ordained the following March and delivered fine sermons. She was enthusiastic, innovative, and much appreciated. She joyously led the JPF, helped lead the Pastor's Class and began an after-school "Drop In" for outreach, spiritual and social growth and development. She did much to help the Parish Life Committee's events. Ashley took a maternity leave in 2005 and decided that it was too much to commute here from Milford and be a new mother. She left in July 2005.

Later, in the fall of 2003 we hired The Reverend Dr. **Ralph Ahlberg** as our Interim Senior Pastor. He had been a minister for 45 years in six congregations, three of them since his formal retirement from settled ministry in 1998. He is also the father of Dean Ahlberg, our seminarian in 1983. As Rick Derr, Senior Deacon in 2004 wrote: "Rev. Dr. Ralph Ahlberg served us with grace, assurance and conspicuous compassion throughout his time with us from October 2003 to February 2005. His sermons, as always, were his hallmark, and constantly garnered rave reviews. They inspired and challenged us."

The Reverend Dr. **David D. Young** began his seven year ministry as Senior Pastor in 2005. David joined us from Michigan with his wife, Michelle, and three children, all of whom were active in the church. Michelle organized the monthly meal for the needy at New Covenant House for several years and was a vital member of the Environmental Mission Team.

Under his guidance, the Church Committee focused on the worship service and instituted changes in the liturgy in an attempt to make the service more powerful and meaningful to the congregation. He also focused on a new staffing model, which contemplated two full-time ministers, supported by a number of part-time Directors (some of whom would also be ordained ministers).

Many of these permanent, part-time positions were filled by people who went on to make significant contributions to the life of the church. Included among them were Ginny Breismeister who began as Director of Membership in 2006, Rev. Ron Halvorsen as Minister of Pastoral Care in 2006, Rev. Dan England, who moved from an interim position to become part-time Minister for Communication and Adult Education in 2007, and Rev. Avery Manchester, Associate Minister for Pastoral Care in 2009.

David's ministry was focused on the community and larger world, as well as on First Church. He participated in a number of mission trips overseas, led a delegation of First Church members who joined with Common Hope to build a house and provide school supplies and



equipment in Guatemala, and initiated seven new Mission Teams led by church members. (See the Events and Innovations chapter for more information about these self-directed teams.) David also worked actively to represent First Church in the community, serving as chaplain to several organizations and as President of the Greenwich Fellowship of Clergy.

An important, but largely unknown, focus of his ministry was on the terminally ill. David spent countless hours at the bedside of the dying—both believers and non-believers—and brought comfort to them and their families.

In 2011, a major controversy erupted as the Trustees debated how to refinance the mortgage on the parsonage at 81 Riverside Avenue, jointly owned by the church and the Youngs, and on a possible new mortgage for a house for Rev. Susan Murtha, who had become an Associate Pastor in the fall of 2010. The Trustees were divided on the issues, three resigned, and a small group of church members began actively campaigning to have a new leader for the church. Rev. Young submitted his resignation early in 2012, and it was reluctantly accepted. To many in the congregation, the departure was unexpected as his public performance in terms of pastoral care, worship leadership and as a representative of the church to the community at large was widely respected. He is now the Senior Minister at the Neighborhood Church in Palos Verdes Estates, CA.

The Reverend **Ron Halvorsen** became our Minister of Pastoral Care and Adult Education early in 2006 as a part-time position. He was diagnosed with cancer at the end of that year but contributed to all of our usual aspects of pastoral care and adult education while he was with us. Valiantly, he supported others while in need of support himself. Sadly, he passed away in 2008. He was a fine, caring man. His wife Gail studied to become a Stephen Minister here. There is now a Ron Halvorsen Memorial Scholarship Fund for Stephen Minister Leadership Training.

The Reverend **Daniel B. England** accepted our call to be our Interim Associate Pastor in 2007 and soon began teaching his popular Bible Study class, giving thoughtful sermons and working with the Pastor's Class. The next year Dan moved to being our permanent part-time Minister of Communication and Adult Education. He also got our website information updated, conducted some of the summer beach services, visited the sick and hospitalized, and did baptisms and funerals. By 2009 Dan's excellent Bible Study classes were put on our church website, thanks to Harold Frost's diligent recordings. Dan's innate sense of diplomacy and gentle humor were always wonderful. Dan became Chair of the Committee on Church and Ministry, Fairfield West Association, Connecticut Conference in 2013. It is a regularly occurring pattern that all our pastors take on more and more responsibilities the longer they stay with us. Dan's a writer and delivered such a touching story for his Christmas Eve sermon, that we begged him to repeat it two years later, which he did. In September 2014, however, we wished Dan well as he left for an Interim Senior Minister position in Litchfield, CT.

The Reverend **Kate S. Forer** began with us as Associate Pastor for Christian Education in August 2008 and was ordained here that fall. The third grade began using an enhanced Bible curriculum written by Kate specifically for their class. She also helped teach the Confirmation class and planned a fall retreat with Rosemary Lamie for the Women's Fellowship. In 2009 she created a well-received initiative of having the children begin worship with the congregation every Sunday. The teachers, parents and children truly appreciated this added dimension of their Church School experience.

With Kate's guidance, the Church School Task Force chose a new curriculum called "Rock Solid." The teachers found it very useful and relevant. Rather than being lection-

ary based, “Rock Solid” is Bible story-based and covers stories from both the Old and New Testaments. It is designed to present the entire Bible over a three-year cycle. After making a fine, creative impact, sadly for us, Kate and her husband, Taj, decided to move in December, 2009. Kate is now Senior Pastor at the Presbyterian-New England Congregational Church in Saratoga Springs, NY.

The Reverend **Mark D. Montgomery** began as Associate Pastor for Youth Ministry at the same time as Kate Forer in August 2008. By November Mark was installed and Kate was ordained. They brought a wonderful new enthusiasm and energy to the many programs for children and youth. Mark and Kate joined with David Young and Rick Woodman in teaching the Confirmation class. They created a committee of eight youth to be the Youth Council for First Church. CPF and SPF had their annual progressive dinner at three homes and the JPF had their annual Christmas party. Each Sunday night, the Senior High and Junior High Youth Fellowship programs continued to meet. Mark added a current events/Bible discussion group in 2009 that met intermittently before church, eating cereal. Debbie Crawford and Phoebe Griffith continued to assist with the Youth Ministry program. Under Mark’s direction, the Youth Sundays became more innovative and meaningful.



Thanks to Mark, we brought supplies to a school for orphans in Belize for our SPF mission trip in February 2011. The JPF worked at St. Luke’s Lifeworks, volunteered at the animal shelter, sold Christmas trees, went to Pilgrim Towers in Stamford, and provided leadership and walkers for the annual CROP Walk. When our Youth Mission Trip went for the first time to Panama in 2012, it was our first collaborative programming with Second Congregational and First Presbyterian.



Mark directed a Cabaret in January 2011, which included a pasta dinner, wonderful Broadway music performed by our parishioners, a live and silent auction and lots of fun. All net proceeds went to the youth arts and outreach programs for our church. Further, Mark was the coordinator and pastoral lead of the new “linc” service on Sunday afternoons. (See the Committee/Worship Committee chapter for more information on linc.)

In 2011, we confirmed a group of both 8th and 9th graders. Our plan was to begin moving toward a confirmation class that would be for 8th graders instead of 9th graders. The Church Committee decided to skip Confirmation for the 2011-2012 school year in light of our staffing gaps. We returned to confirming 9th graders.

Over the seven years that he was with us, Mark continually took on extra responsibilities as different staff members left, sometimes only until the next staff person was hired. He also played a role in helping us move toward a major change in our Governance to the Church Council format. He helped the Outreach Committee change how we did our annual Christmas tree sale and in naming the agencies that the profits would go to, which helped our image in the community as we were able to say, "This money does not go to First Congregational Church." Specifically naming the charities also helped bring in more volunteers from those agencies to assist us in selling the trees.

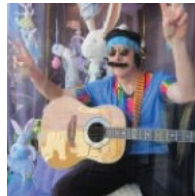
In June 2015, Mark moved on to be Interim Senior Pastor at a large, active church in Cheshire Connecticut, First Congregational Cheshire. We feel much gratitude for all that he did for us in his seven years here.

In early 2009, The Reverend **Avery Manchester** joined us to be our part-time Associate Minister of Pastoral Care. He took on the responsibilities of Ron Halvorsen, such as pastoral visiting, staff liaison to the Prayer Shawl, Prayer Chain, and Stephen Ministers groups with occasional preaching, which he continues to this day. After Dan England left, Avery also chose to lead the Bible study classes. Avery has generously given us far more than his defined number of hours per week, and we are very grateful.

## 2010 - 2015

The Reverend **Susan J. Murtha** began in the fall of 2010 as Associate Pastor for Christian Education. She did much to help the children of our church. She also wisely suggested that we change our administrative structure to be like other churches that have a Church Council instead of a Church Committee and a Board of Trustees. It took us some years to make that happen, but we did! Susan resigned in July of 2011 and is now Interim Senior Minister at First Church of Christ, Farmington, CT.

Dr. **Craig Scott Symons** moved here from Michigan in 2010 to be our Director of Music. He had a Bachelor of Music in Church Music from Wayne State University, a Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Michigan. Craig had served a variety of congregations, is active in the American Choral Directors Association, and was Founder/Conductor of Ars Nova, a semi-professional choral ensemble. He generously offered to be Senior Organist, as well direct the Palmer Handbells and the Children's Choir, with occasional piano assistance from his husband, **Vance Briceland**.



The Reverend **John Collins** served beautifully as our Interim Senior Pastor from 2012 until 2014. John fit in well here and his gracious sense of humor and diplomacy helped us. He sometimes played his guitar during his sermons and, along with Mark Montgomery, posed like a mannequin in the window of the Rummage Room dressed as a hippie on April Fools Day! John is now Interim Senior Pastor at Asylum Hill Congregational Church in Hartford, CT.



Our call to The Reverend **Richard S. DenUyl, Jr.** in 2014 as our Senior Pastor was unanimous, and he has proven to be an excellent fit. He had been Senior Pastor at The United Congregational Church in Little Compton, RI. The Senior Pastor Search Committee worked very hard for 15 months and did a fine job. Richard's sermons earn much praise. His experience, insights, excitement and wonderful ideas led us perfectly into our 350th anniversary year. As an example, his experience in the food service industry years ago inspired him to suggest that we



Barbara, Sophie and  
Richard DenUyl, Jr.

serve lobster rolls prepared with his favorite recipe as a special treat for our 350th Anniversary Founder's Day Sunday. That Sunday in July, with people dressed in "Old Tyme" costumes, drew quite a crowd! He, his wife, Barbara, and daughter, Sophie, helped drive to Rhode Island to get the lobster meat, and they all helped clean it and make the recipe.

Because of his Dutch heritage, when Richard saw the photo of our church with the multi-colored tulips in the foreground in the beautiful pastoral search brochure that Meg Sherman and Pat Mendelsohn designed, he felt that this was the church meant for him. When he came to our church for a second interview by the Search Committee, Pat Mendelsohn first showed him the inside of our Meetinghouse at night. He said in his sermon on November 13, 2016, "The silence was palpable and the golden light on that stained glass window in the dark was stunning. At which point I felt, how awesome is this place? It is none other than the house of God." (The words of Jacob.)

Richard and Barbara agreed to live in our smaller parsonage at 11 Forest so that we could earn extra rent from our 81 Riverside Avenue parsonage, which we eventually sold. Richard was instrumental in the decision to rehabilitate all three of our parsonages on our church campus so that the pastors will all be more close by and accessible, as well as more aware of all that goes on in the off hours. He, Chris Cantwell and Chris Hartwell were key people in the transition of our church to the Church Council form of government on July 1, 2015. He also worked with the Personnel Committee to resize the church staff to be in better alignment with our membership size and finances.

Soon after he arrived and settled in, Richard gave a sermon honoring the 50th anniversary of the Rummage Room. The sermon was thoroughly researched and full of heartfelt appreciation of all the hard and charitable work the Women's Fellowship had done to make it such a success. He totally endeared himself to all of us!

To help manage our church school and youth programs, The Reverend **Meghan Young** agreed to be our Interim Transitional Associate Pastor in 2015. She came to us highly recommended and proved to be bright, capable and witty. She gave fine sermons and helped Rosemary Lamie with the Church School and Donald Haviland with youth activities. We wished she could have stayed with us longer than one year, but she felt it was time for her to do full-time pastor work. She is now the Pastor at the Congregational Church of Tryon, NC.

The Reverend **Patrick Collins** joined our staff as Associate Pastor in August of 2016. He thoroughly enjoys working with youth and children. He was raised in the Roman Catholic Church but switched to Congregational after he met his wife, Kate. Later, he became the full time Youth Director at their church in Lincoln, Nebraska. He sees the key to a dynamic youth program as community engagement and instilling that Christian value of love of neighbor. We hope he stays a long time here.

A surprising number of First Church members have entered the ministry. The Reverend W. Douglas Allen was ordained in 1964. Since then there have been the Reverends John Potter (while his father, Francis E. Potter, was Senior Pastor here), Elizabeth Frazier, Nancy Schongalla, Sally Colegrove, Jonathan Colegrove, Dedee Rigg, Faith Carmichael, Susan DeSimone, Karen Forester, Jean Simpson, Susie Craig, Dr. Brenda Stiers, Craig Breismeister, and Jack Davidson.

There are also several members who have been or are studying at seminaries: Barbara Livingston, Faith Carmichael, Eric Plickert, Laurie Tubbs, Nan Broeder, Jackie Schofield and Olga Hartwell.

The Reverends James Fung, R. Alan Johnson, Meg Boxwell Williams, Brigitta Remole (in Stamford), Bill Federici (in New Haven), Susie Craig, Dale Greene (in Washington, D.C.), James Ebert, Ashley Grant (in Milford) and Sally Colegrove were ordained while working at First Church.

A number of the non-member young pastors in our last 50 years were just out of seminary, coming to Old Greenwich before their ordinations. Some had served in small churches and most stayed only a year or two at First Church. With the valuable and varied experience they gained at such a large and active church as ours, they soon moved on to churches of their own and some to positions in the state or national United Church of Christ. We were blessed by being a part of the training of Dean Ahlberg, Robin Jensen, Dennis Calhoun, Sue DeSimone, Adele Crawford, Jean Simpson, and others. Adele had been Administrative Assistant and was later ordained by the Presbyterians.

## Non-Pastoral Staff

### **Director of Religious Education/ Children's Ministries/Church School**

Frances H. Milnes served as Director of Religious Education from 1965 to 1969, and Alice Berry held that position for the next three years until she left to marry Mark Follansbee and move to Vermont. Marion Johnson, wife of our Associate Minister, Alan Johnson, filled in for a few months in 1974. Mary Ann Chidsey and Bev Harrington took over as Church School Supervisors from 1975 to 1976, and then Mary Ann continued as Church School Administrator until 1981. Ginny Breismeister was the Chair of the Religious Education and the SPF Task Force from 1992 until 2006. Laura Pugliese was Chair of Religious Education from 2007 to 2009. This was renamed Christian Education and aimed at the young people. It was assigned to Susan Murtha in 2010 and became a pastoral staff responsibility.

A pastor became Director of Children's Ministries for the first time in 1982 when Meg Boxwell Williams agreed to take on that task in addition to her other duties. When Meg left in 1987, Kathy Verdier took over as Interim Director of Church School until Susie Craig became Director from 1988 to 1991. Susie continued for the next two years even though she became Assistant Pastor in 1992. Elaine Mahoney became the next Church School Coordinator for a year or so until Lynn O'Gorman was the Coordinator from 1995 to 1998, with Lynne Lehman taking over until 2001.

From 2002 to 2004, Rosemary Lamie and Jenn Lepoutre shared the job of Church School Coordinator. Prior to that time, Rosemary was a church school teacher from 1996 to



1998, and was on the Church School Task Force in 2001. In 2005, Rosemary became Church School Coordinator full-time when Jenn left for a job as a teacher. Rosemary has been a member of First Church for years, and her two children have been in our Church School. Rosemary has an extensive background in the area of Social Services, child advocacy, and reaches out to numerous community services on the needs of child concerns. She has been very valuable here these past 15 years and has been Director of Family Ministries since 2014.

Jenn grew up at First Church. She and her husband Clem were married here in 1988. Their three sons were in the Church School and the Junior Pilgrim Fellowship. Jenn has been active at First Church as a Deacon, member of the Chancel Choir, Music Committee, and Outdoor Ministries Committee assisting especially with the All Church Retreat. Jenn also worked as a Special Education teacher for Cooperative Educational Services in Trumbull, CT.

## **Preschool**

Peg Roberts was the first Director of the Preschool, signing on in 1955. As many generations of lucky students and parents can attest, Peg ably led the Preschool for 24 years. She was succeeded by other competent and dedicated directors, including Wendy Silverman (6 years), Sandy Plickert, Jacquelyn Denning, Michael Plomer, Jackie Kahl (12 years), Jeanne Primeau, Tim Holman, Penny Gellman, Libby White (9 years), and Darla Kohler Steiner (5+ years). Darla began in 2012, and came to us highly qualified. The Preschool is doing very well under her leadership. A remarkable number of our teachers have been with us for many years.

## **Church Administrator**

The position of Church Administrator began in 1978 when we hired Randy Bradham. He did much to reduce church operating costs and to relieve the Senior Pastor and Trustees of numerous administrative details. Randy and his wife Ruth retired to Florida. In 1981, Dick Camp took over the position from until 1984. Dick drew the first numbered cemetery plot map. Emily Jostrand worked seven years as Administrative Assistant from 1979 to 1982 and then came back to be our first woman Church Administrator from 1985 to 1989. Joseph Renton next became Church Administrator from 1990 to 1991, followed by Harold Frost from 1991 to 1992.

JoAnn Genovese was Church Administrator from 1993 to 1995. George Handley then took over for 18 years in the part-time position from 1996 to 2014 until he retired to Florida. George instituted many energy-efficient changes in the church buildings and was diligent about caring for our buildings and grounds.

## **Financial Administrator**

Kirk Young was our Financial Administrator for about 14 years, beginning in 2000. He faithfully handled all of the church finances for payroll, pledges, payments, budgeting, deposits, stewardship, and bank reconciliation. He attended Trustee meetings as well. Once George Handley and Kirk both retired, the Trustees combined their two jobs into one full-time position to save money and to always have a church administrator on hand to handle emergencies and important questions. We were lucky to find Steve Summer-ton who agreed to become our first Director of Administration and Finance in 2014 and is doing that job very well. Shortly after he arrived, he faced a special challenge due to the

extensive rain damage to the flat roof over the Education wing in 2015, with collateral damage to the rest of the building. (See the Building and Grounds topic.)

## **Director of Membership**

In 2006, Ginny Breismeister was the first to be named Director of Membership, a job that involved greeting people every Sunday, writing notes of welcome to those who signed the guest book and holding new member meetings and inductions with the Senior Pastor.

## **Administrative Assistants, Secretaries and Clerks**

From 1965, we had three fine secretaries who each continued for three years: Carolyn Collegegrove, Nellie Hutchinson and Pauline Johnson. Nellie was on our staff from 1952 to 1968 –16 years. More secretaries were needed in those days of typewriters. Carolyn was promoted to Administrative Assistant in 1968 and continued to 1972. In 1966, we hired three more secretaries, Eileen Claghorn, Marcia Livingston and Bernice Sherwood. Marcia and Bernice stayed for six years when Bernice was promoted to Pledge Secretary and remained until 1980. Lee Fertig and Mildred Madenford both began as secretaries in 1968. Lee then became an Administrative Assistant in the Church School for four more years, while Mildred was promoted to manage Church Accounts for a total of 16 years here.

The 1970s brought our two longest-staying secretarial/clerical staff members: Jean Cardini, who worked 19 years as secretary and bookkeeper, and Mary Babbidge who was our first Cemetery Administrator and Records Clerk and stayed a remarkable 37 years! At first, Mary had to phone the other cemetery managers in the area to learn how to do her job. In the earliest days of our church, the senior pastor managed the cemetery records. Shorter-term secretaries in the 1970's were Beverly Millikan, Anne Stolley, Claudine Atkin, and Florence James.

Nancy Fairchild and Yanna Saari both began as secretaries in 1980, staying nine and 10 years, respectively. Erna Olson was our Pledge Secretary from 1985 to 1987 after which Peggy Whitlock took over as Church Accounts/Pledge Secretary for 17 years. Mary Boudreau was Administrative Assistant from 1984 to 1990. Marcia Wilson helped out as a secretary for two years in that period. With the change from typewriters to computers in the 1990s, we needed only one secretary instead of two or three. Laurie Tubbs and Andrea Bates each stayed about two years. Our Administrative Assistants, Bunny Rush, Adele Crawford and Joan Bepler, each worked three to four years. Donna White began as a secretary in 2000 and continues to this day as Office Manager/Senior Administrative Assistant—16 years and counting! Darleyne Sandreuter worked for five years as Publications Assistant, and Terry Flanagan handled Publications along with being our organist from 2007 to 2010. Barb Wilkov then became Director of Publications until 2016. Vance Briceland joined the music staff in 2012 as accompanist for the Children's and Youth Choirs. Later he agreed to handle our weekly and monthly publications as Publications Coordinator. He has authored many books of fiction. We have been very fortunate to have such a well-experienced and reliable office staff.

## **Parish Nurses**

Mary Ann McDevitt, RN, BSN, became our first Parish Nurse from 1998 to 2000. Dee Coover, RN, MPH, MSN, continued as Parish Nurse from 2000 to early 2004. Sue As-

selin, RN, has been our hard working Parish Nurse from May, 2004 to the present – 13 years. These three ladies have helped many people over the years.

## Sextons

We have had 28 Sextons over the years who have kept our buildings clean, neat and in good repair. Occasionally, when the Senior Sexton left, the church hired up to four young people to help out part time for a year or so, which is why the number of sextons is so high. Of the longest serving sextons, Victor Smalley was Senior Sexton from 1947 until he retired in 1974—about 28 years. Helen Shepherd was the first female sexton from 1965 to 1967. She shared the job with two men. Lloyd Cooke began in 1973 and stayed with us until he retired in 1997, but came back for a while to help out again in 2007—about 25 years! His son was in our Youth group as well. Lloyd knew everything about the church buildings and could always be relied upon to help at weddings and memorial services. The Maintenance Supervisor sometimes lived in one of the church-owned houses on our campus. Harold Stevenson joined Lloyd from 1975 to 1990, and they were a good team. Lilliam Rodriguez became our Senior Sexton in 2002 and stayed with us until 2014, a wonderful 12 years. She emigrated from Costa Rica and eventually joined our church. Juan Leon emigrated from Peru with his family and joined Lilliam in 2006 and, happily, he is still with us. After Lilliam left to spend more time with her young son and began evening college, Curtis Gay joined Juan in 2015 as co-sextons. Curtis had been doing a fine job cleaning part-time in the Preschool since 1993. We have been very fortunate to have these fine people remain with our church for so long and are grateful for all their help in so many ways.



**2015 Staff:** 1st row: Donna White, Richard DenUyl, Avery Manchester, Patrick Collins, Sue Asselin. 2nd row: Juan Leon, Curtis Gay, Darla Kohler, Vance Briceland, Craig Symons, Rosemary Lamie, Ginny Breismeister and Steve Summerton.



### Staff Members who've stayed 10+ years, sorted by years



*From left: top row: Mary Babbidge-37, Lloyd Cooke-33, Dick Vogt-30, Tom Stiers-29, Sally Colegrove-25, John Stansell-23. 2nd row: Bob Small-21, Jean Cardini-19, Susie Craig-19, Mildred Madenford-19, George Handley-18, Peggy Whitlock-17. 3rd row: Nellie Hutchinson-16, Merton Libby-16, Carolyn Paulus-15, Bernice Sherwood-14, Harold Stevenson-14, Kirk Young-14. 4th row: Rosemary Lamie-13, Herman Reissig-13, Lilliam Rodriguez-12, Gerry Mack-11, Ginny Breismeister-10, Juan Leon-10. 5th row: Yanna Saari-10.*

### Preschool Directors and Teachers over 10 years



*From left: 1st row: Barbara Andersen, Duly Chiappetta, Marie Fernando, Nicole Gannon, Donna Harrington, Mary Jane Kraus. 2nd row: Jena Palmer, Jane Potter, Jackie Kahl-12 years, Peg Roberts-24 years*

# Events and Innovations

These are special events, task forces or efforts, some that were short-lived or one time only, but worth mentioning. It's a catch-all chapter on efforts that don't fall neatly into any other topic!

## Seder Meal and Tenebrae Service

We have had some wonderful and meaningful Seder meals over the years. In 1973, we had a Seder meal with Rabbi Silver of Temple Sinai in Stamford and his family, and again on Maundy Thursday in 1979. It was a memorable experience of family worship, which also celebrated our common roots with the Jewish religion. In 2015 on Maundy Thursday, the Parish Life Committee organized a Seder meal. The Seder was meant to be a learning experience as the Seder was the meal Jesus and his disciples shared when He instituted Communion. Joe McBride provided background information on the Seder and taught us the details of the meal and the meaning behind the traditions.

Most often, ever since at least 1945, we have held a Tenebrae\* service on Maundy Thursday. Tenebrae is distinctive for its gradual extinguishing of candles while a series of readings and psalms are recited. (\*Tenebrae means darkness in Latin. It is an ancient Christian Good Friday service.)

## Watchnight Celebration

An innovation in 1979, the New Year's Eve Watchnight Celebration, led by Paul Fraser, blossomed as a solemn—then-joyous worship happening for youth and adults. Sally Colegrove led another one in the year 2000 with a New Year's Eve worship service at the Reynolds/Blaker home. It was a great evening attended by nearly 100 people!

## British Festival

Thanks to hard work by numerous individuals and the generosity of many members and friends, the British Festival in May 1981 was an overwhelming success. It was the brain-child of Richard Vogt to celebrate the English roots of our church. The impact on the church and the community was tremendous. An ardent anglophile, Vogt designed the programs and brought in such luminaries as the organist of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, John Scott (who later became Director of Music/Organist at St. Thomas Church, New

York City), and actress Hermione Gingold to star in this month-long event. Miss Gingold was living in New York at the time.

When Art Delmhorst drove Hermione Gingold from her NYC hotel to our church, she tried out various stories on him to get his feedback. Once she told those stories sitting on a chair on a platform in the auditorium to an audience, she gloriously embellished them to everyone's delight!

Having the idea to serve a lovely tea, Richard contacted Twinings Tea, explaining the program he was presenting and asked if they would consider donating tea for the event. It must have been that Vogt charm because thousands of tea bags were delivered in a huge crate to First Church and we drank tea for months after the all-May event was over. The ladies of the church made huge banners of royal crests per Richard's designs to hang from the auditorium ceiling.

English traditions abounded all month: We delivered May baskets to shut-ins ... the Congregators sponsored English Country Dancing...British films were shown in the Meetinghouse... Greenwich Morris Men from New York City danced on Sound Beach Avenue... Angie's Colonial Inn was renamed Trafalgar Tavern serving Scotch eggs and bangers... afternoon tea was served each Saturday and Sunday in the Auditorium...a Maypole dance was held on the Church lawn...the Yale Concert Choir, directed by Jon Bailey, sang...the Dibbles presented travelogues on Scotland and Wales...*A Night at the Proms* was performed with Cynthia Clarey, John Aler, Jake Gardner, Greenwich High School Jazz Ensemble, Christ Church Boys' Choir, and chorus orchestra... Mark Grimisch presented his dramatic piece *Churchill: The Early Years* twice in the Auditorium... the Round Hill Country Dancers provided English Country Dancing... a dinner theatre experience, *The Hollow Crown* was performed by the Cameo Theatre... Daughters of the British Empire organized tea... music by the Tuesday Consort... the Youth Group presented two showings of *My Fair Lady*... Polly Fritch demonstrated English cooking... fish and chips were prepared and served from our church kitchen... a round robin tennis tournament, "Wimbledon West," was played in Binney Park... three presentations of Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde* with Ara Berberian as Noye and all the animals were performed... many, many strawberries were served. All in all, the British Festival was an unforgettable experience for the hundreds of people from First Church and the entire community who participated. We have deep appreciation for Richard Vogt who created and directed the month long festival and the wonderful people who contributed so much in so many ways, including Chairman Carol Farn.



Front: Dick Vogt, Carol Farn, Hermione Gingold and Art Delmhorst. Back: David Taylor, Jane Hawken, his wife and Wynnie Delmhorst.

## AIDS Memorial Quilt

The **NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt** was founded in San Francisco, CA in 1987. A portion of the quilt came to our church on January 23, 1993. It was huge! We



displayed it in the auditorium and again at the Eastern Greenwich Civic Center. Richard Vogt wrote the dedication service along with Brenda Stiers. Over 600 people attended! In 2016, the quilt weighed 54 tons and had more than 48,000 panels dedicated to more than 94,000 individuals.

## Honduras Medical Clinics

(from Sally Colegrove's oral history, <http://www.fccog.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Oral-History-Sally-Colegrove.pdf>)

"We went back to Honduras in February of 1996, and I met up again with the woman I had met 10 years before—Dr. Joyce Baker of the Association of Evangelical Churches of Honduras (AIEH), a UCC group. She again took us to the remote hilltop village of Pinalejo where they were still using a shed as the medical clinic. She said, "The one thing we need is a state of the art medical facility here in Honduras, and this is where we need it. Here are the plans—we've had plans drawn, but these plans will cost \$65,000 and we don't know where we would ever get the money." We rolled up the plans and we brought them back to First Church and in six weeks we had raised \$65,000! The clinic was built and it was almost completed by the time we went back with Dr. Stu McCalley the next year with medical supplies for Pinalejo. We met and admired Dr. Reniery Espana, the young Honduran doctor who assisted Joyce there. We did some other projects that Joyce had identified, but it was about two years following that she said, "OK, now we've got a state of the art medical facility on one side of the country, but now we need one in the Yoro Valley up in Subirana."

So we went to Subirana. We had taken a group of our teenagers the year before and they had done work projects in the final stages of the building of the Pinalejo clinic. Then we went to Subirana and the church raised \$75,000 for the Subirana clinic and in the years that followed we began, every other year, to take a group of our teenagers from First Church down to work in Honduras. That was an amazing life changing experience for them. During the years after building Subirana, we also built two medical hostels in San Pedro Sula for Dr. Baker so that she could diagnose someone at one of the clinics, and she could see that they went in for treatment at the government hospital. There was a lot that we did with Honduras.

Over the nine year collaboration with AIEH, we sent two groups of volunteers per year, including SPF youth mission groups usually led by Sally Colegrove and Susie Craig. Groups would travel down with two additional suitcases of medical supplies carried by each person. We raised enough money over the years during Lenten drives, to construct two medical clinics (the second in Subirana), two medical hostels in San Pedro Sula to be used by patients of the remote clinics visiting hospitals, as well as funds for community housing and the upkeep and maintenance of smaller AIEH clinics. Over the period of the mission, we estimate that we donated approximately \$1 million in money and donated materials to AIEH.

## Hurricane Mitch

One of the young people who had gone to Honduras with us early on, Jamie Rutherford, decided that she wanted to do an internship with Dr. Joyce Baker. So she went down to work as a mission intern with Dr. Baker. Hurricane Mitch struck Honduras on October 31,

1998. The most amazing things started happening at First Church. We heard about what was happening because Jamie had a satellite telephone and was able to call us and told us that it was awful and that she had given away all of her clothes and that she didn't know what she was going to do because she had three eggs and there were 600 people in the mission compound and they had no food. The next day was a Sunday. In church we said we have just heard from Jamie about it all and we need money and volunteers who will courier medical supplies and food down to Honduras. By the end of the week we had \$103,000!

Starting November 1, the website helped greatly to report on Jamie Rutherford's experiences ministering to the Honduran villagers made homeless by the ravages of Hurricane Mitch. Visitors to the site could read heart-pounding e-mails from Jamie requesting help being relayed to us daily through Susie Craig, and later to see photographs of the 150 box-packers who literally filled the auditorium packing over 300 boxes destined for Honduras.



## Facilities Use by Outside Groups

Outside groups have used our church since 1735 when the Episcopalians helped us build our third Meetinghouse, the gallery church, on the corner of Lockwood Avenue and Tomac Avenue. In return we let them hold their Sunday afternoon services in our new church.

Boy Scout troop #3 held meetings in our church since 1923. Later, we hosted Cub Scouts Den #3, Sea Scout Ship #3, and Explorer Post #3. As of 1973, Boy Scout Troop #3 and the Sea Scouts were still active at our church when we actively led and sponsored them.

We've also rented meeting, rehearsal and performing space to the Old Greenwich Association for their annual meetings, to the District 6 Representative Town Meeting (RTM) meetings, to a Jewish study group and their Friday evening religious services, to theater and dance groups, and to music student practice and recitals. We have been fortunate to have five pianos in various rooms plus the Meetinghouse organ.

The church began the Summer Youth Festival (SYF) for high school and college age students in 1952 to help keep them active in the summer. The last show was in 1992. They usually put on six performances over two weekends in August. Broadway musicals were the usual, sometimes repeating a few favorites, like Oklahoma. Over 300 young people participated in those 40 years. For a while, they had some difficulties with getting an orchestra together because our show dates were the same as those for the Stage Door for Youth in Stamford, but the two groups finally coordinated the dates.

Financially SYF had a slight profit. The Steering Committee of about 20 youth members was elected every August, with an adult Managing Director and an adult Music Director. Many SYF members are now in touch with each other again on a Facebook group they created.

In 1966, the SYF and Boy Scout troop #3 went for two weeks to Costa Rica and were grateful for support from First Church. They stayed with the families of the scouts who visited us in 1965.

By 1980, people were giving piano and music lessons or simply practicing at the church and this continues to this day. There were also exercise classes in yoga, Tai Chi,



and aerobics. Theatre groups such as Cameo Theatre, and the Acting Company of Greenwich rehearsed and performed at our church, and later there were Improv classes. Musical groups auditioning, rehearsing and/or performing here were Connecticut Playmakers, the Greenwich Choral Society, Gateway Classical Musical Society, and the Melody Men and Off Sounders men's singing groups.

Groups no longer using our facilities are Alcoholics Anonymous, Old Greenwich-Riverside Newcomers, groups holding antique shows, the Boy Scouts, Jewish congregations, Cameo Theatre, the Acting Company of Greenwich and the Junior League.

Further ongoing activities are exercise groups, weddings and wedding receptions, memorial services, Red Cross blood drives sponsored by our church, Friends of Greenwich Point, flower shows, Girl Scouts, a Zen group, aerobics groups, craft fairs and retreats. We are blessed that we can help so many people in our community get together.

## The Journey to Inclusion

By Chris and Betsy Moore

In the summer of 2000 the Church Committee appointed a task force to explore "through study and discussion" the place of homosexual people in our church. This was prompted, in part, by a series of widely publicized acts of violence against gays. A United Church of Christ initiative, launched fifteen years earlier, called on congregations to make a public covenant of welcome to people of all sexual orientations into the full life and ministry of the church. By 2000, only ten percent of UCC congregations had made such a Covenant of Openness and Affirmation.

The initial inclination of the study group – and later the congregation – was to express an extravagant welcome to *all*: regardless of race, age, religious heritage, physical or mental ability, gender or sexual orientation. Such had been our tradition and the majority of the congregation was happy to spell it out.

As it had in other congregations, time proved that the sticking point of inclusion was explicit recognition of homosexuality in particular. The church had gay members, including staff members, but the congregation had never been called to consider its feelings as a congregation, let alone declare them publicly. Thus began a two-year conversation in the church, a journey that would challenge long-held beliefs and bring deeply personal feelings into the light.

The first year was one of learning. The new inclusiveness group compiled the experiences of other UCC churches and consulted the leaders of congregations that had adopted—or rejected—Open and Affirming statements. Scholars visited First Church for Second Hour talks to explore ancient and contemporary readings of the Bible passages that touch on homosexuality. Along with questions of theology, some members had questions of fact: Is homosexuality a 'lifestyle' choice, or an indelible aspect of how some of us are made? Was this discussion about life at First Congregational Church or a progressive agenda? Everything that the group discovered was organized in a "library in a box" that members of the congregation were invited to explore. (The box, alas, has since been lost.)

The questions ceased being academic in August of 2001 when a same-sex couple asked that their commitment to each other be marked by a ceremony in the Meeting-

house. Civil unions wouldn't exist in Connecticut for another four years, and full marriage rights not until 2008, but here they were, asking our blessing.

And they got it: a "blessing ceremony" at the First Congregational Church of Greenwich. The ceremony was a source of pride for many in the congregation, and an eye-opener for others who had until then seen little need for any examination of the church's inclusion of gay people. That so many had to be consulted—the full Church Committee, a panel of former Deacons, the Pastor's Advisory Committee, our pastors themselves, and the chairs of the inclusiveness group—made it clear that real inclusion for gays was far from automatic.

This led to a year of searching conversations. In 2002, members of the congregation came together in meetings large and small to share their experiences, their wisdom, and what was in their hearts. For some this was testimony; for others, a painful and public confession of doubts. Young people in the Senior Christian Fellowship were especially eloquent in favor of an Open and Affirming declaration, and their stories carried a great deal of weight. As members explored what becoming an Open and Affirming church would mean in practice, questions that had seemed vexing a year before found their answers in the larger principle of Equality.

Would we baptize the children of same-sex couples? Allow gay leaders to chaperone youth trips? The answer came to most of the congregation in a still, small voice. *How could we not?*

Private doubts may have lingered but, in the Congregational tradition, a consensus emerged. There couldn't be a "back of the bus" at First Church. There couldn't be different standards for membership and for service. We would be one congregation, fully including all, without exception. Work began on an explicit, public declaration of Openness and Affirmation and a revision to the Church Covenant that defines what binds us as a congregation. The Covenant we recite today includes these words: *As Jesus accepted, welcomed, included and embraced all people without exception, so do we accept all who join with us in our search to walk in the ways of the Lord.*

The question of whether First Congregational Church of Greenwich would become an Open and Affirming church was to be called at the January, 2003 Annual Meeting. In the week prior, our pastors—Tom Stiers, Sally Colegrove and Susie Craig—spoke from the pulpit in favor, followed by a Town Hall meeting to make sure that every voice was heard before the vote.

Matters did not go as planned. A sharp-eyed church member discovered that the proposed revision to the Church Covenant could not be brought to a vote because the previous version—in use since 1994—had never been voted on by the congregation as our By-Laws require. After three years of "thorough study and discussion" the inclusiveness measures had to be put off until a special all church meeting in March 2003.

This became another occasion for deep feeling and moments of powerful eloquence on all sides of the conversation that had occupied the congregation for so long. Everyone in the Meetinghouse knew that the question would be decided that day, and had, in our inelegant Congregational way, *already* been decided. The vote, when it came, was decisive. On March 9, 2003, The First Congregational Church of Greenwich became an Open and Affirming church. In the decade that followed, 700 more UCC congregations joined us. Those who were there remember the faces and the voices of the many who spoke their hearts, and how proud we were to be in that great room as we struggled with questions that later came to define a cultural shift in our country.

## Mission Teams

In 2008, seven new mission teams formed from nearly 200 members and friends of First Congregational Church. These teams were the idea of David Young and were self-directed by the members. Unfortunately, the teams ended around the time when David Young left. The teams grouped around these issues:

**Environmental** – This team worked to engage members of our congregation and community in environmental stewardship to preserve and restore the earth by reducing the environmental impact of our church facilities and activities, our homes, activities, and businesses. Every action matters – big or little. The Team Leader was Shona Quinn.

**Hunger** – They worked to address hunger, both locally and around the globe. They got our members to lobby Congressman Jim Himes to ensure the passage of the Child Nutrition Act, to participate in the annual CROP Walk, and encouraged everyone to put food in the food barrel for Neighbor to Neighbor as they come to church each Sunday, volunteer at Neighbor-To-Neighbor, and cook and serve chili and salad to many people at the New Covenant House for Hospitality in Stamford. The Team Leader was Tom Mahoney.

**International** – In 2010, a team of 10 went to Guatemala to work on a housing project through a group called Project Common Hope. They worked on building a home to move one more family off of a mud floor. Many in the congregation also helped by contributing supplies and support for the team. The following year, another team returned to work with Common Hope. The Team Leader was Kathy Fraser.

**Literacy Volunteers** – They helped people of all ages improve their comfort and fluency with American English. They worked with local organizations that promote literacy, such as Reading Champions, volunteering at libraries and local schools with tutoring students and Literacy Volunteers of Stamford and Greenwich. The Team Leaders were Nancy McConnell, Mary Ranta and Donna Tagliarino.

**National** – They took a weeklong family mission trip during the April public school break to H.O.M.E. in Maine. The Team Leader was Phil Alexandre.

**Shelter** – Led by Peter Griffin, they sought those families and organizations in need and helped provide, repair or build the necessary shelter so that they can live more comfortably and with dignity.

**Visitation** – This group visited the sick, the elderly, and young children learning to read with therapy dogs. The Team Leader was Ashley Cridfield.

## Wonderful Wednesdays

From 2010 to 2013, we had occasional events called Wonderful Wednesdays. These began with a simple dinner, followed by four to five breakout groups on different topics or activities, ending with communal worship. They were a great way to socialize and learn.

## Website

In 1997, Deacons Hugh Hitchens and Bill Bausch gave a demo of their proposed First Church website design at the annual meeting. In the spring of 1998, a task group headed by



David R. Siever, Chairman, and Clem Lepoutre, Website Manager, redesigned the church website from the ground up. The new site, located at <http://www.fccog.org>, was aimed at three primary audiences:

- Existing members, who now had a single place to go for the latest in First Church news, sermons and schedules, plus current information on volunteer opportunities, counseling programs and giving needs;
- First Church alumni, college students and seasonal members who now had a convenient way to keep in touch with what was happening at First Church, including biweekly updates of the *Meetinghouse News* and calendar and the Rummage Room's latest needs, and to share news about their families from virtually anywhere in the world;
- Prospective new members who now would get a detailed overview of the Church's many programs and a feeling for what it would be like to attend First Church. Over 80 web pages covered First Church's history, its many worship opportunities, music programs and schedules, the spiritual, social and educational activities available, and, for those moving into the area, how to join.



Clem Lepoutre



David Siever

The group posted a “macro” tour document of the site on the Andrea Siever/Kay Davidson memorial communication center in the hallway wall off the auditorium.

People who met weekly to design the new site were Bill Bausch, Tate Briley, Mary Ann Chidsey, Harold Frost, Judy Goodchild, George Handley, Clem Lepoutre, Grayson Lang, Dana Low, Connie Pappas, Penny Schongalla, Ryan Siever, Tom Stiers, Shelley Sun, Don Walton, and Kirk Young.

By 2002, the website had sermon reprints, the *Meetinghouse Monthly*, *Meetinghouse Up to the Minute* (a bimonthly newsletter discontinued after April, 2005), the bulletin and calendar.

The Preschool developed their own website, [firstchurchpreschool.org](http://firstchurchpreschool.org), with two new logos, one for the Preschool and one for the Day Camp.

Pat Larrabee began as the volunteer Webmaster in 2009, having developed the stained glass windows webpages in 2008 with photos of the windows and links to extra information on many of the subjects represented in our wonderful windows. She also developed several illustrated booklets on the windows for the pamphlet shelf in the entrance foyer of the Meetinghouse that people can borrow to take a self-guided tour of the windows.

By 2010, we had recordings of all Bible Study classes on the [fccog.org](http://fccog.org) website, and in 2011 Pat redesigned our Preschool website, a design team developed a new tree logo, and moved it to Wordpress with easy editing by trained staff members. Laura Ritchie initiated the new logo process.

Rev. Dan England oversaw a complete overhaul of the main website in 2010 with a new design in WordPress so it could be maintained by our staff. There was a search bar, schedul-



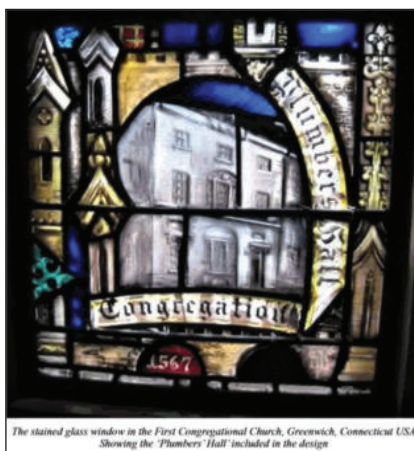
ing capability of when to activate the weekly sermon recordings and an easier-to-use technical layout. Terry Nolan, a professional website designer, was the chief designer and the staff reviewed every page to suggest improvements. The Communications staff member could now add to the site, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We tried having an online discussion forum within the website, but decided it didn't help enough, so disabled it.

In 2012, Mark Montgomery and Donald Haviland developed their own website for the youth groups, *fccgyouth.com*, which was linked to from the main website. *Fccgyouth.com* no longer exists.

Pat Larrabee added webpages in 2014 for "Our Pastor History" with as many photos of our senior pastors as possible plus short biographies, lay leaders with headshot photos of our deacons and trustees (later Church Council members), a photo gallery of all the quilts that had been made over the years with wonderful input from Hilary Lawrence, a list of Senior Deacons and Board of Trustee Chairs by year with most information gathered by Donna White, our cornerstones with a photo of each stone and a list of the contents in the three cornerstones, a photo gallery for all major events, photos of all 72 pages of calligraphy in the Memorial Gifts Book, and a schematic of how our current church building evolved in 1895, 1930, 1952 and 1962.

In 2015, at the request of the Board of Trustees, Church Committee and later the Church Council, Pat added password-protected webpages for all the documents in their large binders so they could just bring their portable device to meetings and still access all those documents via the internet.

The stained glass webpage brought an inquiry in 2009 from John Carnaby, Steward of the Worshipful Company of Plumbers in London, England! He was amazed to find in a google search that a church in America had a depiction of their Plumbers Hall in one of their stained glass windows and wanted to ask about it. We agreed to write articles in our respective publications about the happy discovery. He later mentioned that our window does not depict the original building that the Nonconformists met in, since it burned in the 1666 great fire of London. See below for his fascinating and informative article.



# The Plumbers' Hall and the Congregational Church USA

By Steward John Carnaby

How and why is a depiction of the Plumbers' Hall, as painted by Thomas Shepherd in 1851, included within a stained glass window in the First Congregational Church of Greenwich in Connecticut, USA?

By chance, I recently came across the web site of the First Congregational Church of Greenwich in Connecticut, USA, and discovered that the Church has a stained glass window in which is a depiction of the Plumbers' Hall. This was such an interesting and unexpected connection between the Worshipful Company of Plumbers and a Church in the USA, that I thought that it merited some research.

In the 1530's the Plumbers' Company had a Hall in Palmers Lane, in the City of London, a long and narrow winding lane, running down to the River Thames from Thames Street. The Plumbers' Company were tenants of the Vintners' Company, who had their hall close by and a short distance from Fruiterers' and Parish Clerks' Halls. At that time, very many tradesmen, the Plumbers amongst them, inhabited the area. The historian, John Stow, later recorded the existence of this Hall in his 'Survey of London'.

Around 1550, various small and secret religious groups of Separatists sprang up around London, and Pastor Richard Fitz led one of these groups. Their meetings were later to play a key role in the Pilgrim Fathers sailing to New England on the Mayflower. Once in New England, the Fathers established a Congregational Church that grew with the emigration of Puritans from this country.

Queen Mary (1553-1558) was on the throne at this time and was known as 'Bloody Mary' because of the number of people who were executed during her reign for being Protestants. She had nearly three hundred Protestants burnt at the stake when they refused to give up their religion. It was during the latter period in Queen Mary's life, that many English men and women were unhappy with the Church of England. According to some; it went too far in reform, and according to others, not far enough. Some of this latter group called for the purifying of the Church. They were called Puritans or 'Unspottyd Lambs'. Others wished to separate themselves entirely from the Church of England and they became known as Separatists. They established a "Privye" or Private Church that was governed by its own pastor, Richard Fitz. They had no fixed meeting places, for obvious reasons, so members met in private houses, both north and south of the River Thames.

On June 19th 1567, this group of Nonconformists, reported as a hundred strong, rented **Plumbers' Hall**, allegedly to celebrate a wedding, but in fact it was to hold illegal religious worship. The City of London Sheriffs were alerted and burst in and arrested twenty-four men and seven women. Those arrested were brought before the Lord Mayor, Bishop Grindal, and dignitaries. The Bishop charged them with absenting from their parish churches and with setting up separate assemblies for prayer, teaching and administering the sacrament. The twenty-four men were kept in Bridewell Prison for a year because they had dared to forsake the Church of the Bishops, and to set up a separate assembly for divine worship.

The Pastor, Richard Fitz, was the group's minister, who afterwards died in Bridewell Prison of 'jail fever' as did his Deacon, Thomas Bowland. Another, John Bolton,

returned to England from Geneva, after Queen Mary's death in 1558, but was excommunicated by the **Plumbers' Hall Congregation** and subsequently hanged himself. Later, in 1593, John Penry, Henry Barrow and John Greenwood were also hanged for their dissent from the Church of England. How long the **Plumbers' Hall Congregation** existed before and after June 20th 1567, is not definitely known, but one thing is certain, it put them on a collision course with the Queen (Mary) who was Head of the Church of England and liked the colour, splendour and ritual of worship that the Puritans and Separatists detested. Later, in 1558, seventy-two men and women were found and arrested in the house of James Tynne, a goldsmith, in the Parish of St. Martins-in-the-Fields. Among those taken were six of the first seven **Plumbers' Hall** leaders.

So this is why these legendary meetings held in **Plumbers' Hall** all that time ago (complete with some gruesome details) had such a great impact on the Pilgrim Fathers who sailed to New England, and our connection with the wonderful stained glass window in Greenwich, USA.

It wasn't until 1638 that the Plumbers' Company were able to purchase the land to build their own Hall in Chequer Yard. Another Hall in Bush Lane subsequently replaced this, after the Great Fire of London in 1666, but was demolished in 1865, to make way for Cannon Street Station.

# Lay Administration

## The Diaconate

Before the governance changes on July 1, 2016, the Diaconate was the mainstay of The Church Committee, the governing body of the church, which must approve all policy and professional personnel changes. In addition, it was charged with preparing and serving communion, with visiting the ill, elderly and shut-ins, and with providing spiritual leadership and support in situations of need.

In 1965, the Church Committee consisted of the members of the Board of Deacons and the Board of Deaconesses plus the Church Clerk and Benevolence Steward. The heads of major appointed committees might be present, but did not vote and were present for communication purposes only, to keep up with important decisions. The Senior Deacon, the head of the church, chaired the Church Committee. The separate Boards of Deacons and Deaconesses met monthly, usually with the Senior Pastor in attendance. The Senior Deacon and Deaconess presided at their respective meetings.

In 1972, a new post was created, Chair of the Board of Deacons. This new officer was to conduct meetings of the Deacons and relieve the Senior Deacon of various related responsibilities.

As a result of By-Laws amendments passed at annual meetings on January 25, 1979, and January 24, 1985, the president of the Women's Fellowship and the chair of the Music Committee became voting members of the Church Committee.

Traditionally, the Deaconesses have done most of the visiting, note writing of cards to shut-ins, and planning and serving at receptions following memorial services and at other special events. Communion was prepared by the Deaconesses and then served by the Deacons. The Deacons did some calling, and a member of the Diaconate was assigned to be a liaison, non-voting member on each of the various committees and boards of First Church. The Senior Deacon always assisted the pastors with baptisms, reception of members, and confirmation.

In 1989, the separate Boards of Deacons and Deaconesses were merged into one Board of Deacons, which included both men and women, all of whom were now called Deacons. Responsibilities of the former two boards were shared by all the Deacons, including the preparation, serving of communion and clean up. The assignment of the many responsibilities of the new Board was undertaken by the Chair. The Board of Deacons met, together with the pastors, at about four-week intervals and, in addition, met monthly as part of the Church Committee. The Church Committee institutes and acts upon church programs and activities. The Deacon meetings emphasized the spiritual concerns of the church.



**Deaconesses 1985:** *From left: 1st row: Shelby Larson, Joan Cleworth, Sally Sawyer, Carol Hermance. 2nd row: Suzanne Rikkola, Joan Denne, Ruth Reed, Jean Watkins, Carol Sweger, Dot Camp.*

It is interesting to note that the emergence of women from traditional roles to positions of importance in business, finance and politics has been mirrored in the church. Twenty-five years ago only men ushered and served communion, while now men and women share these and other duties on all boards and committees equally. In the role of Senior Deacon two women have served, in 1975 and 1981. Since 1980 more women than men entered the ministry from First Church, and since the mid-1980's there have been more women than men on the professional staff.

## The Board of Trustees

Unlike the membership and church attendance numbers, which have fluctuated, the yearly budget has gone only one way—up, reflecting the needs and inflation of the past quarter century. These increases have largely been met through the generosity of the congregation. The balance of our income comes from endowment funds, interest and special bequests.

Year	Actual Income	Pledge Income
1965	\$225,679	\$167,626
1975	\$236,423	\$189,895
1985	\$516,401	\$356,353
1995	\$1,011,486	\$662,414
2005	\$2,044,169	\$869,059
2015	\$2,492,318	\$857,951

In addition to paying the operating costs and maintaining the buildings and grounds, there is always the chance of funds being required to overcome an unexpected crisis,



such as the failure of the heating system on a wintry Sunday morning or the roofs springing a leak. Around 1990 there were many major improvements, long overdue, such as a new boiler, roof and wall restoration, a new fire alarm system, and emergency lighting. And in 2014 a storm caused a great deal of water damage to the Education Building. (See the Building and Grounds chapter for more details.)

These large capital expenses are financed in various ways. From time to time there is a capital fund drive, separate from the stewardship campaign. The Trustees are committed to not touching the endowment funds and to using only half the income generated by the funds, the other half being reinvested. Somehow, with wise management, the money is usually found when the need arises, in spite of the ever-tight budget!

Several properties have been purchased, or were already owned by the church, as homes for various ministers, and sometimes sold as ministers left or wished to purchase their own homes. Four houses were still owned by First Church in 1990 and only three houses by 2016.

## **Buildings and Grounds**

The Trustees have always overseen maintaining our buildings and grounds. Fifty years ago our expanded and reoriented Meetinghouse was so familiar to everyone that it was hardly mentioned as a topic in *The Last Quarter Century 1965-1990* church history book. The extended Meetinghouse was rededicated on February 4, 1962 and it was a major change in the life of our church.

Built in 1895, the primary entrance to the original stone Meetinghouse was through the base of the bell tower. The June Binney Memorial Parish House, dedicated in 1931, contains the church offices, the Auditorium and the Daniels Center beneath it. The church and the Parish House were two separate structures. In 1952, the Education Building filled the space between the Meetinghouse and the June Binney Memorial Parish House and joined them into a single compound. However, the three buildings occupy different levels because they were not built following a single unified plan.

A more extensive discussion of the expansion project is at the end of this chapter.

### **Building and Grounds Maintenance**

There have been many repairs, renovations, access projects and conservation of the buildings and grounds with more emphasis on energy conservation in recent years. The remaining Building Fund debt for the 1961-62 Meetinghouse project was fully paid by 1966.

### **Building Renovations**

Air conditioning was installed in 1965 in a “southerly secretarial room” (now the print room).

Ray Harrington added a tape system in 1967 so that all 11:00 am services could be recorded for later use. Ray designed and built our first sound system in the audio room. He recorded many big church events over the years as well.

In 1985, serious building problems resulted in a thorough technical inspection, which identified repairs required to stonework, gables, gutters, woodwork, doors and grounds to rectify major deterioration. A handicapped-access ramp was installed at the church entrance with funding spurred by the Women’s Fellowship. A special gift funded Lexan protective covering for our stained glass windows. Unfortunately, this had to be removed years later due to excess heat, which caused window buckling.

A major five-year plan prioritized the required restoration projects. Columbarium landscaping was completed, parking lot lights were installed and the Education building got a new roof. A fire alarm system was installed, bringing the buildings up to code. Also, extensive Bell Tower repairs were made along with refurbishment of the chimes and bells.

Funding for these major projects was a recurring theme over the past 50 years. The old dingy gym downstairs was beautifully remodeled into The Daniels Center, with new fabric-covered walls and ceiling tiles to cover the pipes. It was dedicated on January 26th, 1989, when Dr. Daniels' daughter, Helen, was presented with a bouquet of roses as a token of our appreciation for being with us at the dedication. The Daniels Center kitchen was also completed in 1989 with significant funding from the Women's Fellowship and the Congregators.

The Meetinghouse roof and exterior wall restoration continued. They fixed a drainage problem in the undercroft. The Shady Brook Lane parsonage required restoration prior to rental. Also, the SPF scraped and repainted the entire bell tower support structure.

They thoroughly inspected all church parsonages and garages. After 30 years, the first major refurbishment of the Meetinghouse was approved. This included extending the marble platform ten feet into the chancel, eliminating multiple levels in the chancel area and allowing the choir to be brought forward and face the congregation. This improved the sound and made the space friendlier. New lighting was installed in the choir loft. They repainted the entire Meetinghouse, all wood beams were cleaned and refinished, all pews and furniture were cleaned and new foam was inserted into the cushions.

The recurring maintenance theme returned in 1995-96 with the development of a new preventative maintenance plan for the church buildings and grounds. Leaking roofs and peeling paint required major attention. Air conditioning was installed in the Meetinghouse and in the Lounge.

In June 1999, the Shelter Strong Campaign was initiated to fund another round of maintenance and improvements. The goal of \$1.5 million was exceeded, raising over \$1.9 million. However, rising costs and the greatly increased scope of the roof project required raising an additional \$350,000 to complete the many projects.

Several major projects were completed by 2001:

- A new slate roof on the Meetinghouse, related roof work and bell tower wall renovation.
- New heating, air conditioning and electrical systems.
- Networked computers and a new telephone system.
- Renovations to the kitchen and Daniels Center and creation of two new bathrooms.
- Renovated upstairs kitchen, new bathrooms and renovated meeting rooms. Added central air conditioning in the Preschool, Daniels Center, and Parish House offices along with individually air-conditioned meeting rooms 103, 104, and 203.
- New exterior oak doors facing Sound Beach Avenue.
- Community outreach capital for the Domus Foundation, the new Hospice Care facility in Stamford, and the New Covenant House community kitchen.

In 2009, an anonymous gift allowed retrofitting of our lighting with energy efficient light bulbs, which reduced our electricity bill by more than \$4,000 per year. Substantial repairs and cleaning of our stained glass windows was completed in 2009. The Meetinghouse windows were removed for the duration.

The Building and Grounds Committee reported in 2012 that, "with 30,000 square feet of interior space, buildings built in 1896, 1930, 1952, and 1960, 17 stained glass windows, bell tower bells weighing over 4 tons, 16 bathrooms, 100-plus trees, 2 ceme-

teries, 4 residences and lots more, the cost of maintenance, repair, and improvements is substantial. Volunteer assistance can help reduce costs, but because of the historical nature of these buildings, much of the work requires a high level of professional expertise.”

### **Fifty + Years of Real Estate Transactions and Repairs**

- 1964: We purchased the Griffin lot on Rockland Place even though the Zoning Board did not approve its use as a cemetery extension. We demolished the house and filled in the basement to be even with road level in 1965.
- 1964: We purchased 22 Watchtower Lane as a parsonage for the Francis “Duke” Potter family, and remodeled 106 Sound Beach Avenue into two apartments.
- 1965: We sold 20 Forest Avenue, which we bought in 1959 as a home for Robert Croskery and his family. He left in 1960, and we rented that home for 5 years. It’s a large yellow house across the street from the church and ironically was where services were held for a short while when Rev. A. Lincoln Shear caused a split in our congregation in 1894.
- 1966: We bought the Genise property on 19 Rockland Place, for \$25,000 of cemetery land acquisition funds. After making repairs and improvements, we rented the house. It borders the Columbarium.
- 1967: We purchased 5 Deepwoods Lane as a parsonage for the Merton Libby family.
- 1973: We sold 22 Watchtower Lane and 5 Deepwoods Lane when Duke and Merton left.
- 1973: We purchased 22 Shady Brook Lane for the Paul Yinger family.
- 1974: We sold 19 Rockland Place.
- 1979: We sold one of the two remaining Rockland Place lots for \$42,953 to finance half of the cost of the new Columbarium.
- 1980-81: 15 Forest Avenue was refurbished for David Taylor.  
106 Sound Beach Avenue was refurbished for pastoral staff housing for Dale Greene.
- 1983: We sold the last Rockland Place lot for \$63,000 to add to the Endowment fund.
- 1988: We co-invested in a condominium at 77 Silo Hill for staff housing.
- 1989: Additional work was required to the exterior and windows of 106 Sound Beach Avenue.
- 1990: Significant improvements were completed in the first floor apartment of 106 Sound Beach Avenue. Painting and cleaning of 15 Forest Avenue made it ready for rental.
- 1991: We sold the Silo Hill condominium.
- 1994: The roof on 106 Sound Beach Avenue was replaced.
- 2005: The church co-invested with David Young to purchase 81 Riverside Avenue.
- 2006: 22 Shady Brook Lane was sold. Proceeds paid the 81 Riverside Avenue mortgage plus earmarking over \$335,000 for future pastoral housing expenses.
- 2013: 11 Forest Avenue was renovated.
- 2015: September rain and blocked drainage pipes from the roof caused extensive damage to the Education Building, forcing the closure of three staff offices, the Music area, Lounge and meeting rooms 103 and 104. Insurance settlement caused extensive delays. One good outcome is that the insurance paid for all asbestos removal and the building brought up to current building codes.
- 2016: We sold 81 Riverside Avenue to keep pastoral housing on our campus.

The church now owns three permanent pastoral housing units: 106 Sound Beach Avenue\* and 11\*\* and 15\*\*\* Forest Avenue. These have been or are being renovated and dedicated to serve as pastoral residences, helping the church to avoid making real estate decisions every time new pastoral staff is hired. The intent also is to create a more attractive campus atmosphere. By using these properties solely for pastoral housing, we also avoid town real estate taxes. This new direction will help stabilize the church budget.

## The Church Clerk

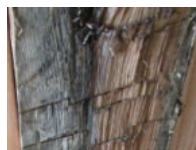
In 1937, when we became incorporated and developed our first By-Laws, the Church Clerk, Edward Grant (Rev. Sally Colegrove's grandfather), kept the records of membership and attendance, registered our Articles of Incorporation in Hartford and took minutes at Church Committee and Annual meetings. In more recent years that job was split, with the vital records keeping by Mary Babbidge and now Ginny Breismeister. Many Clerks over the years took minutes at Church Committee and now at Church Council meetings and read the Call to Meeting for the Annual Meeting and any Special Meetings. In more recent years, the church rolls were revised and many names were placed on the inactive list or completely removed. Since each UCC church in Connecticut pays a "head tax" to the state conference based on the number of its members, this culling was a job well worth doing.

In 1965, the church membership was 2,502 and by 2015 it declined to 789 active members. We don't know how active the members all were in 1965, but that year was the tail end of the Baby Boom era. Our membership is climbing again.

The greatest attendance occurs in Lent, ending with Easter, and in Advent, ending with Christmas. The lightest attendance is in the summer. No surprises there!

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\* 106 Sound Beach Avenue, when being extensively renovated in 2016 and converted back from two apartments into a one family house, was discovered to have adze marks along a living room beam plus a brick fireplace with an attached bread oven in the basement. Our ledger book II (1810-1874) at the Greenwich Historical Society archives says several men in our church were authorized to build a new parsonage in 1843-1844 once the old parsonage on Arch Street (on the far side of Binney Park) was getting decrepit and then condemned. This was in preparation to make a nice parsonage for our new pastor, S. B. S. Bissell, who stayed from 1842 until 1853.



Adze marks on the beam.

\*\* 11 Forest Avenue was mentioned in *The First Three Hundred Years* as having been given to our church by Hubert Dalton in 1919 as long as we paid for it to be moved from the corner of Tomac and Forest Ave. Dalton bought it for \$1 from Miss Ariana P. Cobb in 1919. She was a teacher at the Sound Beach School, but lived in Upton, MA, when she sold her land to Hubert Dalton. He wanted to build his Dalton Tool factory there, which he later sold to Electrolux for their vacuum cleaner factory. The house was simply referred to in the 300 year book as the house where the sexton lived and that it was moved to the northeast corner of the church property after we dug a basement to fit it. We have confirmed from town land records that that was the house at 11 Forest.

\*\*\* 15 Forest Avenue was sold to the church by Evelyn Billie Staby in 1953. Land records at Greenwich Town Hall show that the house was probably built between 1895 and 1920, and it was on three lots of land running from the corner of Rockland Place and Forest Avenue to the south along Rockland.

On October 18, 2015 at a Congregational Meeting we voted in a new governance by merging the 31 member Church Committee with the 15 member Board of Trustees into a new Church Council of only 13 voting members, keeping the Diaconate as a sub group focused only on church services. The purpose was to streamline decision-making and join the financial knowledge with the policy making in order to be more effective and appropriate. Many Congregational churches now have this structure. It also makes minute-taking better since the Clerk only took minutes for the Church Committee, leaving the Board of Trustees to ask a different trustee to take minutes at each meeting. We have great hopes that this new governance structure will work well in many ways.

## The Church Council

The Church Council officially began in July 1, 2016 with the new By-Laws and the new governance structure. It incorporates the functions of the former Church Committee and the Board of Trustees.

The 13 voting members are: the Senior Pastor, the Treasurer, and the Chairs of the 11 Standing Committees. Ex-officio, nonvoting members are the Clerk, the Assistant Treasurer, the Associate and Assistant Pastors, and the most recent past Chair of the Church Council. The Church Council sets church policies and overlooks all church programs and financial affairs. The 11 Standing Committees are the Asset Management, Budget, Buildings and Grounds, Caring Ministries, Community Relations, Diaconate, Faith Formation and Education, Outreach, Personnel, Stewardship and Welcoming Committees. Each Committee has five members, except the Diaconate which has 12 members plus the Senior Deacon.



**Past senior deacons 1956 – 1990, from left:** *1st row:* Harlan Reynolds, 1987; Bill Porter II, 1977; Ruth White, 1981; Allie Holmes, 1975; Curtis Carlson, 1989; Warren Dennison, 1956-1957  
*2nd row:* Gerald Isaacson, 1988; George Fisk, 1969-1970; Clark Whittemore, 1976; Donald Freeman, 1979 *3rd row:* Fred Veith, 1980; Leon MacKenzie, 1973; Bruce Benedict, 1971; Art Delmhorst, 1985; Ken Olson, 1986; Bob Wilson, 1978 *Missing from the picture:* James Kratzer, 1965; Edward Newton, 1966; Haven Knight, 1968; Fred Pinkham, 1972; Edward Holden, 1974; Hank Van Buren, 1982; Michael Chapman, 1983; John Lehman, 1984; James Sotzing, 1990

# Christian Outreach/ Benevolence

We try to have a balance of international, national and local giving. We meet the basic needs of water, food, clothing, shelter, education and the spread of Christian love. In giving aid to programs, we try not to institutionalize poverty and dependency, but to foster independence.

Besides financial giving by First Church and its members are ways of non-financial giving:

- Preparing and serving food for the soup kitchen at the Stamford New Covenant House
- giving food to Neighbor to Neighbor and to H.O.M.E. through One-to-One, in the weekly food collection barrel and Harvest Sunday
- bringing gifts at Christmas to Pilgrim Towers and H.O.M.E.
- providing labor and materials at Rebuilding Together, H.O.M.E., and other service projects

By 1966 the Church was finally free of debt after our major expansion of the Meeting-house in 1961-62, so we formed a new Benevolence Committee to handle mission and outreach of the Church and to be responsible to the Church Committee for administering the benevolence appropriation. The major part of the money provided by the Church budget then went to Our Christian World Mission, which is basic support for the total budgeted program of the United Church of Christ. Of what we gave, about 22% was used in Connecticut, 23% for Homeland Ministries, 27% for World Ministries, and the balance for Pension Boards and Stewardship Council. Incidentally, the Women's Guild and the Evening Guild each had their own outreach funding choices. They merged in 1968. Sometimes the Religious Education group gave independently to outreach as well.

In 1968, we gave substantially to a seminary, to the building fund for a hospital of our denomination in Puerto Rico, seed money for the operation of a day-care center in Stamford, support to a newly formed chaplaincy service in Greenwich for the elderly in our hospitals and nursing homes, scholarships for black young people who could not otherwise participate in our own Summer Experiment, a scholarship for a Christian young man from Biafra attending medical school in the U.S., whose funds have been cut off because of the civil war in his country, and aid to a family service center for Arab refugees in the far northern part of the Holy Land.

We've financially supported Inspirica in Stamford since 1890! Inspirica helps house the homeless in emergency shelters and final housing, provide career training, parent-



ing and healthcare. Our members have been on their board. It was formerly called: St. Luke's LifeWorks, St. Luke's Community Services, and originally, St. John's Hospital and Home. This is by far one of our longest lasting outreach projects.

The Social Action Committee, which was formed in late 1969, and the Benevolence Committee joined in 1970 to act as a **Board of Christian Outreach**. Over the years we aided a welfare family, which we "adopted", and helped a local family with the aid of the Red Cross when fire destroyed all their possessions.

**Miracle Temple**, the first black UCC church in Fairfield County, was our biggest new project in 1977-1978. We pledged \$2,000 to this new United Church of Christ Church in Norwalk toward its building fund. Our church is one of 13 regional Fairfield West UCC churches which pledged a total of \$50,000 to Miracle Temple's building fund. Their building program began with the purchase of the Trinity Episcopal church of Norwalk which had burned down on July 21, 1974. Our church member, Charlie Fish, discovered that the granite of this former church matched the granite here at First Church. Just at this time the columbarium committee was searching for matching granite for our new Columbarium, and Ben Menegon negotiated with Miracle Temple<sup>1</sup>. How exciting it was to hear that Miracle Temple has made us a gift of this costly granite for our columbarium! They didn't want the stones and were glad to have them removed for free. Our church pledged \$30,000 over a three year period, starting in 1992, to help pay for a portion of their reconstruction costs. In 1991 members of the Trustees and Outreach Committee attended the dedication of their newly renovated House of Worship. Three years later we gave Miracle Temple two grants, one for the Christian education program and the other to help reduce their mortgage debt to the Connecticut Conference.



In 1979, we gave money to Hill House, the new senior citizen residence in Riverside.

One of our most exciting new projects was the adoption of Dr. and Mrs. Edward C. Riggs, medical missionaries to India. Because we had met the UCC's Our Christian World Mission goal in 1978, we were eligible in 1979 to undertake this "Second Mile" missionary project, under the auspices of the UCC Stewardship Council. We were the only official Second Mile Church in New England in 1980!

We also sponsored two families of Boat People from Vietnam in 1980-81 through Church World Service, who needed some help in resettling from refugee camps. We gave them temporary housing, furniture, household items, cars, clothing, some help in finding jobs and tutoring in English language.

A most significant thing happened in this church in 1981. After a strong appeal, the congregation gave over 3½ times that of 1980 toward the One Great Hour of Sharing offering. That year Congress had cut back on funding social programs. Churches and synagogues felt the call to help with these programs. With coordination by the Council of Churches and Synagogues, the faith committees in lower Fairfield County began slowly to respond. The Rev. Gary Brown and First Congregational Church, Stamford began a feeding program for the homeless. The Council of Churches and Synagogues worked with govern-

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.miracletemplectcogic.org/history.html>

ment agencies and soon established a more permanent feeding program. They converted a large warehouse in south Stamford into a permanent homeless shelter. Many members of First Church gave hours of valuable labor to make these ministries successful.

David and Karyn Stevens from one of the UCC Homeland Ministries in Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi discussed their work in 1980 (accompanied by a Gulf-style feast for shrimp lovers). The Women's Fellowship donated to that ministry for years after that.

In 1982, the Women's Fellowship gift allowed us to add our **Second Mile** missionary support to Richard and Nancy Sales in Zambia. By 1984 we were supporting both them and Rev. Allen and Judy Myrick in Zimbabwe.

We gave \$30,000 to the Evangelical Church of Togo to buy a new drilling rig in 1984. Eventually they had more than 32 wells dug all over. **First Church received a special commendation** for this by the UCC Board of World Mission.

Our One Great Hour of Sharing recipient country in 1986 was Honduras. We also gave \$10,000 to the Council of Churches & Synagogues in honor of our Rev. Brenda Stiers being appointed their Executive Director!

From 1988 to 1990 our One Great Hour of Sharing program in Turkey helped the rural poor, training women on good hygiene, nutrition and in rug weaving. A group led by Sally Colegrove and Wendy Reynolds first went to Turkey to assess the best ways we could help. Adopt-a-House and Pilgrim Towers received truly significant outreach gifts from the 325th Anniversary Fund.

In 1989 we switched our **Second Mile** missionary support to Dr. Joyce Baker in Honduras.

From 1991 to 1993, the congregation's One Great Hour of Sharing mission program was in Zimbabwe, thanks to our church missionaries there, the Myricks. We funded projects of water wells, an ambulance, farming, beekeeping, reforestation, sewing, and poultry raising, roofing a hospital and constructing a storeroom.

In 1991, we assisted the Stamford Shelter for the Homeless by housing the winter overflow of homeless men in the area in the Daniels Center for two weeks. There were 83 volunteers helping with the project.

The Outreach Committee involved the congregation for many years in "Christmas in April" (later renamed to "Rebuilding Together"). This was a program sponsored by many corporations, religious congregations, service clubs, and non-profits to rehabilitate individual homes on a weekend in April. Wendy and Harlan Reynolds gave many hours facilitating First Church's involvement by studying how this program worked in a neighboring town. Bob MacLea visited the sites and estimated what materials were needed. Giff Reed, Ben Menegon, and Bob Goodchild often led our teams.



**Soup Kitchen workers ca 1990:** 1st row: Anne Wachsman, Cornelia Veith, Elaine Smith, Joyce Carlson. 2nd row: Carolyn Colegrove, Pat Pollack, Zoe Hansson, Nancy Fairchild, Curt Carlson



Paul Pacent and Diane Kretschmann, team leaders

By 1992 we also supported Adopt-A-House, Soup Kitchen, Call-A-Ride, H.O.M.E., Silver Lake, the Hunger Walk, United Church Board for World Ministries, Homeland Ministries, General Synod, Stewardship Council, Pension, Church Life and Leadership, Racial Justice, Communication, Church in Society, Center for Women, and Church Development.

First Church joined the Second Congregational Church of Greenwich and the Round Hill Community Church of Greenwich in 1993 in sponsoring the Hodzic family, refugees from Bosnia, in relationship with Church World Service. This also was the first time we joined in such close partnership with two other churches in a mission project.

## Bosnian Refugee Resettlement Committee (1993 to 1995)

Early in 1993, many Connecticut churches were asked to sponsor Bosnian refugees who were victims of “ethnic cleansing.” Three churches in Greenwich—First Congregational Church, Second Congregational Church and Round Hill Community Church—joined together to form a sponsoring committee. In September, the committee received the Hodzic family—parents, Mustafa and Emsa, and their three boys, Almin, Muhamed and Saudin. The Hodzics were Muslims, from Prejidor. The committee helped teach them English quickly, arranged for medical and dental work, and helped get them jobs. The children went to school and became involved in activities and projects. Over time, the parents got their drivers’ licenses and a car, paid income taxes, and moved to a bigger and better house. The Hodzics first lived in a rented home and studied the English language intensively. By November Mustafa had a job at Derektor Shipyards in Mamaroneck, and Emsa had several housecleaning jobs. Almin, a junior at Greenwich High School, worked at an animal hospital weekends and during school holidays. All the boys all did well in school.

Contributions from the churches and many individuals sustained the family. The members of the Committee, chaired by Curt Carlson, and many volunteer teachers from all three churches gave many hours to help the family settle in, shop, repair and furnish the house, drive them to countless appointments and events, find jobs and commute to them, etc. The pro bono work of dentists, physicians and translators and the willing giving of many people were very gratifying.

In 1994, the committee raised \$12,000 and spent about \$10,000. The Hodzic family were legal residents with work permits and financially independent.

The committee disbanded in October 1995, but committee members still kept in touch with the Hodzics as friends and neighbors. The Hodzics still live in our area and embody the spirit of hard work, self-reliance and independence. The committee members from all three churches worked very hard and did a fine job of helping this family find their way in a new country.

In 1994, following the fall of Communism, we began an exciting partnership with the Reformed Church of Hungary to help renew the message of our Protestant faith. Our One Great Hour of Sharing collections were dedicated to expanding Christian education, building churches and supporting the Bethesda Children’s Hospital. In 1995, we donated to the Reformed Church High School in Pecs, the Raday Theological College and Karoli Gaspar University, and traineeships and overseas scholarships for seminarians. The first SPF trip to Europe was in early 1995 to Pecs, Hungary. Religious freedom is a gift and a responsibility that our Hungarian seminarians taught us never to take for granted.

In 1999, First Church was recognized at the Council of Churches and Synagogues' Annual Meeting as "Congregation of the Year" because of our "shining example of stewardship: of congregation, community, country and world." Chuck Ainsworth, former Chair of the Outreach Committee, was also recognized and received the Community Service Award for his years of outstanding service to this community.

## Christian Outreach History 2003 – 2009

By Chris Hartwell

The charge and mission of Christian Outreach Committee is to serve the congregation in three ways:

- To seek out charitable organizations and distribute grants thoughtfully and responsibly; distribute to needy agencies in our community serving local, regional, national and international communities. The Committee was guided by past giving, emergency needs, and periodic surveys of the congregation aimed at determining where our membership most wants to offer support.
- To educate our congregation about populations in need and how their needs are being addressed
- To encourage and promote volunteerism and involvement by members of the congregation

In order to increase awareness of the needs in our community and how we were addressing them, the Committee held several "Mission Fairs" in 2009 at Coffee Hour where various agencies set up booths to give the congregation a direct look at where our Outreach dollars go and the difference they make in our community. We also conducted a church-wide survey of members' goals and desires for Outreach, to help the Committee with its future grant making decisions.

Based largely on the priorities expressed in that survey, the Committee focused its support on local agencies addressing Homelessness, Hunger, Health Care, Care of Children and Youth, Elder Care and Community Education and Volunteerism. Approximately 20 to 25 agencies received grants each year.

The Committee also administered two major volunteer projects benefitting the community:

1. The annual Christmas Tree Sale was a longstanding tradition begun by the Boy Scouts. The Couples Club continued it to raise funds to support local charities. The Boy Scouts had moved on to selling wreaths door to door. Eric and Betsy Kreuter had served as volunteer Co-Chairs of this event for many years, but in 2006 the Outreach Committee took responsibility for its organization and administration.

2. First Church Growers for the Hungry began in 2004 when longtime members Don and Connie Walton offered a plot in their back yard for use as a garden to grow nutritious, natural vegetables for distribu-



The Walton's backyard garden

tion to local food agencies. Food pantries and soup kitchens often had difficulty obtaining fresh vegetables. During the five years of operation, over 50 church members devoted many hours of their time to produce hundreds of pounds of tomatoes, zucchini, butternut squash, green beans and other vegetables each year, while learning quite a bit about gardening.

In 2005, the Committee saw the need to find a new direction for the annual Lenten Offering. Previously, the congregation had become very involved in our project to build a medical clinic and nutrition center in Honduras, and from 1998 to 2000 the Lenten Offering had raised a total of \$149,000 to support that project. Several mission trips of youth and adults went to Honduras to assist in the project. However, after the construction project was completed, the organization with which we were partnering in Honduras underwent changes that made it difficult for us to continue our role there at the same level. At the same time, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita left many people living in poverty here at home. Our survey of the congregation showed a strong priority of addressing basic human needs of food and shelter in our local community and our nation. Accordingly, we decided to make a three-year commitment to dedicate the Lenten Offering to “H.O.M.E. and Hunger.” The proceeds of the offering would be apportioned between H.O.M.E. of Maine and three local hunger agencies—Neighbor to Neighbor, New Covenant House, and the Food Bank of Lower Fairfield County.

The congregation responded with great enthusiasm to this new direction, greatly increasing the recent level of contributions to over \$60,000 in 2006, and over \$70,000 in 2007 and 2008. We continued our established relationship with H.O.M.E., including site visits each year to determine specific projects that could be funded with proceeds from the Lenten Offering.

When H.O.M.E.’s Farmhouse Shelter was destroyed by fire in May 2007, we launched a special appeal that raised more than \$25,000 in additional contributions. With matching funds from another charitable foundation, H.O.M.E. was able to rebuild the Shelter within a year.

We have also given Gifts-in-Kind (Non-Monetary gifts). For instance, in 2015 we gave:

- 356 bags of groceries from Harvest Sunday Food Drive in honor of our 350th anniversary
- 181 Giving Tree gifts delivered for years by Ruth and Giff Reed to H.O.M.E. Co-op friends in Maine, and 50 gifts to Pilgrim Towers residents, organized by Mary-Ann Assing and her committee
- 50 non-denominational Easter baskets to Covenant to Care for Children
- 50 white gifts at Christmas to Covenant to Care for Children.

Some of our volunteer experiences were:

- Stop Hunger Now, which was initiated and organized by Peter Griffin. Fifty church members of all ages packaged 10,000 meals as part of 285,120 meals sent to impoverished Malawi in Africa.
- New Covenant House Soup Kitchen—First Church volunteers provided about 1000 meals in 2014.
- In 2015 the Grunow and DenUyl families generously began a free Christmas tree delivery program.

All in all, in the 50 years from 1966-2015 our church has given a total of *\$16 million* (in today’s values) to many charities, plus many more uncalculated amounts of goods



and services not listed above. The generosity of First Church is enormous. We have great compassion for those less fortunate than we are.

The Benevolence Stewards have worked very hard to make our world a better place and deserve special recognition. We are grateful for their strong leadership.

<b>Benevolence Steward</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>Benevolence Steward</b>	<b>Years</b>
Lee McKeithen	1965-1967	Ruth Davidson	1991-1993
Ruth R. Pope	1968-1969	Jeffrey Boak	1994
C. Webb Williams	1970-1971	Charles H. Ainsworth	1995-1997
Emily Jostrand	1972-1973	Mary Bausch	1998-2000
William Henry	1974-1976	Tom Mahoney	2001-2003
Anne Low	1977-1979	Gene Waggaman	2004-2006
Joyce Carlson	1980-1981	Chris Hartwell	2007-2009
Stuart W. McCalley	1982-1984	Peter Griffin	2010-2011
Robert K. Brady	1985-1987	Clem Lepoutre	2012-2013
Wendy Reynolds	1988-1990	Tamara Ng-Yow	2014-2016

## Pilgrim Towers

Pilgrim Towers is a senior residential community with affordable, independent housing available to eligible seniors of any race, creed, sex, or national origin in downtown Stamford at 25 Washington Court. It has 74 studio and one-bedroom apartments on 10 floors designated for seniors on limited incomes who are able to live independently. Lew Miller, Moderator of the First Congregational Church in Darien, initiated the project. It was originally called United Church of Christ Residences–Stamford. Originally supported by First Congregational Church and 45 other local Congregational churches, Pilgrim Towers has since expanded its sponsorship, although about 20 churches still sponsor the facility. The dedication of church members has made Pilgrim Towers a desirable place to live. Ben Menegon, Jack Sweger and Sherry Myer were on the earlier boards, with Joe McBride, Ken Kolb, Marilyn Olssen, Richard Peebles, Josh Ziac and Paul Johansen later. Ben and Jack represented First Church on the board for many years. In recent years, we have rotated board members more frequently.

The building was first occupied in 1968. Thanks to a federal loan program, the committee got an option on some property in Stamford in 1965. The cornerstone was laid in 1967. About 1,500 seniors have lived there since then. If Pilgrim Towers didn't exist, the majority of the residents would have no other option for a home. For instance, in 2003, residents' income could not exceed \$38,000, and monthly rent was \$325. It is more than apartment living. It is like a family—complete with likenesses and differences, ups and downs, but the residents look out for each other. It is diverse on all levels.

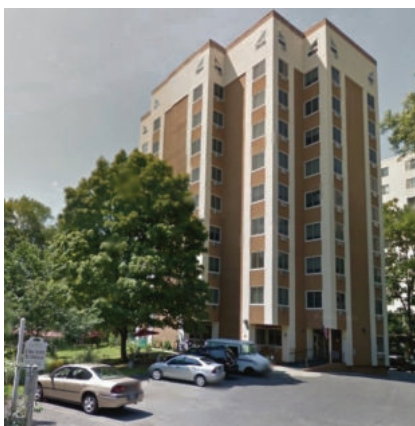
Pilgrim Towers is regulated by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). As a faith-based community, Pilgrim Towers is connected to a network of caring individuals and houses of worship that focus on quality care for the community. We are dedicated to creating a comfortable, caring, and enjoyable atmosphere. The Board of Directors is committed to improving the lives of Pilgrim Towers' residents through monthly meetings and organization of volunteer efforts. The Board's goal is to not raise rent. Rent increases have occurred only a few times in the 40+ years.



There is a garden area overlooking the Rippowam River, just south of Mill River Park, with various seating areas, a mail-room, a BBQ area, and a vegetable garden. The community lounge is for events and for residents to socialize, with free computers and printers, a piano, and a kitchen.

In 1967-1968, we gave about \$8,600 to help pay for the construction, plus a \$10,000 gift in 2007 to renovate their community room. Smaller annual donations have been made over the years.

In 2008, the Church School coordinated the gift-giving project for the residents of Pilgrim Towers for the second year. Also, the 5th graders began a more personal relationship with the residents through a pen pal letter-writing project. They visited Pilgrim Towers in December and were met with enthusiasm and good food. The children sang carols with the residents, played a Christmas trivia game and thoroughly enjoyed meeting their pen pals. We are committed to helping our children experience community service projects. Children in grades 4 and 5 continue to visit Pilgrim Towers for Halloween and pre-Christmas to sing songs with familiar tunes but new words, thanks to Rosemary Lamie's leadership. At Christmas time, they include Old Testament trivia and bring gifts from the annual church Giving Tree. Our children also go there in April to do gardening and grounds clean up.



## The Prayer Chain Ministry

By Barbara Norrgard

Connie Walton started the Prayer Chain Ministry in 2007. Eighteen members prayed for about 30 people who needed God's help. Prayer requests were passed within the groups by telephone. In 2012, email was used to send information. In 2013, the Prayer Chain Ministry had 25 members, headed up by Angela Stevens. Prayer requests came either from the pastors or directly to Angela. In 2014, Pastor Mark Montgomery assumed the leadership of this Ministry. Mary-Ann Assing presently heads the Prayer Chain Ministry.

## The Prayer Shawl Ministry

By Barbara Norrgard

The Prayer Shawl program began in 2005 and was organized by Angela Stevens, Inge Thalheim and Penny Lehman. Over the years, members have knitted and gifted over 100 shawls, which have been given to anyone who was experiencing illness, loss or life challenges. Suggestions for recipi-



Lu Baldwin, Deb Bonnell, Janet Klingner

ents have come from Pastors, the Parish Nurse, Stephen Ministers or the congregation at large. Prayer shawls have been presented by many people, often by pastors or friends. We place shawls in a gift bag with the following note:

“As you wrap this shawl around your shoulders, may you feel God’s embrace, presence and unconditional love for you. May you be enveloped in warmth, sustained by hope and comforted by the prayers that have been knit into this shawl for you by the Prayer Shawl Ministry of the First Congregational Church of Greenwich.”

From 2014-2015, Nancy McConnell led the Prayer Shawl Ministry and provided support to knitters and recipients alike. In 2016, the Caring Ministries group reactivated this ministry.

# Religious Education and Faith Formation

## Adult Education

Over the past 50 years, “adult education” at First Church has taken on a variety of meanings. Through the decades, the consistent thread has been an effort to find ways to make the church and its teachings relevant in an increasingly secular world and an increasingly diverse society. Through a variety of doctrinal, spiritual and social programs, clergy, staff and lay leaders have striven to respond to the adult members of the congregation’s quest for enlightenment and guidance, both individually and as a group.

Doctrinal and academic offerings have consistently included Bible study. This has been offered in a variety of contexts from the formal Bethel Bible Class started in 1985, which continued into the 1990s, to short courses on particular books of the Bible taught by members of the clergy. In addition to scriptural study, courses on topics such as women in the Bible, literature and faith, and Christian basics have been offered based on various ministers’ individual interests and areas of expertise. For several years in the 1990s, a talk entitled “Behind the Sermon” preceded Sunday worship, with the minister leading a discussion of that week’s scripture texts. Post-worship Bible study was reinstituted in the mid-2000s and developed an enthusiastic following that became even more dedicated when, in 2009, classes began to be recorded electronically and posted on the church’s website.

The introduction of “Second Hour” discussions by Rev. Thomas Stiers in 1974 provided a structure for a wide range of presentations on issues of social and personal interest to the adult community. The program continued throughout Dr. Stiers’ long tenure. Discussions followed Sunday morning worship. Speakers ranged from theologians, authors and poets, to educators, elected officials and community leaders. Many committees within the Church took on the responsibility of planning Second Hours that aligned with their particular focus. These committees included Church and Society, Family Life, Outreach and Wellness.

The importance of integrating adult education with support for families, parents and spouses was a theme that continued through the years. Retreats and outings, along with



A Second Hour talk in the lounge

service projects both at home and away provided a setting for these endeavors. “Hats Off” and for a time, “Ties Off”, provided opportunities for women and men, respectively, to make friends and discuss topics of particular interest.

## Church School

By Rosemary Lamie

“The More Things Change the More They Stay the Same!”

—*Frances H. Milnes*, Director of Religious Education 1965-1969

Through the years, the Church School has been directed, coordinated and supervised by several people each year including pastors with the assistance of Religious Education Committee members, Church School Task Force members and leaders. A Sunday morning Church School with curriculum taught by volunteer parents, pastors and high school assistants has always anchored the program. The program has long included a worship time either in a large gathering space for the entire church school to worship together, in age level “shifts” or in individual classrooms.

Curriculum has changed from formal, published Bible story based materials, to lectionary based materials\* in the 1980s until 2009\*\* when the curriculum reverted back to a Bible story based curriculum\*\*. In 2014, the curriculum became a Workshop Rotation model\*\*\* where children, in Kindergarten through 5th grade, would experience Bible stories and teachings through reading, drama, art, games, cooking, woodworking, etc. In 2015 we have several curricula being presented simultaneously: Rotation Workshops for elementary school children; a special Preschool program for 3 and 4 year olds; a special Overview of the Bible yearlong curriculum for 3rd graders; and a customized program for “678”, our middle school children, presented by our Associate Pastor for Children, Youth and Families.

New emphases were often introduced in the church school. Marion Johnson, wife of Associate Minister R. Alan Johnson, served as Interim Director for several months and put a new emphasis on involving the whole family featuring Family Night suppers as well as a Family Retreat.

In 1976, Mary Ann Chidsey became Church School Administrator and stayed in that position for five years. She worked closely with Ann Suzedell, Interim Associate Pastor. Since that time, church history had been a regular part of the Church School curriculum. Meg Boxwell started The Big Event in 1982 with Wynnkie Delmhorst’s help and Mary Ann started the 4:00 pm Christmas Eve Family Service in 1983. To encourage attendance at that new Christmas Eve service, for the first two years we gave out cookies at the doors after that service.

In 1987, Kathy Verdier became Interim Church School Director with Pat Pollack as the Church School Assistant.

From 2002 to 2004, Rosemary Lamie and Jenn Lepoutre shared the job of Church School Coordinator, with Rosemary doing three quarters of it. Both of them had been

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\* *Whole People of God; Seasons of the Spirit*

\*\* *Rock Solid; Grow, Proclaim, Serve*

\*\*\* Materials are drawn from several sources readily available on the Internet

very active with the church, as detailed in the Staff chapter. In 2004, Rosemary assumed full responsibility for the Church School and is now Director of Family Ministries.

## **Priorities and Philosophy**

Today our children and their families are the major programming focus for the church year. With the changing culture of church attendance and participation in anything religious, it is all the more important that we acknowledge the shared responsibility between church and home for the faith formation of children. First Church has long been committed to finding ways to help parents bring faith forming ways home to their children. We continually seek opportunities to engage our families in ways that will help them build their faith and to live out their values and belief in God's love for all. We focus on a learning environment where children can learn the basic stories of our faith as well as spiritual practices such as prayer, service and relationship.

Our programs have changed as well. For instance, church school has evolved from Sunday school with the emphasis on a traditional classroom approach to the more experiential Rotation Workshop curriculum.

One of the four goals adopted by the Church Committee in 1983 was the coordination of the church school curriculum with Meetinghouse services by adopting a curriculum that followed the lectionary. Although our pastors stopped following the lectionary about 2007, the church school continued with a lectionary-based curriculum until 2009 when the Bible story based "Rock Solid" curriculum was begun.

Team teaching, which began in 1987, made recruitment easier as it created opportunities for teachers to teach on the Sundays they were available, rather than having to teach every Sunday. A team consisted of four adults and two high school students. Since about 1988 we suggest that parents teach two years for each of their children in church school.

## **Children in Worship and Communion**

Children have also begun to be integrated into worship in more meaningful ways, which began with their inclusion in Communion via a formal education program involving parents and children in the 1990s. This was a movement, which began with the UCC, was adopted by the Church Committee after some discussion. There has long been a dilemma on the question, "Why, if we teach our children about communion and even have a first communion service of sorts, we do not include children more often during worship?" Again, this was controversial because when parents were surveyed about this, the majority said they were satisfied with the status quo. This issue, perhaps more than any other, highlighted the influx of former Catholics into the UCC. Since Catholics were accustomed to receiving communion at every Mass, it was quite different for them not to have communion at every worship service in our church and furthermore not to have the children at seven years of age and older participate when it was served. It was more often an issue of convenience as it still is today. To bring children of only certain ages into church for communion from the church school classes was disruptive, cut their classes short and could cause some level of disruption during worship. We revisit this issue every year. We are still trying to find a good answer to how to include children in communion more regularly.

For years the Sunday school held its own worship service in the Auditorium or the Daniels Center. In the beginning it was every Sunday and the children's choir sang every week. Eventually it was held more sporadically and the choirs did not sing in that worship. Then it changed to once a



Richard DenUyl's Children's Sermon

month. In 2008, our new Associate Pastor, Kate Forer, newly graduated from Duke Divinity School, with a maturity and perspective that was cutting edge, convinced those who needed to be convinced that it was important for children to experience their faith through worship with their parents and other adults in the church. As a result, children in Kindergarten and older began every Sunday in worship and went to church school sometime before the sermon. We have continued this practice to this day. We also celebrate those times when children are in worship for the entire service on Harvest Sunday, Music Sunday, Palm Sunday, Easter and Christmas services, and other special Sundays during the year.

## The Church School and Community Service

Although the Church school has always been involved in mission programs, a developing trend is the desire for increased opportunities for children in groups and with their parents to engage in community service. Parents of young children especially are seeking ways to help their children understand the needs of people in our world – not just how to address them but also why they exist. They want their children to have a perspective and experience beyond collecting money and items of need.

Thus, in recent years we have begun a visitation program usually with 4th and 5th graders who visit Pilgrim Towers two or three times a year. Beginning in 2011, we also volunteer at Neighbor to Neighbor two or three Saturdays a year. This is an all-church event that includes teams of children and parents. Although it is difficult to find programs that accommodate our youngest children, we continue to search for and develop those opportunities.

The church school sometimes collected money and goods for the various organizations that the church supports. These organizations include Heifer International, Neighbor to Neighbor, Covenant to Care for Children of CT, H.O.M.E. Co-op, Kids in Crisis, and all of the international destinations of our Youth's mission trips.

Another church school tradition was the creation of the Big Event in 1982. These were programs offered on low attendance Sundays, specifically the school holiday Sundays when many families were traveling. More recently, these are also Sundays when sports programs tend to schedule tournaments. The name Big Event was a misnomer since it was generally a one-room schoolhouse format with a specific focus for children of all ages. A few years ago, most of these Sundays became Service Sundays where we could teach our children about a need in the community and then do a project that addressed that need or the needy them-



selves such as Valentine cards for our folks in the armed services. A more recent project is directed to our own members, many of whom have moved to Edgehill after downsizing their homes. Our children have made special Valentine greetings for them.

In 2008, the 5th and 6th graders began visiting Pilgrim Towers in Stamford at least three times a year—Halloween, Christmas and spring planting time.

## Child Care

Volunteers have provided childcare in a Baby Nursery and Toddler Room for decades. In 2008, we hired Preschool teacher Duly Chiappetta to be the paid Child Care Supervisor on Sunday mornings, and we started to provide childcare for chancel choir members on Sunday mornings during their warm-up.

Jeff Wagaman shared the position with Duly for several years. He and Duly both retired in 2015; Jeff after more than 30 years and Duly after seven years.

We consider our Sunday morning childcare program to be a special ministry, especially to the parents as well as to their young children. As a child's first experience with church, we strive to make our program welcoming and our space attractive and inviting.

## Church School Task Force (CSTF) and Religious Education Committee

Most congregations have Religious Education committees, but at First Church there have been Task Forces for Church School, JPF (Junior Pilgrim Fellowship), SPF (Senior Pilgrim Fellowship), Confirmation, and the College Pilgrim Fellowship since the early 1980s. For more than 10 years, Chair of Religious Education Ginny Breismeister represented the Task Forces at Church Committee meetings. Ginny attended almost all of the Task



*From left: Leslie VanDermeer, Laura Pugliese, Paul Kretschmann, John Teeters, Elaine Teeters, Diane Jenkins, and Diane Kretschmann*

Force meetings as well as many of the activities for children and youth including the international mission trips! In 2005, Ginny shared the position with a co-chair and then finally stopped in 2006 when she became the Director of Membership for the church. Co-chairs continued for a few years until 2009 when a Faith Formation Committee was formed to coordinate all the various task forces and programs in the church. The church By-Laws were revised to reflect this change.

CSTF began in 1976 and is still a major part of the success of the church school. Although the title of the group has changed over the years, it was finally called a Task Force in the early 1980s along with several other task forces. There are members who have been part of this ministry for more than 20 years and there are new members recruited every year. They volunteer as Sunday "Supers"\* every week when they are available during church school to assist the teachers. The Task Force also hosts several events during the year including the Advent Craft Workshop, the 3rd grade family Bible Breakfast, Children's Sunday, the Easter Saturday program and more.

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\*"Supers" is from the traditional title of Sunday School Superintendents used many years ago.

## Enrollment and Attendance

### Enrollment and Attendance in June 2015

- 180 - The total children currently enrolled (Baby through 9th grade)
- 116 - Total number of families to whom we send communications
- 170 - Number of children attending at least once or twice this year
- 30 - Number of new children in past 1 1/2 years, Baby - 5th grade.
- 48 - Regularly attending children (at least 2 times per month)
- 47 - Average weekly attendance

This is a drastic reduction in attendance since the Baby Boom days. However, in the 1990s and early 2000s children remained on our rolls for months and sometimes years even though they no longer attended, “in case they came back”, and some did. Also, as total church membership and attendance decreased, so did that of the church school.

## Church School Pastoral and Lay Staff Leadership Timeline

1965 - 1969	Frances H. Milnes, Director of Religious Education
1970 - 1974	Alice Berry, Director of Religious Education
1970s	Religious Education committee and four Church School Supervisors
1974	Marion Johnson, wife of Associate Minister, Interim Director
1976 - 1982	Ann Suzedell, Interim Associate Pastor; Mary Ann Chidsey, Church School Administrator
1982 - 1987	Rev. Meg Boxwell, Director of Children's Ministries (ordained 1983)
1987 - 1988	Kathy Verdier, Interim Church School Director
1988 - 2007	Rev. Susie Craig, Director of Children's Ministries (ordained 1991)
1991 - 1993	Several volunteers helped coordinate the Church School
1993 - 1995	Elaine Mahoney, Church School Coordinator
1995 - 1998	Lynn O'Gorman, Church School Coordinator
1998 - 2002	Lynne Lehman, Church School Coordinator
2002 - 2005	Jenn Lepoutre, part-time Church School Coordinator
2002 - Present	Rosemary Lamie, Director of Family Ministries (the longest tenure of any lay leader in Church School)
2008 - 2009	Rev. Kate Forer, Associate Pastor for Christian Education
2011 - 2012	Rev. Susan Murtha, Associate Pastor for Christian Education
2015 - 2016	Rev. Meghan Young, Associate Pastor
2016 - Present	Rev. Patrick Collins, Associate Pastor of Children, Youth and Families

## Some innovations that continue are:

- In 1970, the Christmas Eve White Gifts tradition began. Gifts for needy children are covered with white wrapping paper to give the illusion of snow and placed under the Christmas trees in the church.
- In 1973, we combined two Sunday church school sessions to one, and the tradition of “Recognition Sunday” was begun. Each class prepare a display of their work through the year. We recognize graduating seniors who have taught church school for four years or in their senior year. Recognition Sunday was renamed to Children's Sunday in 2014.

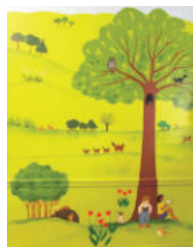
- Mary Ann Chidsey started the 4:00 pm Christmas Eve service with Meg Boxwell Williams in 1983.
- The Bible Breakfast began in 1992 to prepare the 3rd graders to receive their Bibles later.
- Middle school classes were changed to better engage our young teens with a focus on world religions as well as issues of concern to young people.
- Teams of Church School teachers expanded to include high school students.
- A 10:00 am Christmas Eve children's service started in 1991 to spread out attendance.
- Starting in 2005, church school teachers were commissioned on Homecoming Sundays.
- "Walk Through Holy Week" on Palm Saturday began in 1993 and was held biannually.
- 2nd grade communion began in 1997.
- "Search the Church" on Easter Saturday combined with the "Walk Through Holy Week" and Egg Saturday in 2013. "Search the Church" was an alternative to the traditional egg hunt.
- Bible Stories at the Beach started in 2013.



## Church School Non-recurring Events

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| 1965      | We rewarded 61 children (out of over 700) for excellent attendance with a trip to the Hayden Planetarium.  |
| 1976      | We celebrated the American Bicentennial with a study of the history of Congregationalism and of First Church; and developed a colonial-style worship service for March.  |
| 1978      | The first family retreat at Silver Lake. (Confirmation and Youth groups had gone before.)<br>A new and modern curriculum was purchased for the Church School, "Living the Word," introducing the use of workbooks for elementary and junior high students. |
| 1979      | New Year's Eve Watchnight Celebration, a solemn-joyous worship for youth and adults.<br>Our second Family Retreat at Silver Lake Conference Center was a high point of the year.   |
| 1991-2004 | Good Friday service at 10:00 am was held during these years.   |
| 1993      | We began an egg dyeing family event on Easter Saturday.  |
| 1993-2010 | A member of the pastoral staff taught the Pastors Class for middle schoolers.  |
| 1995-1997 | We began family classes about children in communion, as young as 1st and 2nd grades.   |
| 1997      | There was an interdenominational Passover & Easter project.  |
| 1998      | Bible Blast Off: For five weeks we had a different booklet with Bible stories and activities for the whole family. The series ended with a potluck dinner.   |
| 2001      | First graders learned the Lord's Prayer. We tried 5:00 pm Saturday worship for three years.  |
| 2004      | A three-year cycle began for middle school to learn Judaism, Islam and Catholicism.  |

- 2006            There was a weekly Church School worship in the Daniels Center.
- 2008            Deb Bonnell created a “Four Seasons” preschool mural in the preschool hallway (shown right).
- 2008            Children began worshipping with their families before going to their Church School classes.
- 1981-2012     We often participated in the CROP Walk to raise funds for the Church World Service hunger-fighting program.
- 2013            Monthly Service Sundays where the young people serve the community were introduced. Holy Week “Search the Church.” We tried a live people nativity at the outdoor crèche.
- 2014            Rotation workshops began in Church School. Different teams of adults and teens teach a topic or skill of their choice.
- 2015            Church School children staged the Maypole dance on the kick off day for the 350th Anniversary celebration, reprising a tradition begun by Richard Vogt in the 1981 British Festival.



We are grateful for the ongoing commitment and support of the Church School Task Force. Their dedication, inspiration and hands-on help made the program what it is today. This group has been in existence since 1976 and at least three members have been part of it since the 1990s! Folks join the Task Force because of their commitment to the Christian formation of our children and families. They remain on the Task Force because it is an important and meaningful personal ministry for each of them.

Also important to many children throughout the years, and continuing into their high school years for some, are the summer programs at the Silver Lake Conference Center in Sharon, CT. Our church has been sending young people to Silver Lake almost since its beginning in 1957. At least two of our members who have been ordained attribute part of their call to ministry to their experiences at Silver Lake. It is our pleasure to encourage and support our children who want to have this unique experience.



## Preschool and Day Camp

### Facts and Figures

The First Church Preschool, or “Day School” as it was first called, opened in 1955 with two teachers and 15 students. The next year the enrollment rose to 33, with a waiting list. Over the years the size of the school fluctuated with community demographics, evolving needs and wishes of parents of young children, as well as the opening of other preschools in the area.

By 1968, 60 three and four year olds were enrolled in a morning program. Annual tuition was \$300. Due to enrollment pressures, an afternoon program for 20 four year olds was added the following year. The 1969 annual report noted a general drop in elementary school enrollment that could affect interest in the additional program, but student numbers held steady at 50 to 60 through the 1970s. An extended day program for four year olds was introduced in 1980. New sections for two, three and four year olds, along with additional professional staff, were added to meet demand over the years. In 1983, we began a lunch program three days a week. By 1991, enrollment numbered 122 students. In 1997, enrollment reached 200, with 20 teachers, making the Preschool the largest in Greenwich. Thereafter, the school scaled back the number of students to allow for more individual attention. We also began a pre-kindergarten program in 2007. By 2012, there were 12 teachers and 103 students enrolled in a variety of programs for three, four and five year olds. The pre-kindergarten program proved very popular.

First Church also ran a Summer Day Camp until 2006. In 1969, camp ran for six weeks with offerings in athletics, the arts, drama and nature for children ages four through 12. The American Camping Association accredited the Camp and the Red Cross approved the swimming program. Field trips, cookouts, "Olympics" and reunions added to the regular daytime fun. Mary Ann Chidsey began the "Sand Dollars" summer child care program in 1983 for the younger children. Day Camp enrollment reached 400 in 1993. As patterns of family summer plans changed with the times, the Day Camp changed as well. The single six-week program was converted into a series of two-week programs. In 2006, the name was changed to Summer-FUN-tastic, with programs geared to three, four and five year olds only.

## Leadership

A Parent Committee, headed by a Board of Directors, made up of parents of current students, formed the governing body of the Preschool for many decades. In 1999, the governing structure was redesigned in order to improve efficiency, effectiveness and communication between the Preschool and the governing bodies of the Church. The Parent Committee became an autonomous group, organizing social events and fundraisers. The Preschool Board consisted of eight members, including the Preschool Director, the Senior Pastor, a member of the Budget Committee, a member of the Faith Formation and Education Committee, a Parent Committee member and two members-at-large from the church membership.

## Program Development

The Preschool remains a vibrant, innovative place for young children and their parents to grow both individually and in community. As Kit Warren wrote in 1969, "Our hopes for more parental involvement have been fulfilled" and describes a well-attended lecture by a speaker on "Science and Children." The prior year, a small library of books on then-current educational theories was made available to parents and teachers. Recognizing that not all children learn and engage in the same way, we added teachers trained in learning disabilities to the staff as early as 1971. Physical education, field trips and hands-on projects in art, science and music allowed young minds to create connections between physical and mental spheres. Eventually, the digital world entered the classrooms, via cameras, printers, Wi-Fi, and by 2013, a computer tablet for every classroom. Spanish language instruction is next on the list of innovations.

## Facilities

The physical attributes of the Preschool kept pace with evolving social and educational needs and practices. The ability to maintain a high standard of functionality can be largely attributed to fundraising efforts of parents. Fundraisers such as book fairs, magic shows and children's concerts, run by parents, enabled the purchase of classroom materials and supported the near constant need to overhaul and modernize the playground. Preschool fundraisers also enabled the upgrade of the Daniels Center for indoor recreation and, in 1995, Deb Bonnell's design of the iconic Noah's Ark wall on the wall outside the Daniels Center. Some physical improvements were less creative but essential, such as updating bathrooms to make them accessible to all, and contributing to the improvements in heating, flooring and painting.

With changing times came new challenges, and school safety rose to the forefront. A security system was installed at the Preschool entrance in 2010. Walkie-talkies, exterior blinds, and a camera/buzzer system followed the 2012 Sandy Hook tragedy.

## Community Outreach

From its early days, efforts were made to bring children into both the Preschool and the Day Camp who might not otherwise be able to have those opportunities. The 1968 Annual Report notes the acceptance of two scholarship students. The following year, five scholarship students attended from Stamford, along with one from Old Greenwich and "one and one-half Church family children." Mothers of Preschool children drove the students from Stamford. In 1994, the Kay Davidson Memorial Scholarship was introduced to provide tuition to a child of a church family experiencing financial difficulties. In 1976, 15 free spots in the Day Camp were made available to the Greenwich Department of Social Services. The number of free spots had increased to 25 by 1994.

Outreach to the community is also important. Preschool students sang songs for the residents of Nathaniel Witherell. In 1994, they supported a local heart surgeon's trip to Guatemala to help children with heart defects. The motto "Caring Communities are Intentionally Built" was adopted in 2012, thanks to Darla Steiner, in order to bring focus to efforts to foster deeper relationships between families students, and the larger community. To put the words into practice, the following years saw monthly service projects to benefit local service organizations such as Pacific House, Neighbor to Neighbor, Adopt-a-Dog and Byram Schubert Library. Annual fundraisers enabled the purchase of hats, coats and gloves for dozens of children that the Preschool was asked to sponsor by Stamford Social Services.

## Stephen Ministry

Dr. Kenneth Haugh, a minister and psychotherapist, founded Stephen Ministry in St. Louis MO, in 1975. Its purpose is to provide lay ministry to supplement the work of the Pastors. The program was named after Stephen, the first layperson to assist the Apostles with their caring outreach.

More than 12,000 churches of many denominations around the world have participated. The church committee believed that we should strengthen our pastoral care of the parish. Tom Stiers and three others went to Loyola University in Baltimore for a week of training in this care program. With help from Judy Goodchild, they found about a dozen volunteers who





*From left: 1st row: Ruth Reed, Brigitta Remole, Peggy Whitlock, John Ziac and Lenore Hill  
2nd row: Jerry Mulhall, Ginge Liddel, Vinny Holbrook, Helen Allen, Betty Ficker, Barbara Smith, Betsy Boak, Sally Voss 3rd row: Mary Leinbach, Dick Hill, Bernice Whittemore, Caroline Perkins, Dick Myer, Pat Myer, Bob Broeder and Aletha Carlton*

committed to take the training to become Stephen Ministers. After this extensive training program, they matched members of the congregation one on one with a Stephen Minister. Carolyn MacLea was also very helpful. The Stephen Ministry Program at First Church began in 1991. Since then, 82 church members have been trained. They receive 50 hours of training to provide compassionate support for those who are experiencing a difficult time or a life transition (e.g., bereavement, divorce, chronic illness, job loss). The conversations are confidential, and the Stephen Ministers meet regularly for supervision. Generally, each Stephen Minister serves three years but can do more if they want, or take a break and come back later.

Referrals are made through the Pastors and Parish Nurse. The Stephen Ministers also host an annual Valentine's Day Tea for church members living at Edgehill.

### **Stephen Leaders**

1990	Brigitta Remole
1992	Bill Federici, Coordinator
1994	Ginge Liddel and Dick Myer
1998-1999	Carol Hermance
2000	Louise Schmitt and Bobby Littlefield
2001-2002	Judy Goodchild and Louise Schmitt
2003	Judy Goodchild, Carole Lang and Louise Schmitt, Dee Coover
2004	Judy Goodchild, Carole Lang and Louise Schmitt
2005	Judy Goodchild, Carole Lang, Enid Norris, Louise Schmitt, Marty Berlin
2006	Judy Goodchild, Carole Lang, Enid Norris and Louise Schmitt
2007	Eileen Medvey, Carole Lang, Enid Norris, Louise Schmitt, Angela Stevens
2008-2010	Angela Stevens and Eileen Medvey
2011-current	Linnea Stenberg

## The Sunday Radio Mission

The broadcasting live of Sunday morning services at First Church began in 1967, as a once-a-month broadcast, and then on the first two Sundays. Eventually, it expanded to every Sunday. Ray Harrington was as an important contributor to these broadcasts on WGCH. There is a plaque just outside the Audio Control Booth with his name in memoriam. William Pierce helped Ray install and operate the equipment. Also in 1967, our young people produced a twice-monthly radio broadcast called "Image of Youth." Surveys in 1978 and 1981 showed an appreciative audience of members and non-members ranging from Port Chester to Wilton.

In 1986, after considering survey results and discussing various alternatives, the Worship Committee recommended to the Church Committee that the broadcasts should continue with an announcer to give news and comments at the opening and closing of services. This was done with several members of the congregation serving as on-air hosts. A Radio Committee was formed in 1987, first chaired by Whit Hobbs and then Glen Appleyard. In 1988, entirely new equipment was installed and Bob Small, a radio technician for WGCH, was hired to function as studio engineer on a permanent basis, serving at the console in the Control Booth. Over the years, the program received financial support from listeners and members of the congregation, and in 1992, a memorial fund was

established to maintain The Sunday Radio Mission. Since 1995, Bob Small, now Operations Manager/Traffic Manager at WGCH, has had total responsibility for radio programming serving as technical engineer and broadcast voice to the on-air congregation.



Ray H. Harrington  
Audio Control Room



Bob Small

# Music

By Craig Scott Symons

The ministry of music is one of the fundamental programs of a thriving and revered church, and First Church is no exception. We have been exceedingly lucky to have had so many fine programs and musicians over the years.

## 1960s

In the mid-1960s, churches continued to experience growth, although many began to feel the impact of the “me generation” and the declining membership that would be felt in the coming decades. These years were counter-cultural at First Church as Gerald R. Mack completed his work in 1966 after an 11-year tenure, beginning in 1955 as Choir Director/Assistant Organist, moving to Director of Music in 1956. Gerry had a great impact on the expansion and growth of the music ministry, as he was an outstanding choral director and well-liked member of the community. Gerry was also choral director at Greenwich High School and completed his doctorate in choral conducting in 1966 from Columbia University.

His vision and leadership skills continued to refine and expand the ever-popular Summer Youth Festivals to include first-rate Broadway musicals, including *Brigadoon*, *Oklahoma*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, and many others. As Gerry’s duties broadened, another outstanding musician joined the staff, George Matthew, Jr., who was organist from 1962-1967. Gerry directed the junior and senior choirs as well. He resigned to become Director of Choral Activities at Hartt School of Music at University of Hartford.

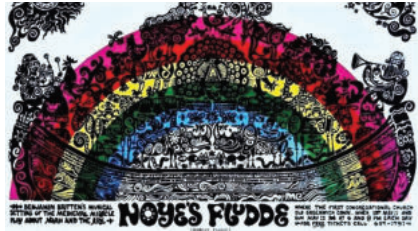
First Church then welcomed Richard Vogt, a singer and conductor from New York City, as our new Director of Music in 1966. This would prove to be one of First Church’s finest hours and firmly cement, if not already done so, the importance of our congregation’s contribution to the cultural life of Greenwich.

Richard was a veteran of the Robert Shaw Chorale and a personal acquaintance of England’s great composer-tenor duo, Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears. Richard hit the ground running as he brought a relatively new work to Greenwich in December 1966. He presented the Christmas portion of Handel’s *Messiah* with a large chorus (180 in 1972) and professional chamber orchestra. An annual tradition now, we celebrated its 50 years in 2016 as one of the major holiday traditions in the Greenwich community. The Evening Guild ladies bought the pew candles and candelabras in 1965, during Gerry Mack’s time, which



were later put to good use in *Messiah* concerts. Richard was also a catalyst for the Harvest Sunday service, the outdoor crèche with live sheep, the Advent wreath, and the laurel leaves circling the columns in the Meetinghouse at Christmas. Like Gerry, he conducted all three choirs.

The one-act opera *Noye's Fludde* by Benjamin Britten soon became a staple in both church and community, first presented here in 1968. We performed it a total of 12 times, roughly every four years until 2009. With a cast numbering 150 or more, the work pulled people of all ages, and fostered lifelong relationships. Metropolitan Opera bass Ara Berberian performed Noye from 1977 to 1993. He was very fitting for the role also because of his Armenian ancestry. Adam Kilgour of New York designed and crafted the animal heads, which were very special. Britten's partner, the famed tenor Peter Pears, sang here as well. Richard Vogt also commissioned the graphic designer Ed Emberley in 1968 to create the poster of *Noye's Fludde*. That same year Emberley won the Caldecott award for best children's book illustrations. In early 2017 that poster was especially featured in an exhibit at the Worcester Art Museum in MA, enlarged almost to the width of the room!



## 1970s

Membership in the choirs at First Church also grew during the 60's and 70's. In 1965, the Chancel Choir membership was around 80 members, while the Junior and Senior choirs had a combined membership of 112. Richard directed all the choirs. Throughout these years, choir mothers were on hand to assist in a variety of ways at each rehearsal and function, as was customary in programs with large ensembles. Each choir had an accompanist, and many extra pianists were called on for assistance for various musical activities.

Richard envisioned unique activities, such as this in 1970:

"Marc Monis is a gifted young guitarist. He has often helped our music along, performing with Bob Caird and Bruce Hansen (guitars also) in special arrangements. During July we organized guitar lessons under Marc's direction, and that little band of pickers and strummers wandered to Binney Park twice each week for alfresco sessions, culminating in their participation at a worship service at the close of the month."

David Johnson, a graduate of Yale School of Music, succeeded Miss Porter Remington, our talented organist since 1968, in December 1972. Jon Hunt ably served as interim until David's appointment.

1972 was a particularly eventful year in the life of our church. All three clergy serving at that time submitted their resignations within a five-month period (PFL-removed quotes). This caused our membership to decline to 1664 by 1973, compared to 2502 eight years earlier. Over 175 participants were active in various choirs. Even with the loss of about 840 church members, the music ministry remained strong and continued to grow and thrive.

As Richard Vogt's ministry continued, the program expanded and received great accolades. With his appointment as conductor of the Greenwich Choral Society, that group performed locally and nationally, and appeared at the Aldeburgh Festival in England in 1976 and 1985. Much collaboration with First Church and the Choral Society existed over the next 20 years. To say that Richard was a creative thinker would be an understatement. For example, in 1971, he organized a Christmas Carol Caravan, and over 200 singers sang on the streets of Greenwich one evening during the holidays! As if Messiah performances in December weren't enough, he initiated a church-wide effort: *The Boar's Head Festival* in 1969, with mummers, jugglers, bagpipes, brass, recorders, bells and caroling choristers at two overflow performances. That festival continued periodically here through 1994.

Other annual highlights include:

**1972:** We did Bach's *St. John Passion* in two performances: at First Church and in New Jersey. We also performed *Missa Luba* and selections from *Godspell* on Music Sunday.

**1973:** Alice Parker conducted two Hymn Sings and a recorder ensemble played a special Christmas program. (Alice and Richard Vogt both had studied with the Robert Shaw Chorale.)

**1974:** The Greenwich High School Jazz Ensemble joined our choirs for a special program. Peter Pears was guest soloist on the third Sunday in Advent.

**1975:** On Shrove Tuesday, we had a program of music, dance, and drama with works by Bach, Mendelssohn, Pinkham, Barber, with Beth Geismar, dancer. Cynthia Clarey sang on Music Sunday.

**1976:** Dave Brubeck, a Wilton resident, performed on Music Sunday with choirs and instruments. He played at our church a total of about eight or ten times, sometimes with his sons in their jazz combo. Two hundred voices sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" at worship for Town's celebration of our nation's bicentennial. Our auction fundraiser for a new organ raised \$12,000. Guest soloists included Seth McCoy, with Cynthia Clarey (shown right) singing Richard Vogt's stunning arrangement of "Oh, Freedom" for her. She sang it again here in 1982.



**1977:** Harvest Sunday had Leonard Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms" with special guests Lorna Haywood, Peter Pears, and John Aler. The Greenwich High School Chamber Singers gave a concert as our last fundraiser needed for the new organ.

**1978:** The new Austin organ replaced the Angell organ, with two Festival '78 dedication concerts for choir, organ, soloists, and orchestra to celebrate the organ. The next year Frederick Swann, organist at Riverside Church, gave the first major recital on the new organ.

**1979:** We presented Dave Brubeck's *La Fiesta de la Posada* for the first time here, with Dave at the piano. He composed it in 1975. We repeated it in 1982 and 1986. Dave's wife Iola came along since she was a gifted lyricist who wrote the text of the piece. After a rehearsal, Dave passed around some hand-written sheet music for a new song he'd composed and asked the choir to sing it so he could hear how it sounded. He changed



one note as a result. Music Sunday had Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* and Ned Rorem's *The Ascension*. The Ohio State University Glee Club gave a concert here. David Johnson left as our organist, and Thomas Strickland took over.

## 1980s

Richard Vogt continued casting his broad vision for music and arts as the 1980s opened a new decade in the life of First Church. He planned a large-scale "British Festival" in May of 1981, which is detailed in the Events section.

As more concerts were being presented, the musicians felt a proper piano was needed in the church. As luck would have it, a church member heard that Victor Borge, a Greenwich resident, was selling one of his Steinway Model D 9-foot concert grand pianos, as he had just become a Bösendorfer artist, and they would be providing him with one of their exquisite pianos. Funding was raised in the blink of an eye, and First Church became the new home of Borge's Steinway.

Other highlights of the decade include:

**1980:** The Chancel Choir presented concerts at Danbury and Niantic prisons, with Liz Bonsal, Clamma Dale, Daisy Newman, and Ken Hoyt. We also performed the Brahms *Requiem* and *Alto Rhapsody* with First Church and Riverside Church choirs, Cynthia Clarey, Jake Gardner, soloists, and Fred Swann, organist.

**1981:** The choir sang the Verdi *Requiem* at Riverside Church in NYC with their choir. Thomas Strickland left for a position in New York City. We celebrated Richard Vogt's 15 years as Minister of Music in October.

**1982:** Jayson Engquist was appointed organist and stayed until 1984. William and Mary Choir performed a concert.

**1983:** Richard began a "Mid-Winter Recital Series" (now called "Sunday Afternoons Live"), which became an annual tradition with charming music, tea and hot chocolate. The choir sang the Fauré *Requiem* on Good Friday. "Gershwin and Friends" was a delight with orchestra and choir, and then on Music Sunday we performed Honegger's *King David*, narrated by William F. Buckley, Jr. A new booklet by Richard and a committee, called *Hymns+Carols*, supplemented the *Pilgrim Hymnal*.

**1984:** The Middlebury College Choir and Orchestra came in April. Jon Hunt and Wayne Martz filled in as interim organists. We performed a "Celebration of America" in November. The Women's Fellowship donated new robes and collars to the choir.

**1985:** Organist Scott Youngs began in March and left in 1987 for a job in Arizona. The Music Committee suggested improvements to the Meetinghouse acoustics by removing carpeting between the chancel and the front pews. This change did help. Meg Boxwell & Kathy Anderson took over the Children's Choir through 1987.

**1987:** The Brubeck family performed "Joyful Noise" in celebration of Richard Vogt's 20 years at First Church. Later the choir sang *Requiems* by Brahms and Rutter. Visiting artists were the Lassiter High School Chorus from Georgia and the Trinity College Choir from England.



**1988:** John Stansell became our permanent organist in January and took over directing the Palmer Handbells as well. He also served as organist-in-residence at Moravian College in Bethlehem, PA, and actively gave organ recitals here and in West Germany. The Jazz Band of Natal, South Africa, with Dave Brubeck performed, and Music Sunday was a joyous celebration of Leonard Bernstein's 70th birthday. There was an Election Day special as a celebration of music in America. Claudine Jackson took over the Children's Choir through 1989.

## 1990s

This decade had several milestones in Greenwich: the 350th anniversary of the founding of the Town of Greenwich, the 325th anniversary of The First Congregational Church of Greenwich, and the 25th anniversary of Richard Vogt as Minister of Music. To commemorate one of those milestones, Richard, as Director of the Greenwich Choral Society, led the music for the Interfaith Worship Service for the Town's 350th anniversary in 1990, which included choirs from area churches and a brass ensemble.

A special highlight was a performance by the Leningrad Radio and TV Children's Choir in 1990. Organist John Stansell presented "Organ Oktoberfest" with recitals by German organists Hayko Siemens, Heiner Grasst and Mario Duella. Claudine Jackson, and then Ledell Mulvaney, took over the Children's Choir in 1990. John Stansell then directed it from part of 1992 through 2009.

Richard Vogt surprised everyone with the announcement that he would retire on August 31, 1995. "Richard Vogt's Retirement Party" in February was done up in true Vogt style with his favorite guest soloists Jake Gardner, Cynthia Clarey, Christine Gorker, John Aler, Ara Berberian, and our own Tom Woodman. The biggest and saddest surprise, however, was Richard's sudden death in bed of a heart attack on May 27, 1995. John Stansell stepped in as Director of Music Pro Tempore, effective September 1, which eventually led to his appointment as permanent Director of Music.

Other highlights of the decade include:

**1990:** The Marietta College Choir sang in March, later the Chancel Choir sang portions of Bach's *St. John Passion*, and on Music Sunday, Dave Brubeck and Alice Parker participated in celebrating First Church's 325th anniversary.

**1991:** We had a three-choir festival performing the Brahms Requiem. Later we had a celebration honoring Richard's 25 years as Minister of Music.

**1992:** For Music Sunday, we performed Schubert's *Mass in G*. Classical organists Hayko Siemens, Heiner Grasst and Mario Duella played at our Organ Oktoberfest. Mary Fike became our Cherub Choir director, while Ledell Mulvaney directed our Children's Choir.

**1993:** We had a "Celebration of Hymns" in October and a "Thanksgiving Festival" in November.

**1994:** "Sunday Afternoons Live" continued in candlelight, with refreshments and eight performances. John Stansell performed Poulenc's *Organ Concerto* in March.

**1995:** Carolyn Diamond joined our staff as Assistant Organist. From 1997 to early 2006, she commuted once a month from Minnesota to help out here. Andrew Gordon

was Organist on the other Sundays from 1997 to 1999. We decided to buy copies of the UCC's *New Century Hymnal* and use it plus the older *Pilgrim Hymnal*. The new hymnals replaced Richard Vogt's booklets of *Hymns & Carols*.

**1996:** The Youth Choir had 15 middle and high school singers. The Duke University Chorale gave a concert in March.

**1997:** The Children's Choir had 20 singers with rehearsal pizza provided by the parents. This provided fellowship with the Youth Choir, which rehearsed right after them.

**1998:** First Church hosted Fairfield County Children's Choir Festival, John Stansell went on Sabbatical Leave, and Christine Goerke sang a recital as a preview of her Carnegie Hall debut.

**1999:** Choirs and clergy participated in the Greenwich Hospital new building dedication. The "Millennium Concert" presented Mendelssohn's Lobegesang with full orchestra and choir. Constance "Connie" Walton's *Ring Out Wild Bells* premiered at St. Catherine's for the "Millennium/Advent" service.

## 2000s

The beginning of a new century was filled with great hope and renewed energy for many musical opportunities. Numerous changes occurred in the staff during this decade as Dr. Tom Stiers announced his retirement in 2003, succeeded by Dr. David Young. In 2000 Mary Fike retired as Cherub Choir director after nine years, and Holly Beneville succeeded her, staying six years. Since 2001, Debbie Berner has been the volunteer Cherub Choir pianist—15 years and counting. Carolyn Paulus, an opera singer and professional voice teacher, took over as director of the Youth Choir in 2001 and continues to this day. Mark Swicegood came on as assistant organist. Soon after Connecticut passed a law that allowed same-sex marriages, Dr. John Stansell and longtime partner Michael Pellegrino were married in the Meetinghouse in November 2008 to a capacity congregation.

Other highlights of the decade include:

**2000:** Christopher Pankratz joined the staff as an accompanist. The Duke University Chorale performed a concert in March.

**2001:** We presented *Noye's Fludde* in November and hosted a Fairfield County Children's "Choir Festival." Sunday Afternoons Live concerts continued, as well as three Octoberfest Organ Recitals.

**2002:** Mark Swicegood, Assistant Director of Music, received an honorable mention in the City of Paris International Organ Competition.

**2004:** Mary Fike and Kathryn Atkin formed a Flute Choir and performed in worship in December. The Chancel and Children's choirs performed at "Sing for Your Supper."

**2005:** The Children's Choir sang at the Central Connecticut Chapter Chorister's Guild in Branford with 21 singers in our choir. Holly Beneville resigned as Cherub Director, and John Stansell stepped in as Interim Director.

**2006:** Mark Swicegood departed and Cheryl Hadley replaced him to finish the year. Stephanie Hanbury-Brown took over as Director for the Cherub Choir. Sunday After-

noons Live (SAL) programs included pianist Andrew Armstrong and Grupo Los Santos, a Latin American-influenced Jazz Ensemble which included Beaver Bausch, son of longtime member Bill Bausch.

**2007:** Terry Flanagan joined as Associate Organist/Director and his wife, Lisa, became director of the Cherub Choir.

**2008:** Lisa and Terry Flanagan welcomed their new son, Terry, Jr. We eliminated “Organ Octoberfest” concerts but had fall and spring organ recitals instead. Efforts to reduce the decline in audience and number of performers in *Messiah* performances were successful.

**2009:** We presented *Noye’s Fludde* for the twelfth time, with a deficit of \$5000, but measured against the success of the performance, it was worth it. However, this was our last performance of it. The Duke University Chorale returned, along with a return engagement by organist Hector Olivera.



Memorial Day Parade, our Noah's Flood Float

## 2010s

Staff changes in 2010 included the retirement of John Stansell after 23 years here, when we gave him the title of Director of Music Emeritus. Lisa and Terry Flanagan also left as Cherub Choir director and Assistant Director of Music, respectively. Dr. Craig Scott Symons began as our Director of Music in 2010. Donald Haviland, a life-long member of First Church, took over directing the Cherub Choir in 2011, along with additional youth group responsibilities. He joined with Second Congregational Church in 2014 and shared a Service trip to Cusmapa, Nicaragua, bringing school supplies and working on a coffee farm. He directed a Youth Broadway Musical in 2014 and *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* a year later.

Craig Symons created a new performing arts series, “First Music & Arts,” named by former assistant organist Mark Swicegood. This encompassed the existing programs such as *Messiah*, “Sunday Afternoons Live,” and the Good Friday program, as well as additional concerts and the new Spring Festival of the Arts. This became a three-day weekend in May with an art exhibit by The Art Society of Old Greenwich, a program of choral/orchestral music, and other varieties of musical performances. In 2011, Craig also initiated the now annual “Summer Sings” and brought together tristate region choral singers for a shared “performance” of some of the great choral masterworks of Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, Schubert’s *Mass in G* and Vivaldi’s *Gloria*. Over the three monthly sessions, the singers totaled nearly 300.

An accident occurred with the Victor Borge Steinway in the auditorium in 2013. During a repositioning of the piano by an outside group, it suffered severe damage. Fortunately, the church’s insurance covered the full cost of the repair and the piano was completely rebuilt in 10 months and returned to its prominent place in the auditorium.

Other highlights of the decade include:

**2010:** Janice Riddell took over as Director of Cherub Choir while Mary Fike directed the Children's Choir for a year with Debbie Berner as accompanist. Our annual *Messiah* had increased attendance in both audience and performers at two full houses in December.

**2012:** "First Music & Arts" continued to flourish, with the new "Spring Festival of the Arts" Festival Chorus and Orchestra performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with internationally renowned baritone Randal Turner from Switzerland in the role of Elijah. Jayson Engquist returned as Assistant Music Director.

**2013:** "First Music & Arts" had a new image for internal and community visibility, designed by member Meg Sherman. All musical groups continue to see marked growth in participation. We were permanently loaned a gorgeous harpsichord built by Eric Herz from Greenwich resident Frederick Tripodi, as he didn't have room for it in his home then. "The Spring Festival of the Arts" program was Brahms *Requiem* with four-hand piano accompaniment by Jon Hunt and Jayson Engquist.

**2014:** We performed *Messiah* only once during December with an increased audience and profit. This was down from prior Saturday/Sunday afternoon schedules that lost profitability due to competing *Messiah* concerts nearby.

**2015:** Music was a significant part of the church's 350th anniversary, as Music Sunday was held on the opening of the anniversary year in May. Sadly, severe water damage occurred in May in the Educational Wing. Seven of the eight rooms, including the choir room and music library, were damaged and became unusable due to demolition. We returned the Herz harpsichord to Rick Tripodi.

**2016:** Donald Haviland concluded his ministry at First Church and Carol Woodman returned to First Church to fill his place as Cherub Choir director. Donald now teaches music in New York City.

The annual *Messiah* performances celebrated 50 years with the Chancel Choir section leaders serving as soloists: Hanna Golodinskii, Linnea Conley, Drew Seigla, and Thomas Woodman. Craig organized the First Church Orchestra with 15 players, which performed in June and September.

Through the generosity of the Helen Binney Kitchel Organ Fund, we purchased a harpsichord built by Edward Brewer in 1980.

# Social Groups

## Committees

### Accessibility Committee

The Handicapped Accessibility Committee began meeting in 1986 with Dr. Harold Wilke to discuss ways in which First Church could be made more accessible to people with handicaps. Later, we needed to comply with the “Americans with Disabilities Act” of 1990. In 1991, Brad Craig gave a summary of the committee’s findings to Tom Stiers and the Trustees. However, some plans were not implemented due to lack of money.

The Board of Trustees and the Church Committee resolved that our church should be accessible to the fullest extent possible. However, the architecture of our building made this difficult. The three main physical structures of the church complex (Meetinghouse, Parish House and Education Building) were built at different times and joined together with stairways with no plan for easier access.

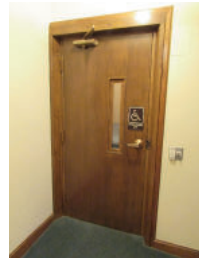
The Task Force tried to use the ideas, sketches and work done previously on improving accessibility by architect Jackson Smith, a First Church member. The group proposed how to make all five main structural levels on which the majority of church activities occur (Meetinghouse, Undercroft, Auditorium, Daniels Center and Administrative Offices) accessible. Unfortunately, the costs of an elevator to access all levels and/or outside ramps between the Meetinghouse-Memory Garden-Office were prohibitive.

### What was Accomplished

A ramp to the Meetinghouse entrance was built in the early 1980’s. Later accessibility improvements from the committee’s work were:

- Improved lighting in the Meetinghouse
- Improved parking arrangements
- Handicapped bathroom facilities in the Meetinghouse
- A sound enhancement system in the Meetinghouse
- Provided large print copies of hymns and Orders of Worship
- Regraded the southwest exit of the Memory Garden connecting it to the sidewalk along the north side of the Meetinghouse
- Both the men’s and women’s bathrooms by the Daniels Center were made handicapped accessible
- The Women’s Fellowship gave equipment for the handicapped in 1991 to be used in church and to borrow for home use

- A new ramp and re-grading in 1992 created easier entry to the Undercroft and Memory Garden
- In 1995 we had improved bathroom facilities on the Daniels Center level
- In 1996, the church installed better railings, door design, hardware and thresholds. With the “Liftovator” (shown right), we had wheelchair access from the Meetinghouse level to the Auditorium/Lounge level. Additionally, the Meetinghouse and Lounge were air-conditioned.



Thanks to the generosity of several members, our Church is now more accessible and more comfortable.

## **Cancer Support Group (1997-2000)**

Susie Craig began the Cancer Support Group in 1997. She met weekly to give support to members and friends of First Church who were living with cancer. By 2000, the group met monthly. Everyone in the group was minister, caregiver and care receiver.

In 2015 Linnea Stenberg initiated a new support group called the Visiting Committee to give confidential one-on-one support to anyone requesting it or anyone suggested by our parish nurse, as an outgrowth of the Stephen Ministry.

## **Cemeteries Committee**

### **Our Main Cemetery**

Our main cemetery began being used in 1834 when we bought 10 acres for our new church on Sound Beach Avenue.

The cemetery had several additions of plot groups over the years, causing a somewhat inconsistent numbering system of plots. After the white wooden church in the cemetery burned down in 1895 and the new stone church was built to the north, new plots were laid out where the church and the walkway down to Sound Beach Avenue were. In 1847, we had to sell two acres of our land on the south end to the new railroad. That left us with eight acres, four of which are for the cemetery. We cannot use some of the cemetery land for burials due to rock layers outcroppings below the grass.

### **Rockland Place properties for possible cemetery expansion**

1. In 1944, we purchased a vacant piece of property 50 feet wide (N-S) and 135 feet deep (E-W) extending from our easterly property line to Rockland Place. The Town of Greenwich sold it to us at a low price.

2. Two more properties on Rockland Place were offered to the Church in 1963. The Board was authorized to purchase one of these, the Griffin estate, out of cemetery funds, provided the Zoning Board would approve its use as a cemetery extension. That approval was not granted. We purchased it anyway in 1964 and demolished the house, filling in the basement to be even with road level.

3. In 1966 we bought a fourth lot, the Genise property on 19 Rockland Place, for \$25,000 using cemetery land acquisition funds. After making necessary repairs and improvements, we rented the house. We sold that fourth lot in 1974.



4. When the neighbors objected to the land being used for a cemetery and rezoning attempts failed, we sold the third Rockland Place lot.
5. When we built the columbarium in 1979, we sold the second Rockland Place lot to finance half the cost.
6. In 1983, we sold the last lot since it could not be used for the cemetery due to residential zoning.

The pastor managed the cemetery in the earliest days of the church, but later the church secretaries did. Eventually, Mary Babbidge was hired to do cemetery management and vital records keeping from 1978-2015.

There were several maintenance projects over the years. The main cemetery drain system had major repairs in 1968. In 1977, we replaced the leaking cemetery water line, and in 1990, we did major cleaning and improvements, including surveying and pruning all trees. In 2003 we repaved the main cemetery roads.

In 2013, Pat Larrabee, with George Handley's urging and Ken Olson's help, uncovered many flat markers in the main cemetery from the weed overgrowth, and Linnea Stenberg planted perennials along the green fence to beautify the trees and bushes there. Pat, Tad Larrabee and Linnea held a cemetery tour after the Memorial Day church service showing where the approximate location of the white 1835 church in the cemetery that burned down in 1895. Such cemetery tours were done years earlier by Tom Stiers as well.

Responding to a request from the Trustees and input from Mary Babbidge, Pat custom designed and loaded data into an Excel-based cemetery management system of burials, transfers, plot maps, plot owners and schematic map of the main cemetery and Columbarium. This gave us a daily backup to the church network for records retention purposes in case of any disaster. It also helped with updates to the names and plot numbers list in the "Cemeteries" binder in the church office, as well as for identifying and counting veterans, etc.

### **The Columbarium**

Louise Guy, a church trustee, began to educate the board in 1975 about the possibility of a columbarium for cremations on cemetery property. Ben Menegon negotiated with the Miracle Temple Congregation of Norwalk for additional stones they didn't want. Ben found the stonemasons to build the lovely columbarium. That section of the cemetery was barely above a rock ledge. So it was best to build the columbarium in the back southeast corner of the cemetery. As the excavation began in 1978, they found a large stone. It became the center of the columbarium. Harold Pruner analyzed the large stone and found that it contained some 80 plus minerals. It became our "Rock of Ages!"<sup>1</sup>

Later, we put in a sprinkler system, new lawn, and repaired/replaced the walk to it.

The Columbarium's capacity is 350 lots with four graves per lot. This space has ledge rock preventing its use for full burial purposes. Because of water lines running through it, some graves cannot be used. At some point in time, it will run out of space and is currently 2/3 sold. The Church Council is planning to expand our Columbarium.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://docplayer.net/12279237-Old-greenwich-ministry-memories-by-thomas-stiers.html>

## **Tomac Historic Burying Ground**

Tomac is the oldest existing burial ground in Greenwich and is inactive. It is about one acre, with about 250 known burials from 1663 to 1904. There are large unmarked stones in the back that could be grave markers from colonial days.

In 1976, we tried to get the Town of Greenwich to take care of the maintenance of Tomac Cemetery, but the Town refused. There were various cleanup efforts there over the years—by church members in 1980, by the Junior Pilgrim Fellowship, and by the Boy Scouts and town youth groups in 1987. In 1990, the cemetery was thoroughly cleaned and the trees were pruned, and once again in 1996 by the Retired Men's Association.

In 1986, concern for the Tomac Burial Ground was brought to our attention by the sale of adjoining property along the north end of the cemetery. Several houses were to be built on the subdivided lots. A committee of church officials, Town officers, and representatives of the organizations interested in conservation were called to a meeting at the Bush-Holley House by the Curator, Teren Duffin, and Curator Emeritus of the Greenwich Historical Society, William Finch. This kicked off a study of the ownership and responsibility for the Burial Ground. The builder offered to pay \$40,000 to the church for the privilege of including the strip of land across the back of the lot to serve as open space for the homes to be built there. The money would be used by the church to maintain the Burial Ground, clear away brush and debris, reset the gravestones and restore the grassy space, which was originally in the lot. Nothing would be done to disturb the graves or markers. At the end of not more than a year the developer would deed back the land to the church. The town volunteers as well as the builder would give help with the restoration of the Burial Ground. The Planning and Zoning Commission denied the builder's application. Boy Scouts and volunteers helped clean up the cemetery.

In order to preserve this historic cemetery, the Tomac Burying Ground committee formed in 1991 with 16 members, headed by Richard "Dick" Hill. Most members were church members.

In 1991, we ran our first appeal-for-funds campaign, mostly by letter to community service organizations and to interested individuals. We used the \$12,000 collected to remove a 50-year growth of trees and brush that was suffocating the cemetery. The goals were to preserve, maintain, restore, and enhance the appearance of the grounds and headstones, marked and unmarked. We received an important endorsement when Greenwich 350, the Town's 350th Anniversary Committee that sponsored the 1990 celebrations, held its concluding meeting in 1991. Its final report included a financial statement showing a surplus of about \$12,000. William Finch, Curator Emeritus of the Historical Society of Greenwich and a member of our Committee, said these surplus funds should be donated to First Church, Trustee for the Tomac Cemetery Association. First Church member and lawyer Clark Whittemore handled the legal documentation for State of Connecticut and IRS approval as a not-for-profit organization. Timothy Schantz, an historical enthusiast and neighbor on Tomac Ave, developed the promotional material.

The Tomac Cemetery Association was renamed the Tomac Burying Ground Association in December 1992. "Historic" was added to the name in 1993. We wanted to honor the original and early settlers of Greenwich in our oldest public town cemetery.

**Fund Raising:** In 1993, we ran a second appeal for funds and mailed 26,000 letters to town residents. By year-end, we had almost \$21,000, after expenses of about \$7,000. The Association had a final surplus of about \$12,000, which we donated to First Church as

Trustee for the Tomac Burying Ground Association. The Lions Club of Old Greenwich made a generous contribution toward this project.

**Professional Help:** In 1994, Sandy Buckland researched the preservation of stones with Connecticut State Archeologist Nicholas Bellantoni and with E. Blaine Cliver, Chief of the Historical Preservation Center, National Park Service, Washington, D.C. They planned to preserve rapidly deteriorating stones and to conduct Ground Penetrating Radar surveys to locate any buried stones or other artifacts. This gave the first-ever three-dimensional map to a depth of six feet.

**Photo Survey:** Boy Scout Troop 3 cleansed and photographed all recognizable stones with inscriptions. Scout Tim Ohlstrom, with Charlie Morgan, led this project, working with the grid map of locations prepared earlier by Eagle Scout David Atwood.

**Committee Activities:** Reg and Gizzy (Carleton) Gisborne advised on fund-raising; Pat Larrabee managed our donor database to produce thank-you letters and statistics; Charlie Morgan was our reporter, problem solver and public relations expert; Marcia Livingston represented The Women's Fellowship and Garden Club; and Carol Wister was our fine Secretary. Rob Perelli-Minetti gave, pro bono, much legal assistance and Ron Klingner created publicity. Bob Ferry, Editor of the Connecticut Ancestry Society quarterly publication, did genealogical research on the 1908 listings of those interred in the cemetery, relating those names to family groupings. Topper Cook made a video featuring Bill Finch and Carol Wister for recording the historical significance and for publicity.

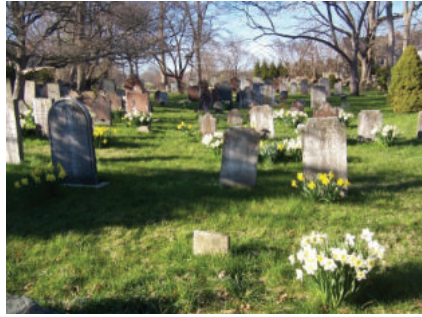
**Headstone Preservation:** From 1995 to 1997, we preserved a wide variety of rapidly deteriorating headstones, up-righted fallen stones, and straightened the tilted stones. Wes Haynes, a stone conservator, attended to over 40 stones. This greatly enriched the appearance of the grounds. Jim Mellet searched using ground penetrating radar, which identified many unmarked stones underground. Nicholas Bellantoni tested this area later. Jackson Smith drew the landscape plan and implemented it to enhance the entrance with a bench with attractive plantings. Geno and Renzo Lupinacci of Lupinacci Monuments donated the granite bench at the entrance, which Jackson had mounted on pedestals. They also worked to restore and renovate damaged headstones. We repaired parts of the perimeter stone wall. Bob Church, a chemist, removed graffiti on a prominently placed stone. The Innis Arden Golf Club helped greatly in clearing undergrowth so headstones could be located and identified.

The ground penetrating radar showed three gravestones underground, broken and deteriorating, for the Reverends Ebenezer Davenport and Robert Morris, who died in 1773 and 1794, respectively, and Alfred Lockwood, a Mason, who died in 1825. Wes Haynes mounted all three on slabs of Pennsylvania bluestone with construction silicone and waterproofed them with a silicone solution. We made a new granite marker for Rev. Morris and placed it in front of the original grave marker. Both Pastors preached at the "Gallery Church" at Lockwood Avenue and Tomac Avenue. Supporting these restorations were: the Memorial Gifts Committee; Geno Lupinacci Memorials, Stamford; and Acacia Lodge No. 85, A.F. & A.M., Greenwich.

Jackson Smith designed the nameplate on the wrought iron gate, which was rebraced and painted. Nine Retired Men's Association of Greenwich members cleaned grave markers, repaired and painted wrought iron fences. Sandy Buckland and Renzo Lupinacci-

ci of Lupinacci Memorials in Stamford developed the procedures and restored these historic stones.

On October 19, 1996, the Sons of The American Revolution held a ceremony dedicating the graves of Revolutionary Soldiers with new brass patriot grave markers. Attending was the SAR State Color Guard, State and local officers of the Organization, leaders of the Town of Greenwich and representatives of local organizations and individuals contributing to the maintenance of the burying ground.



In 1997 the group dissolved and the church took over with annual maintenance of the cemetery. Final activities were:

- The U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs gave us 12 granite markers to place in front of damaged headstones of the 22 Revolutionary War Veterans and the six War of 1812 Veterans. We also placed three markers for women members of the settlement.
- The Eagle Scouts raised 12 fieldstone markers found by the 1996 Ground Penetrating Radar Project.
- Phyllis and Paul Palmer gave the entryway a stone walkway and a flagpole in memory of their daughter.
- We sent a final newsletter to over 260 contributors since our formation in 1993.
- We gave a copy of our records to the Historical Society of Greenwich archives.

There were over 50 volunteers over the years: committee members, Innis Arden Golf Club members and staff, and many Greenwich residents. The officers of the Historical Society Town of Greenwich, Claire Vanderbilt, Chair, William Crooks, President and Susan Richardson, Archivist, were also very helpful.

In 2008, Lesley Schless convinced the town not to start charging a sewer tax on the Tomac cemetery since the cemetery has no water lines. She and Joyce Young did much pro bono legal work for the church.

## The Chancel Committee

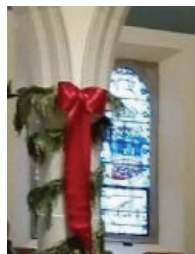
The Chancel Committee began in 1974 under Helen S. Hull as chair. The committee was responsible for placing flowers in the Meetinghouse each Sunday, flower distribution to those who were ill at home or at the hospital or shut-ins, and the decoration of the chancel and chapel on Palm Sunday, Easter and Christmas. Retiring Deaconesses were expected to become members of the Chancel Committee and were asked to serve for two years. The operating capital of this committee was called the Chancel Flower Fund. We asked for special donations at Easter and Christmas and church members assisted in decorating the chancel at these times.

Members of the committee were responsible also for giving information on the flower donors to the bulletin editor, writing thank you notes to the donors and keeping the books and paying bills.

In 1980, members held luncheon meetings every other month in their homes to create a closer working relationship. In 1982, the committee took on the duty of polishing

the communion silverware. In 2010, the committee switched to meeting twice a year to plan for decorating the Meetinghouse at Harvest Sunday, Christmas and Easter. Loretta Stagen, a professional decorator, gave her time and talents in helping with the decorations for a few years.

Through the years, women of First Church who have been leaders in this fine work were Helen Hull, Betty Finney, Martha Fingerle, Dorothy Crabill, Mildred Madenford, Emily Lent, Kit Hobbs, Marion Ficker, Ruth White, Jeanne Boyer, Marcia Wilsson, Pat Geismar, Barbara Hopkins, Virginia Liddel, Pam Grunow, and Judy Gordon.



## Church in Society Committee

### 1978 – 1990

A new Church and Society Committee began in 1978 under the able leadership of Betty P. Woodman (shown right).

Other major chairs of the committee were Allie Holmes 1984-1985 and Larry Paine 1986-1987. The committee did a great job in trying to combat indifference to issues affecting society, to promote involvement, and thus to generate hope. The Committee fostered sermons dealing with a topic followed by a Second Hour on the same topic. Some issues they dealt with were Criminal Justice, Disarmament and Salt II, Human Rights, Energy and Alternatives, Toward a Christian Death Style, Religious Freedom/Religious Coercion—about cults, Welfare Legislation, Abortion Choice, How to Communicate with Your Government, Islam in the Arc of Crisis, Conserving Energy at Home, Housing for Elders and How to Build It, Careers for Women, World Hunger and Human Rights, World Peace Organization, the Handicapped in Society, Handgun Control, Legal Services for the Poor, and Human Service Needs in Greenwich.



The Church and Society Committee also studied the Synod Pronouncements and the resolutions that came before the Connecticut Conference, sometimes making formal recommendations.

In 1980, they explored support to the building of housing for elders in Greenwich and forming an ecumenical committee. As for action, the committee helped to set up two visits of the choir to prisons in the state, and they suggested the collection of canned foods for Neighbor to Neighbor during Lent. They also studied the problem of handgun use in our society and transmitted information on our actions to national gun-control organizations.

In 1982, the YWCA's coordinator of the Domestic Abuse Program, Linda Knopf, led a discussion of the Y's efforts to aid abuse victims in Greenwich.

The committee changed its name in 1985 from "Committee on Church and Society" to "Committee on Church in Society" to be more apt and in sync with the name used by the UCC. They helped enact and use a full-wall bulletin board just outside the Auditorium, which has been an excellent communication tool.

More major issues in 1986 that the committee focused on are anti-Semitism in Greenwich, Central American refugees and the Sanctuary Movement, Human Rights and Foreign Policy in South Africa, United Nations Vision, and Justice and Peace.



In 1989, the Church in Society Committee began a newsletter to bring various social and political issues before the congregation. The newsletter, conceived by David Fountain, attempted to point out ways for people to get involved and take action, hence the name “Issues & Action.” The newsletter covered a broad range of subjects, including children’s issues and a letter writing campaign for Amnesty International, a profile of the Greenwich Hotline, and the Fairfield County Food Bank. One result was the addition of the Food Bank Food Barrel, which Glen Chidsey placed in the narthex once a month. The committee also spearheaded our church’s participation in the CROP Walk.

Unfortunately, with David Fountain’s departure in 1990, the committee lost their desktop publishing expert and leadership and the committee disbanded. They accomplished a great deal of benefit to the church’s meaningful outreach efforts and awareness that continues.

## Communications Committee

In 1967, Pastors Duke Potter and Merton Libby and lay leaders recommended establishing a newsletter to keep the congregation informed about church activities. They believed that a newsletter would reduce expenses because it could include information that was previously sent out by various committees. The report mentioned a two-dollar subscription remittance from church families and financial contributions from church groups who submitted information for the newsletter. Patricia and Kent Dirlam volunteered to be co-editors, positions in which they continued for three years. The *Meetinghouse News* was published on the first and third Thursdays of each month. The Dirlams and their editorial contributors did a fine job making it not only informative, but occasionally charming, witty and poetic.



The Church Committee formed a Communications Committee in 1969 to study our church’s communications procedures and needs. Their study, coordinated by Robert Pearson, confirmed that the *Meetinghouse News* should remain the basic means of reaching the entire congregation to share the programs and goals of the Church. In 1970, Ruth Wright became the next editor. Circulation of the newsletter at that time was 1200.

By 1996 we had a major emphasis on communication between the Outreach Committee and the congregation. The initiative included regular communication of outreach efforts, developing a membership database to inventory the outreach interests and talents of the congregation, creating a bulletin board on both sides of the hallway outside the lounge, and expanding the dialogue with UCC regarding outreach options. The “Meetinghouse News”, Moments of Concern during the services, and messages from the pulpit were coordinated.

We formed a Communications Task Force in 2001 to support the overall goals of the new Long Range Plan. The group reviewed all types of communication with both the congregation and the community. They expanded external communication with the assistance of an outside consultant and designed a multi-media photographic project for broad usage. In 2002, there was a new graphic image for the church and a 13-minute VHS video titled “I Am Home.”

In 2000, the newsletter was produced monthly and renamed to *Meetinghouse Monthly*. In October 2008, Rev. David Young spearheaded another video on DVD to introduce people



to our church. It was titled “Catch the Spirit” and featured interviews with Kendra Farn, the Schinto family, Edee Bjornson, David Young, Rev. Mark Montgomery and Rev. Kate Forer.

Terry Flanagan, our Associate Organist/Director of Communications from 2007 to 2010, began email blasts via Constant Contact in 2010. Barb Wilkov initiated Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram photos in 2011, soon after she became Director of Communications. Later studies showed that social media didn’t help much in attracting new members, so we dropped this effort.

## The College and University Loan Fund

The College and University Loan Fund (“CULF”) was established by Vincent Daniels and the Church Committee in 1955 as part of the church’s home mission for the purpose of providing interest-free loans to First Church students who could not otherwise start or finish college. Each student who received a loan was required to sign a note promising they would repay the loan after graduation or termination of their studies.

The CULF was utilized extensively in the 1950’s and 1960’s before the advent of the federal student loan programs. The congregation enthusiastically supported this program through generous gifts from the Women’s Fellowship and by the congregation as a whole through memorial gifts and the offerings at the Christmas Eve 11:00 pm service.

During the 1980’s the CULF balance increased significantly while loan applications dropped significantly. As use diminished, we no longer requested donations, but some interested members of the congregation continued to support the CULF financially.

In 2011, the Board of Trustees tried to increase use of the CULF. As a restricted fund it could be used only for the original purpose of providing loans to First Church students, so the Trustees formed a committee charged with the task of increasing awareness of the availability of loans. The CULF was publicized, and The Board of Trustees and Church Committee authorized an increase in loan amount, simplified the loan application process, and extended eligibility to all church employees. Despite these efforts, between 2011 and 2015 loan applications increased only marginally.

The Board of Trustees and Church Committee authorized the CULF Committee to present a resolution to the congregation at the 2015 Annual Meeting to end the CULF loan program and to transition the remaining funds to a fund to be used solely for programs and initiatives to benefit all the youth of First Church. A congregational vote of the members, “standing in the shoes” of the original donors was required in order the change the use of the CULF funds. The congregation voted unanimously to approve the resolution to end the CULF loan program as of December 31, 2016.

The CULF served a great need when it was created and ensured that numerous First Church students could stay in school or start college. In 2016 the congregation, recognizing that needs change with the times, looks forward to new initiatives that will invigorate and empower all the youth of First Church.

Emily Close Lent (shown right, above) was the first CULF treasurer and chairman and actively served in that role for 17 years from 1963 to 1979. Robert M. Goodchild (shown right) also served as treasurer of the CULF for 30 years from 1983 to 2012,



when Debbie LaCivita took it over. Special gratitude also goes to Mary Leinbach (shown right) who contributed all of her fees from her college counseling services for many decades to the CULF.

Emily put it best:

"I feel that it's very important that we have to live up to the times today; we can't live in the past and say this is what the church was. If we are going to hold our younger people in the church, we can't live in the past."



## Energy Utilization Committee

Because of rapidly escalating energy costs, the church appointed an Energy Utilization Committee in 1980 to study and recommend ways to reduce energy consumption in church facilities, including the four residences owned by the church. The committee was chaired by H.A. "Tom" Sawyer and had Randy Bradham, Ralph Keith, Bill Osgood, Bill Porter and Jim Starkweather on it. The church was forced to shift from gas to more expensive oil during the winter months.

Our fuel consumption over five years improved by 15% partly due to lowered thermostats. We installed clock-controlled thermostats and Lexan "storm windows" in the Meetinghouse. The Lexan covers had to be removed years later when the stained glass windows were buckling due to the greenhouse effect in the air pocket. The committee then evaluated additional insulation and equipment changes in the residences and hired an outside consultant on this for the church building.

Energy conservation was one of the top priorities of the Board of Trustees in 1981. Improvements in our heating systems were installed at \$15,000 for a saving of \$4,500 annually. Most of these were financed by special gifts and by the Women's Fellowship, including storm windows and doors in two parsonages and modern, gas-fired furnaces replaced inefficient oil-fired furnaces, a separate gas-fired domestic hot water heater in one residence, clock-controlled valves on the larger radiators in the Meetinghouse, and thermostat-controlled valves on radiators in the offices.

Containment of heat cost in the church building during the colder months was accomplished by installing thermostats there and in the boiler room. We signed a firm gas contract in 1982 to get a boiler water treatment system, monitor of cold air leaks, and relate fuel use to building occupancy and use.

In 1983, almost half the Building and Grounds budget was spent on energy. (In 2016 energy was 22% of that part of the budget, so we've made big improvements.) The church's aging heating system needed a new expansion tank and other improvements over the next few years.

In 2001, George Handley, our Church Administrator, installed a high-efficiency natural gas hot water heating system where the water temperature in the system is adjusted to outside air temperature—the colder the weather, the higher the water temperature. When outside temperature goes above 55 degrees, the system turns off. After 10:00 pm, the system lowers the water temp in the radiators by 20°. Room radiators have individual controls.

Thirty inches of granite in our walls is a good insulator. All central air conditioning units were installed around 2001. Our primary meeting rooms have units that can be turned on only when the room is in use.

For the first time, First Congregational Church had a booth at the town-wide Earth Day in 2006 held at Greenwich High School on the wise use of our natural resources.

The booth included photos of First Church installing light bulbs and distributing information on energy conservation.

In 2007, George used a Connecticut Light & Power's small business energy advantage program for retrofitting our lighting with energy efficient fixtures for \$3,213. We received an anonymous gift covering this cost. The annual electrical savings were \$4,000 to \$6,000 per year. The program provided a monetary incentive to retrofit the buildings with new, highly efficient lighting—new fixtures, new reflectors in the fixtures and new lamps.

We also installed motion detectors to control lighting in most of the bathrooms and made a point of turning off unnecessary lighting when areas were not in use. In a year, these changes reduced our kilowatt usage by 21%. We also saw a 17% reduction in cost, giving an annual savings of over \$5,000. Our 2009 electricity cost was the lowest in five years. We also used an alternative supplier for the generation services portion of our electric bill, which is 60% of the total monthly charges.

Environmentally, we limit the use of pesticides and use horticultural oil on outdoor plants to control scale. We use a systemic pesticide to control woolly adelgid on hemlock trees and stopped using poison to get the occasional mouse—using only traps. Bathroom tissue and paper towels are 100% recycled paper.

In 2010, the Environmental Mission Team explored how well the church was saving on energy, and were happy to find that George Handley's report was very convincing that all had already been done!

In 2015, we continued to save energy when our new Director of Church Administration and Finance, Steve Summerton, had super energy saving and long lasting brighter LED light bulbs installed by our sexton, Juan Leon, in the Meetinghouse and auditorium light fixtures.

## Historical Committee

The gift of Alexa Benson of two historical cabinets in 1955 stimulated the assembly of our church records and memorabilia. People transcribed some of the early written records of the church.

From 1965-1967, Elizabeth W. Clarke and a committee researched and wrote the fine *The First Three Hundred Years 1640-1965* book on our church history. They researched in Hartford, New Haven, New York and many local sources, interviewed many people and produced a very scholarly work.

In 1967, Eva Rogers Grant, Sally Colegrove's grandmother, was Church Historian for one year.

Evelyn Ferris (shown right), Church Historian, reported in 1982 that the Bush-Holley library reorganization caused the return of some books back to First Church, where we did not have appropriate storage facilities. The most fragile papers are still in the vault at Bush-Holley until they can be preserved properly. A third collection of documents and microfilm is in the church's safe deposit box at the bank.

In 1983, Evelyn found more historical materials in many storage places. For the 1982 Founders Day, she prepared an exhibit from photographs, bulletins, programs and other printed materials. The committee taped and transcribed interviews with Emily Lent and Dr. Ida Scudder and added them to the church archives. They wrote a booklet on the stained glass windows as well.

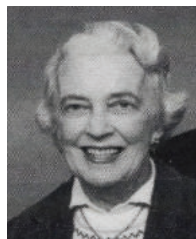


The fire at the Bush-Holley House in January 1983 brought home the need for fire-proof and atmosphere-controlled storage for all historic materials. Our First Church records at Bush-Holley House were in a stone vault in another part of the House and were not affected.

In 1985, Evelyn sorted and filed the monthly Meetinghouse News and weekly Church Bulletins. The next year she sorted the books on the library shelves in the offices, developed a cataloguing system for the church book library, and preserved historically valuable books in closed cabinets. In 1987 she disposed of unnecessary books and listed those that were valuable historic records.

More books, papers and old church records were stored by the Historical Society in the new Archives Building in an atmospherically correct, fireproof vault or on the library shelves in acid-free containers. Our ledger books from 1785 through 1930 are there.

The 325th Anniversary of this church and the 350th Anniversary of the Town of Greenwich were both celebrated in 1990. Dick and Lenore Hill were the Chairs of the 325th Committee. Helen Allen (shown right) and her committee produced a booklet covering the 25 years from 1965 to 1990. Evelyn Ferris worked on visual exhibits divided into three periods: the first 300 years, the next 25 years and a visual presentation of the church's involvement with the community.



David Fountain created a calendar listing all the schedule of events for the 325th Anniversary for both the town and the church. He spoke on the history of the church, the stained glass windows and the book, *The First Three Hundred Years*.

An Oral History project was established and chaired by Andrea Karls. The group met monthly to gather data and transcribe the material "The Preacher and the KKK," which recorded the testing of Allan Lorimer, a former minister. He had an encounter with the KKK right here in Greenwich. The interview with Rev. Lorimer was edited into the booklet that Rev. Fountain distributed. Another vignette was "Reflections of Carolyn Colegrove on the Transfer of Leadership from Dr. Barney to Allan Lorimer." Richard Vogt provided the story of singer Seth McCoy for yet another publication.

Sally Colegrove presented an outstanding slide show featuring the construction of the enlargement of the Meetinghouse. She also pointed out that we have a rich collection of some 5,000 slides covering 50 years of music, Church School, and pastors.

In 1993, Evelyn Ferris retired after 12 years as church historian. After that, there were some historical committees from 1995 to 2001, who sorted and bundled all the weekly bulletins and Meetinghouse News issues and filed them in the historical filing cabinet.

An Historical Committee formed again in 2005 under Aaron Sinay's leadership with a mission to assess present methods of preserving historical and current records and implementing changes, as necessary. The work of this group was huge and long-term. They investigated the whole building to decide on the best place to store our historical documents. They chose a large lockable closet in room 104, which was an air-conditioned room. They also installed metal shelving in that closet. Aaron Sinay left for another job in 2006 and the group became dormant.

David Young asked Pat Larrabee to activate the Historical Committee again in 2011. The initial mission was to catalog and consolidate all of our historical documents in boxes all over the church building. The group worked to weed out, sort, and consolidate by

category into acid free boxes and store on the shelves in only one large closet. We cataloged all documents into an Excel spreadsheet by category and date, an ongoing process.

The team decided to meet twice a month much of the year because there was so much to do. Pat Larrabee chairs the Historical Committee and Rosemary Lamie is our advisor and staff liaison.

We worked in four areas:

**Organizing our collection, we:**

- Used the UCC Church Historians guidelines on preserving church historical records.
- Cleaned out two closets, three file cabinets and two attics of all historical items, which are now consolidated into the room 104 Historical closet.
- Collected non-church Greenwich items to donate to the Greenwich Historical Society. Similarly we gave old playbills and some photos to Connecticut Playmakers.
- Gave the Women's Fellowship Chair a spreadsheet of their room 104 closet contents for review.
- Grouped all old Bibles and other old books in categories on bookshelves in the office for better air circulation. We glued bindings that were coming loose.
- Cataloged all historical items into an Excel spreadsheet, which the staff and committee members now have, with a printed Archives binder in the front office. More items keep turning up, however, so this task never fully seems done.
- Finished sorting the contents of 68 boxes into 32+ acid-free boxes labeled by category.
- Scanned and put all past oral histories on the fccog.org website. Interviewed Tom Stiers, Dale Greene, Sally Colegrove and Mark Montgomery, transcribed them and loaded them onto fccog.org and the church network.
- Scanned and loaded Tomac Historic Burying Ground information onto the Cemeteries webpage of fccog.org.
- Completed a Records Retention guidelines document in 2014 after interviewing the church staff to define the location and retention schedule for records for which each of them is responsible. The Church Committee and Trustees approved it.
- Designed and built a computer-based Cemetery Management system. (See Cemetery Committees, above.)

**Education:**

On our church website, Pat Larrabee documented the three cornerstones' locations, photos and contents, added church history and Senior, Associate and Assistant Pastor timelines to the history webpage along with headshots. She created three copies of a full color booklet on our stained glass windows that people may borrow for self-guided tours. Pat and Tamara Ng-Yow conducted several tours of our stained glass windows. Tad and Pat Larrabee agreed with George Handley to move the portraits of Edwin Binney, Jr. and Rev. Allan Lorimer from the back hallways to be on either side the Binney bas-relief in the auditorium for the first Music and Arts Festival. We made informative plaques.

During our 350th Anniversary celebration, Pat also assisted in researching most of the 52 "First Church Flashbacks" that were read in church each Sunday of our anniversary year (see Appendix). Pat also put up several different displays of old photos of our church history on the large bulletin board outside the Lounge. Pat and two others went

to a UCC Church Historian's Workshop in Avon, CT in April 2015. The topic was planning your church anniversary, which was very timely for us. We gathered three pages of suggestions for how to celebrate a church's big anniversary.

**Documents:**

- Pat updated the list of historical items in our bank safe deposit box and at our town archives.
- Transcribed Allan Lorimer's touching sermon for the October 1930 Dedication Ceremony of the bell tower chimes given by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Stewart. It's on the Bell Tower webpage. A framed version of it is in our church archives.
- Mapped the veteran headstone locations in the cemetery for faster and more reliable flag placement by each veteran's headstone before Memorial Day weekend.
- The originals of our Certificate of Organization in 1931 and Certificate of the Dissolution of the Ecclesiastical Society are now in our bank safe deposit box.
- Created a Management of Vital Records document for the staff and organized paper files in the cemetery office.
- Linnea Stenberg and Pat photographed all handwritten pages of our church's earliest two ledger books at the Greenwich Historical Society archives. Much work remains on that project.
- All 22 of our By-Laws revisions from 1927 - 2010 are now searchable documents on OneDrive and on the church server.
- Finished cataloging our historical records into an Archives document in Excel.
- Scanned annual reports 1925 - current into searchable pdf format. This helped greatly in researching.

**Presentations:**

- Celebrated Founders Day every July with a display of interesting church historical items. One year, we added some colonial games, colonial corn bread at coffee hour and two committee members dressed in colonial costumes.
- Linnea, Tad and Pat conducted a tour of the cemetery on Memorial Day, showing where people of interest are buried, and where the 1835-1895 Meetinghouse was located before it burned down.
- Pat gave a slide show talk on May 16, 2015 in our Meetinghouse for the Greenwich Historical Society on a Neighborhood Tour of Old Greenwich to commemorate the town's 375th anniversary. Susan Ferris, Susie Baker and Al Primo were a great help on this.
- Pat wrote much of the historical script, with clever and humorous editing by Meghan Young, for the Nov. 1, 2015, All Saints Day service conducted by the Confirmation Class. Richard DenUyl conceived it and arranged cool fog effects and mysterious monk-type robes for them to wear as they became voices from the past.
- Pat gave a PowerPoint talk, "Women in the History of The First Congregational Church of Greenwich (pre-1990)", for the Women's Fellowship annual meeting in May 2016.

Our continuing activities will be updating our Archives list from recent additions to the room 104 Historical closet, digitizing and preserving records, photos and slides, doing oral history interviews and typing up the transcripts, and photographing and transcribing our church's old ledger books at the Greenwich Historical Society Archives.



## Membership Committee

### 1970s

First Church's Membership Committee was formed in 1977.

Estimated church membership in 1978 was 1,000, with 600 pledge units. Average Church attendance was 273, with a seating capacity of 540. We set a goal of adding 100 new members a year. The actual number of yearly new members during the 1980s ranged from 51 to 79. Sources for recruiting new members included nursery school registrations, guest book referrals, nametags, and "Bring a Friend to Church" program.

The committee developed an eight-step follow-up process in 1978:

1. Preview of prospective new members by the Membership Committee
2. Letter from the Senior Pastor inviting prospective members to seminars
3. Follow-up telephone call by a Membership Committee member
4. Participation at each session by committee members
5. Postcard reminder of a second seminar
6. Postcard reminder and selected phone calls for a final session
7. Class meeting of recently joined members
8. Name Tag Sundays

A new member information card system, which included information such as skills, areas of interest, etc. for later use, was developed.

The format of the new member orientation program had three sessions, titled:

"Who and What is First Church?," "Who are You?" and "What Can We Do Together?" A team from the Membership Committee was assigned to shepherd each group through the orientation, joining ceremony, and follow-up for six months. There were usually four new member groups per year during the 1970s.

### 1980s

A new event was added in November 1980 – "Bring a Friend Sunday". The aim was to reach people who were longer-term town residents with no church preference. Attendance was up by 50 people at that service.

By the mid-80s, the number of new members had increased from 51 (1981) to 79 (1984). The increase was attributed to: increased focus on the type of Ministry offered at First Church, strong program offerings, warmth of reception to visitors by the congregation, and, mostly, a strong and organized calling program of outreach to new members. New members were generous with their pledges during this time, and also filled 25 positions on 11 committees. A total membership of over 1,800 yielded an average Sunday attendance of about 350.

Additional initiatives for new members included creating folders with information about the church and its programs to give to prospective members. A membership table was set up at coffee hour following the church service. A bulletin board with photos of new members was also added. A brochure for Greeters was prepared and shared with committees to improve hospitality to visitors. The use of nametags continued to be viewed favorably.

### 1990s

The 1990s was a peak decade for new members, ranging from 45 to 74 per year. The number of new member classes changed twice in the mid-1990s, first to two consecutive Tuesday evenings and then to three consecutive weekly sessions. The number of new member

groups during the year ranged from two to six. Several types of informal get-togethers for new members were held during the 1990s, including brunch and potluck suppers.

The four consecutive Wednesday evening new member orientation sessions were changed to Saturday morning or afternoon sessions. This schedule worked better for participants and resulted in more continuity of attendance.

A “Front Porch Bread Ministry” was added, in which committee members took turns delivering a small loaf of dessert bread with a current “Meetinghouse News” to visitors who signed the guest book. Visitors were thanked for coming to First Church and were encouraged to return. The “Front Porch Bread Ministry” was active from 1990-1994.

## **2000s**

The number of new members declined from the previous decade, and ranged from 14-48. The timing of the orientation sessions changed to Sundays from 11:30 am – 1:00 pm. In 2007, it was changed again, based on participant feedback, to a single, longer class conducted by a pastor, followed by a short session on joining Sunday. There was also a New Member dinner.

The number of new member groups decreased from five to three per year. Membership Committee members participated in the training and personally followed through with the new members in that group. They created a new member newsletter as well.

Ginny Breismeister created a formal Greeters Group in 2006, with responsibility to welcome people to the Sunday worship service. She created four seasonal pew cards to inform visitors of programs and contact information at the church. Friendship Sunday was added in 2009 as an opportunity for members to invite family and friends to a service.

## **2010 – 2015**

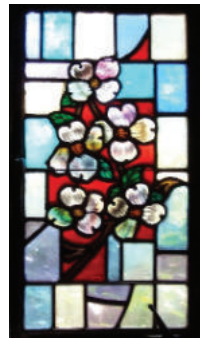
The number of new members during these five years ranged from 44- 47. The Membership Committee continued to maintain contact with new members to help them get connected within the church community where their interests lie or where they might like to find new opportunities. October was designated as “New Member Month” in 2013, with four orientation sessions and two Sundays to join the church.

## **Memorial Gifts Committee**

The Memorial Gifts Committee consisted of 12 members. Their charge was to review gifts or memorials that are offered, and to judge their suitability within the standards of beauty, dignity, and usefulness for the church buildings and grounds.

Examples of memorial gifts that continue to be visible and are highly appreciated are these donations acquired between 1974 and 1977:

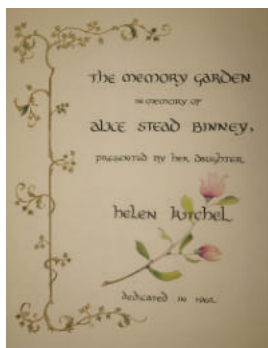
- Outdoor bulletin board in front of the church; designed by R. Jackson Smith, given in memory of Edwin McKeithen.
- Dogwood stained glass window in the tower entrance, given in memory of Victor Denson.
- Black wrought iron flower stands and pots fashioned out of very old andirons, given in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Walton.
- Large print pew Bibles, a gift from Margaret Hayton.



In 2003 we had a goal of informing the congregation of how memorial gifts are handled within the church's By-Laws, and solicited needs from all areas of the church, which might be fulfilled through a memorial gift.

Chairs of Memorial Gifts Committee include familiar names from First Church members during the years 1965-2012: Iimogene Kratzer, Louise Guy, Carolyn Colegrove, and Hugh Hitchens.

Memorial Gifts were recorded in beautiful pages done in calligraphy in a Book of Remembrances, which is in a glass-top case in the Narthex. In 2014, Phoebe Griffith, assisted by Tad Larrabee, photographed the pages. They are now in a photo gallery on the church website so they can be viewed by all.



## Sexuality Education Committee

From 1969 to 1993 our church explored teaching sexuality education. Dr. Harold Wright, psychologist and church member, taught the first sex education course in 1969 for our church youth. In 1981, when the AIDS crisis started, a Sexuality Committee began as part of Religious Education. The Church Committee then voted to approve a course on human sexuality for the spring of 1982. Youngsters of senior high school age who were members and friends of First Church were invited to participate with the consent of their parents.

By 1982, the Sexuality Task Force had 12 senior high students participating. In 1982-83, we held a course on Human Sexuality for the young people in the Church led by Ruth Kaufman from Westport and assisted by Linda Hotetz. Twelve young people from the Junior and Senior classes attended eight two-hour sessions on Sunday mornings. The course, "About Your Sexuality", was developed by the Unitarian-Universalist Association. The goals of the course were to give young people accurate information, develop their communication abilities, and increase their awareness of decision-making values.

After an evaluation of the course, the students, teachers and committee decided to continue the course. The 1983 committee members were Bob Carey, Mary Ann Chidsey, Sally Colegrove, Judy Goodchild, Phyllis Freeman, Pat Geismar, Dale Greene, Linda Hotetz, Sally Jones, Charles Morgan, James Perry, Ruth Reed, Sandy Tubbs, Brenda and Tom Stiers, and Faith Carmichael, Chairperson. A new committee with Pat Geismar as the Chairperson made plans for classes the next year.

In 1984, the Sexuality Task Force arranged for a second "About Your Sexuality" course. Linda Hotetz and Bill Large led seven 11th and 12th graders in six sessions using the Unitarian Universalist Association's curriculum. Linda also presented a course material summary to our committee.

Gretchen Reynolds was chairperson the first half of 1985. Other active members were Suzanne Rikkola, Dana Dolloff, Dr. Stu McCalley, Pat Geismar, Linda Hotetz and Bill Large. Fran Becker attended the teacher training workshop in Princeton, New Jersey and was enthusiastic to co-teach classes to young people using the "About Your Sexuality" curriculum.

Fran Becker and Bill Large came to a meeting of confirmation class parents in the spring to acquaint the parents with the possibility of offering classes to 9th and 10th

graders and to answer questions about the curriculum. In response to the parents' interest, the task force held orientation sessions for parents.

In August we received a written objection to the sexuality curriculum. With the continued willingness of the teachers, we continued the series as publicized. A three-part series took place in September led by Fran Becker and Bill Large. Responses varied and many questioned the appropriateness of the curriculum material.

The Reverend Dale Greene had joined our staff in 1980. She had attended a number of sexuality seminars at the Connecticut Conference and, on December 11, 1985, an AIDS CRISIS seminar at Judson Memorial Church in NYC where clergy were present from all over the northeast. They were urged to preach on AIDS in the coming months. The Connecticut Conference asked, through the different associations in the state, to have pastors preach on AIDS in April of 1986. Dale preached that AIDS and homophobia kill. There needed to be good sexuality education so that people got over the myths and the terrible misunderstandings of just plain old sexuality as well as homosexuality. Some people were aghast at that—this isn't what the church should be talking about. The Pastor's Advisory Committee met to give people a chance to discuss their concerns. They suggested that the Sexuality Task Force be reconstituted by the Nominating Committee and its purpose, functions, responsibilities and accountability be clarified for 1986.

In 1986 a couple from Princeton, New Jersey held a Human Sexuality seminar. Tom Stiers and Dale Greene worked with parents, the Sexuality Task Force, and the instructors to develop a sexuality education program that was given to a group of high school students. Tom Stiers and Sally Colegrove also gave a session on Christian values.

In 1992, we held a Human Sexuality and AIDS Education program with the young people, and in 1993 we had educational forums on Death and Dying, Human Sexuality, AIDS Education and a Contemporary Issues Forum on domestic abuse and respect for diversity. Everything that we did in the area of sexuality and raising awareness moved us toward being open and affirming in the 1990s.

## Ushering Committee

In 1969, women ushered for the first time. Ushers gave a warm greeting to people as they enter the Meetinghouse, handed out bulletins, helped those needing assistance, assisted people to their "favorite" seat, collected the offering, recorded the attendance at each service and neatened the pews afterwards. In 1972, Helen Sickles designed the needlepoint usher badges that we use today. They were sewn by a group of women.

The deacons began the Ushering Committee in 1973, including a parking lot "greeting." Pre-1969 ushers were all men, filling 139 posts that soon expanded to 265 ushering posts in 62 services. Many of the men went to an annual breakfast at a nearby motel to discuss policies and problems. In 1978, they became a subcommittee of the Church Committee, with 12 men and women, each being a Head Usher for one month a year and in charge of finding and training ushers for their month. Eventually, we went from eight ushers per Sunday to four and no longer walked people to their seats.

By 1986, the Usher Committee had one chairman and two members, each for three years. March 21, 1993 was designated Ushers' Sunday to honor all ushers and give thanks for Jackson Smith's fine leadership of ten years.



In 2005, Parish Nurse Sue Asselin and Betsy Kreuter of the Wellness Committee created an Ushers Orientation/Instruction document for CPR training and safety issues. Peter Schay was Head Usher for many years and was followed by Pat Larrabee in 2013. She created an online usher sign-up, which made it easier to coordinate. It was handy for everyone to see who was signed up to usher for a two-month period and voluntarily fill in the gaps.

## **Vision Committee/Long-Range Planning**

A Vision Committee was appointed in May 1967 and worked through 1969 recommending 43 ways to improve spiritual, good works, organization and facilities. At least 25 of these recommendations were tackled.

The Three-in-One Capital Campaign ran from June 1975 through 1978. It raised funds for three projects: a new organ, the United Church of Christ 17/76 College Fund, and the First Church Deferred Building Maintenance.

In 1978, a new Long-Range Planning Committee of 14 people studied worship, education (primarily, youth and adult), benevolence, fellowship, and properties. William P. Porter chaired this significant effort for 15 years. They gave the congregation a 16-part questionnaire (283 were returned), held interviews with approximately 20 standing committees and interviews with the professional staff. They worked to improve congregational involvement, professional staff utilization, our United Church of Christ relationship, church educational activities (Church School, Youth, and Adult Education), Christian outreach, communications, worship and efficient use of physical resources. They aimed to raise \$1,000,000 over the next three to four years, with \$750,000 to be applied to our General Endowment Fund and \$250,000 to establish a fund to renovate, repair and enhance the physical assets of the Church. They hired a consultant for a feasibility study of their ambitious plans.

In 1985, they repaired the sidewalks around the church, installed a new telephone system and by 1987 they added \$1,000,000 to the Endowment Fund. In 1988, they completed renovation of the gymnasium into a lovely room now called the Vincent Daniels Center.

In anticipation of the turn of the Millennium, in 1994, the Church Committee requested the new "Vision 2000 Committee" to consider the mission of First Church in all of its aspects as the Church looked forward to the year 2000 and beyond, including the mission, programs and life of First Church with proposed goals, objectives and plans. The great strength of First Church is its great history and traditions of the Congregational Church.

The survey revealed that our congregation finds the spiritual centering of worship and the welcoming "family" of the Church to be the overriding virtues of First Church and the defining aspect of their relationship with our church. They recommended development of a family service, which addressed the special needs of our young (and growing) families while keeping and strengthening the Church Retreat that brings the generations together.

## **The Year 2000 Initiative**

First Church carried out a highly successful Capital Campaign in 1999 called the "Shelter Strong Campaign." The Trustees worked for a year to identify the needs. George Handley, Church Administrator, researched the needs and costs and produced a detailed list of needs prioritized into three categories. We hired Andy White of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries as our fundraising consultant. A compelling brochure, fine slogan, and weekly communications combined with the successful in-house gatherings organized by Sue and Stu McCalley with picture boards of our needs to show the goals of the campaign.

In June 1999, we completed our Shelter Strong Campaign in only 13 weeks, ensuring that First Church's buildings enter the new millennium in top condition for the generations to come. We exceeded our \$1.5 million goal by raising over \$1.9 million. By the end of 2000, we had:

- a new slate roof and roofing system
- new heating, air conditioning and electrical systems
- networked computers and a new phone system
- renovations to the kitchen and Daniels Center and the creation of two new bathrooms
- outreach capital donations for several agencies in our community

Rising costs and the increased scope of the roof project meant we needed an additional \$350,000 to finish the job. A "Let's Finish the Job" brochure, with project costs and variance data, and a pledge card were mailed to all.

By 2001 we had additional improvements of:

- central air conditioning in the Pre-school, Daniels Center, and Parish House offices, plus individually air conditioned meeting rooms 103, 104, and 203
- a sophisticated tandem-boiler heating system for improved heating in the three interconnected buildings
- an upgraded electrical service to provide safer, more reliable power, with new wiring, new circuit breaker panels, and better distribution
- New exterior oak doors facing Sound Beach Avenue



The old gym, before it became The Daniels Center

To help celebrate our 350th anniversary in 2015-2016, we began a new Capital Campaign to fulfill the last part of our anniversary motto to "Leaning into the Future." We exceeded our goal of \$1.5 million by raising pledges of \$1.7 million for the next three years!

## Wellness Committee

Dr. Granger Westberg, whose daughter lived in Old Greenwich, had started a program called "Parish Nurse" in Illinois. One Sunday Dr. Westberg attended our worship service. As he left, he asked Tom Stiers, "Tom, why don't you have a Parish Nurse?" Tom mentioned this to Adele Crawford, our administrative assistant in the church office. Her home Presbyterian Church had a Parish Nurse, so she researched this project. The Church Committee asked Tom to take Dr. Westberg's course in Chicago. We joined with Greenwich Hospital on supporting a Parish Nurse salary for many years. The Parish Nurse also became a part of the church team that worked in training the various generations of Stephen Ministers.

A Wellness Committee was established in 1997 to expand the caring ministry of First Church. A job description was written and a search committee formed to hire a Parish Nurse. Betsy Kreuter has been Wellness Committee Chair from 2005 to the present – 12 years.



The Wellness Committee acts as an advisory committee to the Parish Nurse and has had a broad range of initiatives such as:

- Second Hour presentations
- health educational programs
- Red Cross Blood Drives
- flu shot clinics
- developing and offering training in Emergency & Safety Procedures
- purchasing an automatic external defibrillator (AED) in 2004. A group of staff and congregants were certified in Heartsaver CPR and AED use.
- bereavement support program



**Wellness Committee, 2017:** *1st row:* Ruth Reed, Betsy Kreuter, Mary Ann Duff. *2nd row:* Carol Deering, Paul Kretschmann, Sue Asselin, Ros Brady. *Missing:* Annette Bergh, Doris Moss Davenport, Enid Norris.

The role of the Parish Nurse includes:

- blood pressure screenings
- consultation on health related issues
- home, hospital, and nursing home visits
- referral to medical or other community services
- identification of recipients for flowers delivered by Chancel Committee members, and poinsettias and lilies delivered at Christmas and Easter
- Medicare Part D assistance
- Friends Helping Friends assistance and connections (meals, rides)
- attending church staff meetings
- collaboration with community resources
- professional development activities at Greenwich Hospital and other community agencies
- writing articles for the Meetinghouse Monthly

## Worship Committee

The Church Committee appointed the first Church Worship Committee in 1980 to act in an advisory capacity to the Church Committee on all aspects of worship at First Church. Committee members included representatives from the Church Committee, the Chancel Choir, the Ministry of Sound, ushers and two members at large. Early discussions focused on the timing of early worship services, a policy regarding serving communion to children and Vesper services during Lent.

In 1981, in a response to congregational requests, they began a Healing Service in March, but discontinued it for the summer and did not resume it. A major accomplishment was the preparation of a booklet on Baptism. This booklet was made available to the congregation and given to parents having a child baptized. Also in 1982 they began an 8:00 am Sunday service at the beach and the numbers attending grew to 30 to 40 or so.

Three projects occupied the Worship Committee during 1986. First, they established an Usher Committee with a chair and two members to keep the organization of ushers for the Sunday Services. Second, the Church Committee recommended and adopted a booklet on

Communion. It included the belief that “Preparation for participation in Communion no matter the age must include time for education, discussion and prayer.” Third, the Committee surveyed the congregation about the Sunday radio broadcasts and as a result they decided to have a radio host assigned each Sunday to give important announcements of church events.

In March of 1987, they decided to hold a service from a new UCC publication, Book of Worship, which offered suggestions for a wide variety of services. It involved drastic alterations in the order of worship and brought mostly negative reactions from the congregation. Since attendance at Worship Committee meetings were low for some time, the Church Committee voted on October 5, 1987 to disband the Worship Committee and revert its functions to the Diaconate.

However, in 1993 the Vice Chair of the Church Committee reinstituted the Worship Committee to evaluate current worship and plan new practices. The Committee produced a pamphlet guide to worship services. They visited other area churches to experience their services for possible expanded worship opportunities. In 1995, the Committee was asked to review the utilization of the worship platform and furniture with a view to improving effectiveness. A lay service was carried out on November 10, 1996 based on the theme, “Reaching Up, Reaching Out, Reaching In.” Family worship services were continued resulting from dialogue with the Church School Task Force.

For quite some time, some members of First Church had the idea of adding a worship service to offer an alternative to our 10:00 am service in schedule and style of worship. Through the considerable work by a special committee chaired by David Young and Mark Montgomery, “linc” was born.

linc launched on September 25, 2011 with a wonderful 5:00 pm service, and our church members showed up in full-force to support it. linc was a service that used art, drama, music, and the spoken word to tell our faith story. There was a small band led by Tod Hedrick, and the worship was conceived and planned by Mark Montgomery with other leaders assisting. Donald Haviland provided vocal leadership and logistics management, Phoebe Griffith was our lighting lead, Ingrid Thalheim was our sound technician and April Condon took care of food. An average of about 45 people attended each week. The energy was positive and linc seemed to meet a need in our congregation and within our community.

The challenges that faced linc, however, were funding, further sustainability, promotion, growth and content. First, there were costs for three musicians, staff time, food, and materials. Second, could we sustain it throughout the year? Third, we needed to promote the service to our community. The service was intended to bring in more young people but that did not materialize. The linc service continued through 2013.



## Social and Service Oriented Groups

### The Couples Club

The church has sponsored various social and service oriented groups. In 1961, the first was The Couples Club, which was heartily endorsed by the Church Committee and the congregation to add greatly to the friendship, fellowship and service to the church and to the community. Membership was open to married couples of all ages as well as parents without partners. Sample events the club organized were a Shakespeare talk, Hobby Night, Whist mixer, Progressive Dinner, dances, monthly meetings with interesting

speakers and a catered dinner in the gym. Club membership quickly grew to 300 couples by 1964. They also provided coffee in the Lounge between Sunday services.

One great speaker topic was “Dialogue with Your Senior Pastor — Subjects Unlimited.” By 1966, the Couples Club began helping annually with the Christmas tree sale to benefit various Scouting groups, the Young People’s Fellowship and other groups. They contributed wreaths and trees to the Cemetery, Binney Park, the Church, and the Nathaniel Witherell Home of Greenwich. They also chaperoned the Young People’s New Year’s Eve Dance.

In 1968, the Vision Committee suggested having new interest groups within the Couples Club, two of which were the Single Adults and the Young Marrieds. Another new group was the official “Greeters” to help our visitors feel better acquainted. The Couples Bridge Tournament became an annual event until 1978. The Evening Guild once ran it.

From 1969 to 1972, the Club sponsored, with the Women’s Fellowship, two International Christian Youth Exchange Students (I.C.Y.E.) from Europe. The students lived with First Church families for the year, with funding primarily by the Christmas Tree Sale and the Couples Bridge Tournament.

For fun in 1971, the “Gourmet Chef” fiasco, with mysterious chefs providing edible fare with comic prelude, was hilarious. The Couples Club prepared the church Membership Directory in 1973 and the Church Committee delivered it.

## The Congregators

The Couples Club decided a person did not have to be part of a “couple” to join in and it heartily welcomed all adults. Appropriately, in 1974 they voted to change the name of The Couples Club to The Congregators to sound more inclusive. The Congregators continued their social, inspirational and service activities.

**Social:** They had outings to baseball at Shea Stadium, the American Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford, and a tennis tournament. For many years they organized a brunch, sometimes called the Brunch Bunch. The annual Progressive Dinner was the biggest effort, where in 1988 there were a record 130 people sharing in the spirit and song of the Christmas season. They also arranged to have Jazz on the Lawn, a trip to the Darien Dinner Theatre, Holiday for Brass and a “Swing into Spring” jitterbug dance in the decorated auditorium.

**Inspirational:** They arranged the Bethel Bible Series with Tom Stiers and radio broadcasts of Sunday services. Bethel Bible training began in 1985 with 106 students in our congregation. It ended in 1993.

**Service:** The financial donations remained toward support of youth activities, with the only income from their annual sale of Christmas trees. They decided to discontinue support of International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE) students to free up funds to a larger number of young people, such as to the Scouts, to underwrite the Confirmation Class retreat and the family week camp program. Two annual bake sales with the Music Committee raised contributions for the Organ Fund in 1978 and in 1979 Congregators joined the Women’s Fellowship’s contribution to fund a new Meetinghouse entrance ramp for the handicapped. Another Congregators service project in 1981 was the Coffee Hour following the Sunday Worship Service, which became a traditional time for fellowship at the Church. In 1981, the Congregators held more than a dozen special events and contributed over \$4,500 to various projects. Gifts included grants for the Youth Program and

Sunday School, purchase of round tables for the auditorium, repainting of the auditorium, payment of printing costs for the Church's new Baptismal Booklet, and contributions to Silver Lake Conference Center, the Old Greenwich-Riverside Community Center, and Hill House. In 1982, they gave money to purchase books for the Church library and a book rack to display sermon reprints, to pay for speakers at several lectures, to prune and care for church trees, and to help fund the All Church Retreat and the SPF summer program.

In 1985, they improved safety and convenience by the installation of new lights in the parking lot thanks to a major gift from the Congregators and help from the Women's Fellowship and Fran Woodward.

Congregators gave money for our radio broadcast, the Bereavement-Support program, new windows in the Lounge, and better lighting in the Auditorium. The next few years they held Ajax Days to help spruce up the church, and in 1989, they picked ten bushels of apples to donate to the Stamford Shelter for the Homeless. The Daniels Center kitchen was completed in 1989 with significant funding from the Women's Fellowship and the Congregators.

Congregators were unhappy to be terminated in 1989, which was mainly because the Board of Trustees disagreed with how they chose to spend their money from the annual Christmas tree sale. Consequently, the annual tree sale proceeds went back into the church budget with a Trustee heading the sale, and the proceeds going to various charities. By 1995, the tree sales were run by the Christian Outreach Committee.

## Parish Life

Sally Colegrove wrote, "In the last twenty years ministry has changed to reflect the need of families to spend quality time together. At First Church our response has been the intergenerational program areas currently called Outdoor Ministries and Parish Life. These are new ministries, which are precursors of ministry in the new millennium. The greatest gift we as a church can give to one another is time, spent together on this journey of faith." (Source: annual report 1999, page 10.)

The Parish Life Committee began in 1995 and is the only group in this chapter that continues to this day. They work to enhance the fellowship and spiritual life of the congregation of all ages. They handled the following special events: The Homecoming Picnic, The Harvest Dinner, The Christmas Progressive Dinner, a mid-winter event, and the Maundy Thursday Lenten Supper and Service. The Harvest Dinner was discontinued in 2001, and the Progressive Dinner was discontinued in 1998 because the logistics for so many attendees were such a challenge to organize!

Our annual Harvest Dinner in October 1997 became an All-Church Dinner honoring Bill Federici in the Auditorium.

Parish Life threw a big party for Tom Stiers' 60th birthday in 1998 under a tent on the church lawn. The Indiana barbecue was complete with beverage/appetizer hour, catered supper, works of art, birthday cake, a bicycle gift from the congregation and an accompanying helmet from the Church School, and visits by Stiers' friends and family. The dynamic M.C.s were Art Delmhorst and Chuck McConnell. Sunday morning we worshipped under the tent again for an old fashioned Tent Meeting, with spirituals, a brass quartet and sermons by Rev. Dr. Brenda Stiers (Indiana Soul Food I) and daughter Heather Stiers Dorn (Indiana Soul Food II).

Parish Life joined forces with Women's Fellowship for a new event, Hanging of the Greens, when they decorated the church for Christmas, held a service of celebration and a potluck dinner.

Our year 2000 was challenging with our main kitchen being under renovation for most of the year.

The Homecoming picnic in September 2001 was cancelled due to the tragic events of September 11.

Erlinda Haviland taught us how to make spring rolls for the June 10th Celebration and Rededication of the Church after completion of the major renovation projects.

The Harvest Dinner celebrated the autumn season with a potluck dinner following the new 5:00 pm Saturday worship service. We welcomed the Hodzic\* family back as our honored guests. (\*See the Bosnian Refugee Resettlement Committee topic of the Christian Outreach chapter for more information.)

A new event in mid-December was called “We Gather Together at Christmas.” A gourmet soup, excellent breads and other comfort food were followed by a fantastic celebration of Christmas cookies, with Christmas Carols in the Meetinghouse.

The 2006 Homecoming introduced Pie Baking and Pie Eating contests. The committee especially recognized the Havilands who served on this Committee for many years and provided important leadership with Larry’s careful record keeping and organizational memory and with Erlinda’s special soups for Maundy Thursday supper and other treats from her kitchen.

The 2007 Homecoming Sunday picnic had further innovation. Attendees brought 40-50 side dishes. A Windows project for people to design and create hundreds of “stained-glass” window panes were assembled into four “stained glass” windows. These Homecoming Windows were used as temporary replacements for the stained glass windows in the Meetinghouse while they were removed for restoration over the next year. Also, new that year was an information table for the First Church Growers for the Hungry to share information about their activities.

In 2008, the Homecoming picnic featured a special art project in which the Congregation created three large paintings. The next year, Homecoming also had inflated Bouncy Houses on the front lawn—a first for our church.

## Social Groups

### First Church Singles

This group began in 1980 and was active for two years. The group was organized and led mostly by Carol Hokansen, with Dale M. Greene later. The group met twice monthly for discussion, fellowship, and refreshments. Two parties were held at historic Bush-Holley House in Cos Cob. Discussion leaders were trained by a professional in a series of leadership training classes. This group served singles over thirty in the community and our church membership.

### Family Life Committee

The Family Life Committee was active from 1982 to 1991. It was funded by the Congregators. They presented all-family events such as the new Family Month, an activities-packed month of family programs and fun. They held an International Potluck Dinner after the Advent Workshop, organized the All-Church Retreat, a camping and canoeing retreat, the 4:00 pm Christmas Eve family service, Family Life Sunday/Week-

end, and a Parent Effectiveness class on ways to enrich the time spent with their children. They arranged a Second Hour about the abuse of alcohol and drugs and other topics. Their Spring Dance of 1988 was one of the first events in the new Daniels Center.

### **Third Saturday Group**

As a variant of the First Church Singles, Meg Boxwell Williams began the Third Saturday Group, a social gathering for singles and couples from their late twenties through forties. This group was active from 1984-1986.

### **First Person Singular**

This group began on February 24, 1991. Single men and women of First Church and the community, ages 35-75, enjoyed going out for brunch once a month in various locations. They had picnics, theatre outings, canoe trips, and cocktail parties. Sally Colegrove helped Lucy Hedrick organize the activities. Several of the participants joined First Church. Later the group offered resourcing and counseling of group members as needed. By 1995, they joined activities with singles from Second Congregational Church. However, by 1997, due to scheduling conflicts, this group ended.

### **Outdoor Ministries Committee**

In 1992 a vote at the annual meeting created the Outdoor Ministries Committee to provide outdoor activities for our congregation and be our environmental advocate (the Environmental Task Force). This committee led beach services and informative Second Hours, sponsored wonderful day trips and a rafting adventure to the Delaware Water Gap, assisted at the Homecoming Picnic, kept us updated on the Earth Summit, and designed and ran the All Church Retreat.

The Environmental Task Force, chaired by Nan Burleson, worked for two years on having a booth at the town-wide Earth Day at Greenwich High School, using church media for encouraging wise use of our natural resources, replacing our church light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs, and distributing information on energy conservation. They also held Environmental Sabbath services, and Nan conducted an ecology walk at the Nature Conservancy preserve, "Devil's Den." Ruth Greenberg led an ecumenical study group on Theology of Ecology. The Environmental Task Force and the Christian Education Task Force also planned an environmental service at the beach.

In 1995, Outdoor Ministries switched to working on the All Church Retreat at Silver Lake and other outings for the congregation and continued working on these retreats through 2005.

All of these groups gave our congregation a wonderful sense of fellowship, inspiration and an opportunity for service to the church and the community.

## **Women's Fellowship**

For many years, the traditions, contributions and active participation of the Women's Fellowship have been important and vital to the life of First Church. Their programs and activities aim to enrich the body, mind and spirit. Women's Fellowship is a force spiritu-



ally and financially. They respond to the needs of First Church and its community, funding many outreach agencies. All the women at First Church are automatically members.

## Various Names of the Women's Groups

The earliest recorded name for a women's organization at our church is the Ladies Social Circle in 1878<sup>1</sup>. By 1890, the Ladies Aid Society was their name until two new separate groups formed, the Evening Guild in 1929 and the Women's Guild in 1930. There was also a Lend a Hand Club at our church in 1913<sup>2</sup>, one of the 800 or so such clubs that developed nationally. Dr. Edward Everett Hale founded it in 1892, and re-named it in 1898 to Lend A Hand with the purpose of helping others. In 1968, the Afternoon and Evening Guilds merged and formed the Women's Fellowship to have a closer relationship and strengthen benevolence efforts. However, in 1977, the Evening Fellowship was re-created to accommodate working women. In 2004, the Evening Fellowship became Nights Off, a casual group where everyone brings something to eat and drink, with occasional benevolent activities.



**Nights Off group, 2017:** *From left:* Ruth Reed, Lois Kramer-Mettraux, Lois Berlin, Ginny Breismeister, Betty Bonsal, Laura Pugliese, Mary-Ann Assing, Rosemary Lamie, Barrie Richmond, Pat Larrabee and Barbara Norrgard.

## The Rummage Room

For many years, the women of First Church held twice-yearly rummage sales to help the church out. However, the space required for the donations outgrew all the attics and closets of the church. In 1964, a few enterprising ladies, Ruth Wright, Barbara Miller, Ruth Cadley and Martha Fingerle found a vacancy and rented 191 Sound Beach Avenue, the former site of a U.S. Post Office and later a hardware store. They fixed up the store, stocked the shelves and racks and opened on October 1, 1964. It's now "the best little shop



**Rummage Room opening day, October 1, 1964:** *From left:* Martha Fingerle, president of the guild; Barbara Miller, co-chairman; the Reverend Francis E. Potter, Ruth Wright, chairman of the room, and the Reverend Merton Libby.

<sup>1</sup> The First Three Hundred Years 1665-1965, Elizabeth Clarke, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> 1913 annual report of First Church

in town.” Barbara Miller (shown right, top) and Ruth Wright (shown right, middle) were the Co-Chairwomen of the project and the shop was initially open all day on Thursdays and Fridays and a half-day on Saturdays. Eventually, the shop was open all five weekdays plus half of Saturday.

The devotion of the managerial staff has been remarkable. Barbara Miller worked from 1964-1978: 14 years. Betty Edgar (shown right, bottom) became Co-Chairwoman with Ruth Wright in 1979. All in all, Ruth worked at the Rummage Room from 1964 to 1985, 21 years! Betty became Chairwoman and Volunteer Manager from 1985 until her retirement in 1991, 13 years in all. A full-time manager, Deidre Little, was hired in 1992 and stayed until 2000, eight years. Later, there were part-time assistant managers and a large group of community volunteers. Maria Drieghe and Debbi Stickney were Co-Managers in 2000 until Maria became Manager later. Maria worked there from 2000-2015, serving for 15 years.

There are about 60 volunteers from the community and the church. They contribute to a good cause and enjoy camaraderie with other volunteers and the paid staff. Their contributions are enormous.

The award-winning display windows are enjoyed by all. With the use of donated items, the windows range from formal attire and wedding gowns to Halloween costumes, back-to-school, and theme designs that represent all the holidays of the year. The volunteers and staff have had fun in recent years being live mannequins in the windows on April Fools’ Day!

After the Rummage Room’s first full year from 1964-1965, the Women’s Fellowship gave \$12,000 to benevolences (“allocations”), which was worth \$90,292 in 2015 dollars. The Rummage Room has contributed well over \$4,500,000 for benevolences by 2014, with each year’s amount adjusted by the inflation rate to current dollars. In 2012, the record annual amount transferred to the Women’s Fellowship was \$172,000. (This is in addition to what the church gives via the Outreach Committee.) Profits from The Rummage Room are allocated yearly to charitable organizations that serve women, children and families locally, nationally and internationally. The Allocations Committee’s final list

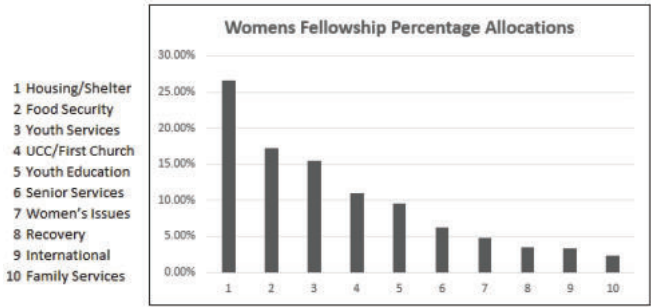


**Rummage Room workers, 2014:** *From left:* Ruth Reed, Sharon Paris, Nancy McConnell, Lea Menegon, Betty Shopovick, Pat Deacon, Judy Miller, Maria Drieghe, Mary Jane Penwell

is presented and voted on each spring at the Women's Fellowship annual meeting. The shop keeps a list of these charities for interested customers.

In 2014, the Rummage Room celebrated its 50th Anniversary, which included celebrations at the shop and a special church service with a wonderful sermon by our new senior pastor, Richard DenUyl.

Years ago the Women's Fellowship used to allocate about 33% to First Church, but now the % allocations are shown below:



Other Activities

In 1970, the first Quilt Raffle was held at the first Antiques Show. Under Inge Thalheim's direction, there was a weekly quilting workshop then that was named the Kettle Quilters group in 1973. It continues to this day. They put a kettle of water on to make tea and the name stuck. The Antiques Show became an annual event with over 100 women involved for many years. The co-chairs were often Carolyn Colegrove and Cornelia Veith. The shows ran from 1969 to 1989.



Quilt raffle, 1989: From left: Ros Brady, Dale Greene, Lois O'Reilly, Carolyn Colegrove

The annual mother-daughter dinner ran from 1972 to 1998. In 1974, a Bridge Group formed with an annual tournament as a fundraiser, which continues to this day.

While abroad in the army during the Vietnam War, Larry Haviland received a well-wrapped coffee can from the Women's Fellowship. When he opened it, a pungent aroma filled the room and many other soldiers gathered around to see it filled with bourbon balls! Those were gratefully consumed by all in minutes, only to reveal a concealed bottle of Southern Comfort!

In 1984, at the request of Joyce Carlson, President of the Women's Fellowship, Dale Greene created and named the Hats Off! women's discussion group. The name was because they could take off the hat that they wore as mother, wife, gardener and chauffeur, and meet together as women. They read books about finding their own identity in the midst of family situations. It's a lively, challenging group that continues to this day.

Our first church-sponsored Red Cross Blood Drive was in 1992 with Women's Fellowship members bringing refreshments for the donors and helping with donor registration. Now everyone is invited to help out.

For our big First Church 350th celebration in 2015-2016, the Women's Fellowship organized an historical speaker on the topic of "Women of First Church" for the Annual Meeting and Tea. At that same meeting, the Quilt Raffle celebrated 45 years of heirloom quilt making!

### **Types of Activities**

**Service/Outreach** includes food, clothing and book drives, sewing layettes for distribution through the state Fellowship, sewing outfits for Honduran children, making aid kits and projects, home visits, services and receptions, "Helping Hands" shut-in cooking, blood drives, public programs and church refurbishment projects. Women's Fellowship outreach activities contribute time, talent and treasure to local and global communities, the same as the church Outreach Committee's. The Allocations Committee of the church now investigates and dispenses all the profits of the Rummage Room to charities benefiting Women, Children and families.

**Educational programs** have had speakers, lectures, presentations, panels, study groups, classes and retreats.

**Meetings** have been monthly luncheons, panel discussions, dinners, annual Rummage Room Fashion Shows, lectures on Christian outreach, day and evening interest groups, and bus trips. These activities fostered community and support, but involved a great deal of effort. Times have changed and with many women working, the group now has one annual luncheon meeting with a speaker and quilt raffle. The interest groups are now the weekly quilting group, the Hats Off (they dropped the "!" from the group name in 1995) book reading group, the Nights Off monthly group, the bridge tournament and the twice weekly exercise group (Tai Chi). These busy days it gets harder to find volunteers to do the organizing of events and interest groups, and most women don't have enough time to attend too many meetings or activities. Nevertheless, the Women's Fellowship is a vital and important contributor to our church.

## **The Joyous Abduction of Mary L.**

**by Ruth N. Morris**

It was a perfect weather day in August 1967, when four "presumably reliable" women suddenly decided to kidnap Mary Libby, wife of senior pastor Merton Libby, and whisk her away to a picnic at Tod's Point. They figured that on a minister's salary, her husband could hardly afford to pay a ransom!

Mary was painfully shy, modest and unassuming – the perfect minister's cheerful wife. She taught Sunday school, had a lovely soprano voice, attended all meetings of the Afternoon and Evening Guilds and helped with those true saints who sorted stuff for the church Rummage Sales.

The rumor was she had cancer, but she never spoke of it. One morning, because she didn't drive, she asked me to drive her to an appointment in Greenwich. I was delighted. We first went to the rose garden in Bruce Park where the pink tea roses were in full bloom. Then we went to the supermarket, where we met Marion Ficker, a special friend. I said, "Let's make sandwiches and go to the beach at Tod's Point. This will be YOUR day, Mary."

Mary said that her husband came home every day at noon for his lunch. "We'll kidnap you! Nelda Teague and Beverly Bradham will join us, and the good minister will just have to get his own lunch." Mary gave in to the four desperados. We taped a message to the back door of the parsonage: "Mary L. has been kidnapped. No lunch today." and took off.

Mary was proud of her own daring and we were delighted in her complete joy, enhanced by the beauty of the dark, sparkling waves, warm golden sands and the screaming gulls circling above. It was a magical day. She had lived in town for many years and had never been to a picnic at the Point. We laughed so much she said, "Please abduct me again." But we never did.

The next week she was driven to Maine to visit her elderly parents, but she became very weak and came back to Greenwich to die at the hospital. Her memorial service was on a beautiful day and the church had many vases of pink tea roses. Because her parents were unable to make the long trip, I wrote them how beautiful it all was and told them the story of the day we abducted her. They were so happy to hear it and replied, "Mary was always so self-effacing and modest we were afraid no one would know what a fine person she was."

(Thanks to Betty Wiiken and Ruth Reed for passing on this story.)



Nelda Teague



Marion Ficker



Beverly Bradham



Betty Wiiken

## Youth

Since the 1900s young people have been a priority for First Church and we have been lucky to have had many fine leaders. Alden Mosshammer began the Fireside Fellowship group for teens in the 1930s, and today the youth program is a strong component of our educational ministry. Formal church school classes end in eighth grade. Ninth graders were once in The Pastor's Class and are now in the Confirmation Class.

When there were gaps in youth leadership by staff members over the years, an adult Task Force took over, sometimes remaining as advisors as needed. For some years we used seminarians to lead the youth groups, but found that there was too much leadership turnover and discontinuity.

The baby boom of 1946+ and growth of First Church membership caused Vincent Daniels to inspire the fellowship program for young people to go in a new direction and focus. The Young People's Fellowship (YPF) was a discussion and social group for those in high school. For many years we held a New Year's Eve dance for young people of all faiths. Physical activity, worship, movies, day trips and service projects were the core of the group's activities. In 1943 Dr. Daniels and Ruth Bennis began the annual tradition



of having the Young People's group holding an Easter Sunrise Service on the beach at Greenwich Point. The annual Youth Sunday, a service conducted by the young people, began by 1954.

The youth performed in *Pirates of Penzance* in 1951. These shows became an annual event the next year as The Summer Youth Festival to give drama training and fellowship for the young people in town on summer evenings. See the Facilities Use topic for more information.

In the 1960s our youth swapped visits with other churches, helped with the Christmas Manger Service, caroling at the homes of shut-ins and did Youth Sunday. By the mid-1960s, the youth program was adapted to the changing needs of the teenagers. Gary Schrag, a seminarian from Union Theological Seminary in New York and the youth advisor/director from 1966 to 1967, convinced the church that they needed a full-time Minister to Youth for activities and counseling needs of the young people. He created weekly programs on worship, discussions of religious, moral and community problems, a monthly newsletter to the young people and ways to make the church and its teachings meaningful for the young people. They did role playing and packed food cans for the 'Welfare Department'. They had a joint fellowship program sponsored by the Presbyterian Church of Greenwich where children from Harlem were brought in by bus one day a month. Our young people read and swam with these youngsters. Our middle schoolers had a picnic, a film, a scavenger hunt, and packed clothes for Korean orphans.

Arthur "Bill" Comeau, a graduate of Bangor (Maine) Theological Seminary, was called in 1967 as our first full-time Youth Minister. He was a folk singer and artist, and produced a children's record of songs dedicated to the young people of First Church, called "Busy Day." He began a weekly coffeehouse ministry for young people from all churches, and a new cinematographers group that won national recognition as one of the most creative programs for Junior Highs in any church. They had retreats, and at a 6-week Summer Seminar on religion he created an original musical, Hello M, with 50 young people and presented programs at hospitals and nursing homes. The first work trip, to the Elon Home for Children in Decoy, Kentucky, was in 1969. They also had self-awareness weekends, seminars on church vocations, sex education and Youth-Adult, Vespers, a trip to New York City, a Halloween party for Stamford children, redecorated a Stamford house, two work weekends, helped with Christmas tree sale, served at a church anniversary dinner, and painted the Youth Room. The Confirmation class visited other churches, meetings or societies in the area and the JPF held a car wash. Bill Comeau left in 1969.

During the 1970s the emphasis on mission continued. From 1972 on, the focus has been four-fold:

- **fun and fellowship:** ski and canoeing trips, camping, music, games and recreation, retreats, bicycling, picnics, progressive dinners, day trips to New York City, and overnights at the church (later called "lock-ins").
- **education:** discussions on family life, jobs, drugs, death, the draft, attending plays, films and having guest speakers.
- **worship:** the annual Youth Sunday where the young people lead the worship, along with Youth Choir and the annual Easter sunrise service at the beach.
- **mission:** almost annual trips to work in places in poverty to challenge and educate our youth in the importance of outreach and compassion. The youth had



occasional bake sales, car washes, recycling awareness efforts, visits to local nursing homes with gifts and cheer, and almost annual youth productions at the church to help raise money for these mission trips. These shows give many young people the opportunity to be on stage and develop poise and self-confidence. They caroled at nursing homes and made Christmas decorations for them, held a free weekly Child Care Center to help young mothers, volunteered locally at the Carver Center and South End Community Center in Stamford, and delivered food bags from our annual Harvest Sunday to the local food bank.

R. Alan Johnson was Minister to Youth from 1969 to 1972 and led work projects in inner city Stamford. The youth group did productions of "J.B." and "1984" in 1970. The YPF made national CBS television in 1971 with a "Look Up and Live" series. Also, in 1972 the Confirmation Class launched the first recycling collection in the Eastern end of town until the town took it over. The youth groups' boat sale helped to pay for two of our young people go to the United Church of Christ summer conference in Turkey. It also helped to finance three Puerto Rican young people to a summer conference at Silver Lake. James Fung took over both youth fellowships in 1973 and continued the activity-centered approach.

Over the years we have also been fortunate to have the dedication of a team of lay adult advisors working with our youth. This was especially important during gaps in staff members' availability devoted to leading our youth groups. When Jim Fung left, church member Nancy Ziac revitalized the youth group in 1975, advised by Associate Pastor Paul Fraser. In addition to the regular youth activities, the students worked as teaching assistants in the Church School, which continues to this day.

In 1976 Herman Reissig, Tom Stiers, Ann Suzedell and Sally Colegrove led the Confirmation class. Ann Suzedell and Nancy Ziac led Senior Youth Fellowship, for Grades 10, 11, and 12. Ann and Sally presented an agape meal to demonstrate discipleship by serving one another. The SYF helped at the Carver Center's project, Christmas Dinner for the Needy. They organized a bake sale and sponsored two families with the proceeds. They shopped for and put together 20 Christmas dinners. 7th and 8th graders had a workday and an auction. A new SPF Cabinet began, with a Coordinator, a Secretary, and representatives of the 10th-12th grade classes. This cabinet planned future meetings, retreats and wrote the newsletter.

Sally Colegrove became Director of Youth Ministries in 1978 and greatly grew the youth ministry. We had about 14 young people in the youth group then. In two years Sally grew it to 120 young people participating in our four fellowship groups. She began a new youth group, the CPF, due to the commitment that our young people in college felt toward First Church and their desire to see each other again when they were home. The CPF had around 25 young adults who got together for reunions and fellowship at holiday seasons.

The youth leadership team began strongly with Paul Fraser, Nancy Ziac and Sally. They renamed the high school group the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship, SPF, and the junior highs became the Junior Pilgrim Fellowship, JPF. The name Senior Pilgrim Fellowship came from Paul's desire to regularize our youth group with the other youth programs of the United Church of Christ where historically the name for those youth programs has been the Pilgrim Fellowship. When Nancy Ziac left, they recruited Charlie and Linda Hotetz, Lynne and John Lehman and Rick Woodman as advisors,

help transport people, and be there on Sunday night gatherings. About 1986 Brad and Susie Craig came on as part of the advisor team. After Rick married Carolyn Paulus, she also became an advisor. Bobby and Barbara Fortunato joined the team, later Phoebe Griffith and Joe McBride, Bill Bausch, Betsy Kreuter, and Ginny Breismeister who actually ran the SPF Task Force. Sally started to publish “Happenings”, a monthly youth group newsletter. Mission trips expanded - see the chart at the end of this chapter for a summary.

There were a couple of years when we had turned over running the Easter sunrise service to the Presbyterian Church in Old Greenwich because we didn’t have enough of a youth program to run it. They were ready to turn it back to us. Sally Colegrove and Paul Fraser quickly reclaimed it. We still owned the big cross that had been used down at Greenwich Point starting back in the early 1950s. Paul and Sally decided that we could catch the attention of the community and the interest of our young people by carrying the cross through Old Greenwich on Good Friday. In the early 1980s, before Sally was ordained in 1983, they got the cross and challenged the SPF to carry the cross down to the beach, lock the cross in the beach house, and do a sunrise service on Easter Sunday.<sup>1</sup>

The SPF used the proceeds from their 1981 show to build an outdoor chapel at Silver Lake Conference Center in Sharon, Connecticut in memory of their friend, Christen Apenes. Also that year our Confirmation class held its first retreat—a great experience. The JPF cleaned Tomac Cemetery. The All Church Retreat had a delightful special guest, Madeleine L’Engle (1918-2007), a Litchfield resident and author of the popular 1962 novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*. In 1982 there was another first when our college group took its first retreat to Silver Lake.



Madeleine L’Engle,  
author of *A Wrinkle  
in Time*

By 1983 the SPF had about 32 active members—the second largest senior high youth group in the UCC. Assistant Pastor Sally Colegrove, continued as the leader of this dynamic group! Our strong relationship with Silver Lake continued as many young folk were volunteer counselors there. By 1985 the SPF grew to 65 young people and became the largest of the Church-related youth groups in Greenwich. The CPF had also grown, and joined the younger folks at Silver Lake for retreats, and at Thanksgiving and Christmas for parties. Wonderful lay advisors to Sally were Anne Scharfenstein, Bob Fortunato, Rick Woodman, and John and Lynne Lehman, all of whom contributed to the success of our youth program. Even more help came from the SPF Task Force, parents of 10th, 11th and 12th graders, with special help from Mary Nee, Linda and Chuck Hotetz. The Senior High Parents Roundtable discussion group was initiated by the Task Force, to discuss issues of concern with other parents.

Since 1987 the SPF has worked each spring vacation at Homeworkers Organized for More Employment (H.O.M.E.) Co-op in Orland, Maine, building houses and doing other projects for them and the rural poor. These trips meant a lot to the young people and influenced them the rest of their lives. The SPF performed shows to raise money for the trip. Some young people gave up trips to Europe or the Virgin Islands, saying they had to go to H.O.M.E. Usually around 25 to 30 young people went. Later, the H.O.M.E.

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<sup>1</sup> oral history with Sally Colegrove

community started bringing their crafts here in November.

In 1989 the group took a trip to Turkey for One Great Hour of Sharing. Sally was on a sabbatical leave that summer. Major helpers were Susie and Brad Craig, Nancy and John Ziac, Anne Scharfenstein, Phoebe Griffith, Rick Woodman and Laurie Murray. Annie Scharfenstein, who had run the JPF for six years, left to get married in 1991, so “Ranger”



Rick Woodman took it over and kept the JPF program strong. By 1999 we had well over 120 young people involved in four fellowship groups and one support group.

Another thing that was wonderful, starting in the mid 90's, some of our very early kids who had been through the program returned to Greenwich after college and began to be advisors. People like Annie Sharfenstein, Clem Lepoutre, Holly and Laurie Tubbs, Pam Sheehy, and Marcia Weil, and around 2000, Will Bonnell and Devon Simpson, in 2002, Jenn Lepoutre, in 2003 Josh Ziac, and in 2011, Donald Haviland. These were very important role models for the young people who were in the program because they showed that it was possible to leave Greenwich, go away to college, come back and again find life in Greenwich.

Our Confirmation program was unique. We did not just purchase a curriculum. There was much more of a diverse population here so it was really important that we address Judaism and Islam, and both biblical history and the components of faith and with a large component of mission and service and outreach. We needed to make our Confirmation program really prepare our 9th graders for adulthood.

There always were two pastors teaching Confirmation with one or two lay advisors. The person who really was the rock as a lay advisor was Rick Woodman. Rick had taught the Confirmation program at First Church for well over 25 years. That was a very important function because he brought a deep love of the congregation and a lot of experience to his work with Confirmation. He passed away unexpectedly late in 2015 when he was Senior Deacon and is greatly missed.

One year Sally met with the Confirmation Class and said: “You decide the mission trip. Any place in the world that you want to go, we’ll go.” They said they wanted to go to the Holy Land. She said: “OK, then we’ll go to the Holy Land.” Interestingly, pretty soon their families and other people in the church were saying that they’re going, too. Tom Stiers and Susie Craig were the leaders on the bus of adults and Sally was the leader on the bus of young people.

Year 2000 was the big Holy Land trip where 78 people from First Church including 24 senior highs, spent nine days following the path of Jesus Christ in Galilee, Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem and even a night at the Dead Sea. It was life changing for all

those teenagers who went. Several of them have gone into the ministry. Many of the others are active in churches even though they now are in their thirties. It was a great experience of education and worship and faith development.

The senior highs listened to the Sermon on the Mount on Mt. Beatitude, took communion near the Garden Tomb, sang on a boat on the Sea of Galilee and walked the Via Dolorosa.

Barbara Norrgard recalled their tour guide saying, “Look over at that hill and imagine a huge army there with a very big leader. Now look over at the opposite hill and picture a small group led by a young man with a slingshot in his hand.” The impact of the David and Goliath story was palpable!

The SPF went many times to Honduras to visit our mission projects in Pinalejo, Subirana and San Pedro Sula.

From 2002 through 2005 there was quite a bit of turnover in youth leadership on the staff. James Ebert left for new duties at Yale Divinity School in 2002, and Aaron Sinay went from being a deacon to being Director of Middle School Ministries. The biggest loss was in 2003 when Sally Colegrove left, accepted a call to be Senior Pastor at Windham Hill United Church of Christ in Windham, Maine. Sally grew up in our church and brilliantly led the youth ministry from 1978 to 2003 - 25 years! Aaron Sinay also left in 2003. Rev. M. Ashley Grant was hired to lead the JPF and Pastors’ Class and Josh Ziac became the leader of SPF. In 2004 seminarian Kelly Stone became our new SPF and CPF coordinator, but when she left, Anna Paskausky was the SPF Coordinator. Then in 2005, Debbie Bocchino, past SPF Advisor and Preschool and Day Camp Counselor, accepted the position of JPF Coordinator.

Our 2006 Confirmation class of 21 students represented eight different high schools. H.O.M.E. honored Susie and Brad Craig for their long and outstanding commitment to them. Sadly for us, Susie Craig left in 2007 to work in Maine after working with our youth for 19 years (since 1988)! Anna Paskausky left then as well. Josh Ziac stepped in but soon had to leave as well. From 2007 to 2010 Debbie & Steve Crawford led the SPF



Service at the new Subirana, Honduras, clinic, 2006

and JPF. Mark Montgomery joined the staff in 2008 and did much to lead the Youth Ministry in many artistic and creative ways for the next seven years. Mark led the Senior High Youth trip to Honduras again in 2009. They worked through the United Church of Christ's mission program and partnered with the Solidarity program in Tegucigalpa. Most of their work time was spent in El Guaylo, a remote village close to Nicaragua. The village had no running water or electricity, but the village members had a wonderful spirit and pride in their community. Our group assisted the villagers with providing access to fresh water and the building of a community center for educational, spiritual and community organizing purposes.

The Senior High Youth next traveled to Guatemala in 2010. Fifteen youth and three adults based in Guatemala City traveled to other towns and villages to paint, work in medical clinics, lead after-school programs and experience the rich culture.

Also in 2010 we began having Youth scripture readers and leaders in Worship.

Fellow collegiate Donald Haviland coordinated the CPF in 2010. He led the SPF from 2012 to 2016, and later worked with the Junior High group.

In 2015 the Confirmation Class contributed to the church's 350th anniversary video produced by Gary Lico by holding interviews with church members who had been members for 50 years or more. The 2015 SPF mission trip to West Virginia with the Appalachia Service Project showed our young people that poverty is in America, too.

One of our 1989 seminarians, Bruce Graham, remarked, "It is very exciting to see that the Church can make a place for the people who are often its forgotten members: adolescents and young adults in college. When I was that age, particularly in college, someone like Sally reached out to me at a very important time in my life." We are so grateful to all these fine people who have helped and educated our young people in so many ways over the years.

## **Mission Trips**

### **Year   Destination**

### **Travelers**

1987-2006 H.O.M.E., Orland, Maine

SPF, Advisors

1969 Elon Home for Children, Decoy, Kentucky

Youth, Advisors

1972 Hindman Settlement School, Decoy, Kentucky

Youth, Advisors

1973 Hindman Settlement School, Decoy, Kentucky

Youth, Advisors

1980 Appalachia South Folklife Center, Pipestem, WV

Youth, Sally Colegrove, Advisors

1982 St. Luke's Community Center, Stamford, CT

Youth, Sally, Advisors

1984 Appalachia South Folklife Center, Pipestem, WV

Youth, Sally, Advisors

1988 Honduras and Turkey

Sally, Tom and adults

1989 Turkey

one youth, five adults

1995 Hungary

SPF, Sally, Advisors

1997 Honduras

SPF, Sally, Advisors

1998 Honduras

SPF, Sally, Advisors

2001 Honduras, San Pedro Sula and Pinalejo

SPF, Sally, Advisors

2002 Honduras

SPF, Sally, Advisors

2004 Honduras

SPF, Susie Craig, Advisors

2006 Honduras

SPF, Sally, Advisors

2007 Tegucigalpa, Honduras	SPF, Susie, Debbie Bocchino, Advisors
2008 Honduras	SPF, Mark Montgomery, Advisors
2009 Honduras, Nicaragua	SPF, Mark, Advisors
2010 Guatemala	SPF, Mark, Advisors
2011 Belize	SPF, Mark, Advisors
2012 Panama	SPF, Mark, Advisors
2013 Nicaragua	SPF, Mark, Advisors
2014 Nicaragua	SPF, Mark, Advisors
2015 Nicaragua	SPF, Mark, Advisors

### **Youth Shows (fundraisers for many of the mission trips)**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Show Name and Type</u></b>	<b><u>Director</u></b>
1969	“Hello M” – original musical	Bill Comeau
1970	“1984”	Alan Johnson
1971	“JB”	Alan Johnson
1980	“The Rainbow Connection” – SPF musical revue	Sally Colegrove
1981	“Happiness Is!” – SPF musical revue	Sally Colegrove
1982	“Through Children’s Eyes” – SPF musical revue	Sally Colegrove
1984	“The Next Step” – SPF musical revue	Sally Colegrove
1986	“Here I Am!” – SPF musical revue	SPF & CPF Members
1986	“Godspell” – SPF	Sally Colegrove
1988	“Walk Forever by My Side” – youth musical revue	Sally Colegrove
1990	“The Best of Friends” – SPF original show	Sally Colegrove
1992	“Homeward Bound” – SPF original show	Sally Colegrove
1994	“Godspell” – SPF	Sally Colegrove
1996	“Come Together” – youth musical revue	Sally Colegrove
1998	“The Road Less Traveled” – youth musical revue	Sally Colegrove
2000	“Godspell” – SPF	Sally Colegrove
2001	“You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown” – youth	Sally Colegrove
2002	“Seize the Day” – youth musical revue	Sally Colegrove
2003	“Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” – youth	Sally Colegrove
2004	“The River Runs Through Us” – youth musical revue	Larry Welch
2005	“Godspell” – SPF	Larry Welch
2006	“Rock for Honduras” benefit concert – local bands	Mark Montgomery
2011	“Cabaret” - dinner & auction – youth and adults	Mark Montgomery
2015	“You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown” – youth	Donald Haviland
2016	“The Best Talent Show Ever” – youth	Donald Haviland



## ∞ CHAPTER EIGHT

# Anniversaries

### 1990: The 325th Anniversary Year

#### April

**8** - Palm Sunday. Speaker: U.S. Representative Christopher Shays

**20-22, 27-28** - Performances of *Our Town*, directed by George Fisk

**23** - House of Worship Tour, sponsored by Council of Churches & Synagogues and Church Women United.

#### May

**20** - Music Sunday. Special Guest: Dave Brubeck

**21** - Vintage Dress Fashion Show. Women's Fellowship / Rummage Room

**27** - Heritage Sunday, 50-Year Member Recognition. Nancy Mosshammer Neuman<sup>1</sup>, preacher

#### June

**17** - Sermon "The Church and Its Mission", Shelby Rooks, Exec. Vice President of United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, UCC

#### July

**4** - Town of Greenwich Parade. First Church Float, created by the SPF

**8** - Founders Day, Harry Adams<sup>2</sup> of Yale, Preacher

**15** - Townwide Interfaith Service, Roger Sherman Baldwin Park. Retired Bishop Brad Hastings, preacher

**18** - Town of Greenwich Founders' Day Concert

**21** - Town of Greenwich Harbor Fireworks. Tall Ships in the harbor

#### September

**9** - Dr. Paul Sherry, President of the UCC, preacher

**16** - Homecoming Picnic

**22** - "Our Town" Art Show, Old Greenwich Art Society

#### October

**21** - Festival Worship Services / Stewardship, Dr. Paul Yinger<sup>3</sup>, preaching

**28** - Festival Worship Services / Stewardship

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<sup>1</sup> Daughter of our Senior Pastor from 1935-1941, Alden S. Mosshammer

<sup>2</sup> Our Interim Pastor, 1973-1976

<sup>3</sup> Our Pastor, 1973-1976

## November

18 - Harvest Sunday

21 - Interfaith Worship Service, Thanksgiving Eve at First Church

25 - Festival Worship Service, led by Revs. R. Alan Johnson, our Associate Pastor 1969-1972 and Marti Swan

## December

31 - Ringing Out the Greenwich 350th Year

# 2015-2016: The 350th Anniversary Year

By Pat Mendelsohn

The 350th Anniversary Celebration began on May 10, 2015, exactly 350 years after May 11, 1665, when the Connecticut General Assembly ruled that “... *Greenwich shalbe a Township intire of itself, provided they procure and maintaine an Orthodox minister...*.” First Church provided the minister and the rest, as they say, is history.

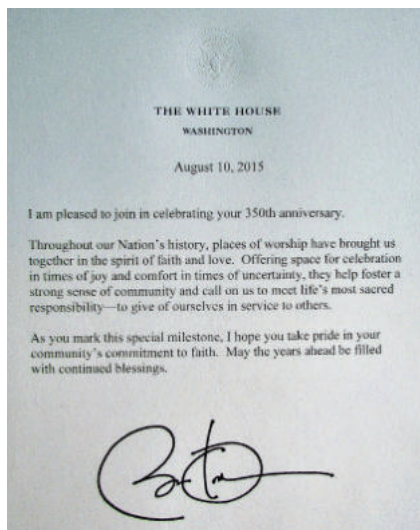
The Opening Celebration on May 20 was a spectacular worship service packed with history and the music of multiple choirs, hand bells and soloists. The Meetinghouse was “Standing Room Only.” Three generations of the Thalheim family carried specially designed banners representing First Church past, present and future.

Many special guests attended including the UCC Conference Minister, Rev. Dr. Michael Ciba, elected officials from state and local government: State of Connecticut Senator Scott Frantz and Representatives Michael Bocchino and Alfred Camillo, and former Representative and long-time church member, Lile Gibbons. The Hon. Michael Bocchino read a Proclamation from the Connecticut General Assembly recognizing our milestone anniversary. In addition, President Barack Obama sent a congratulatory letter. A festive reception on the front lawn followed the spirit-filled worship service.

The yearlong celebration ran from May 2015 through April 2016. Planning began with monthly meetings starting in September 2014. The committee, chaired by Pat Mendelsohn, represented a cross-section of the congregation. Together with the participation of our newly arrived Senior Pastor, Richard DenUyl, Music Director Craig Symons, associate pastors and staff, the committee of 25 provided broad input into ways to mark



Joe McBride as a Tithing Man



the historic occasion. Working groups within the committee met independently to focus on specific aspects of the celebration.

The first order of business was identifying a vision—a vision that would deepen the understanding of our story, enrich our spirit, provide opportunities for fellowship and fun within our congregation and engage the greater community:



Pat Mendelsohn, Chair, at the lectern

Honoring the Past  
Celebrating the Present  
Leaning Into the Future

The 350th Anniversary Celebration was not to be just a series of events but an opportunity for reflection, celebration and re-dedication throughout the anniversary year. The goal was to go beyond the church walls and emphasize that First Church is important to the community as a meeting place, as a focal point, and as a place for spiritual nourishment... a church that welcomes all and reaches out to our neighbors in need.

Through a comprehensive communications plan, we let it be known First Church had been here for 350 years, yet First Church was gearing up for the next century. Meg Sherman designed the 350th logo that conveyed this idea: We are an old solid church...ever faithful...but we are solidly in the 21st Century...ever present.



Large banners with the 350th Anniversary logo were mounted on the church building on the Sound Beach Avenue side and at the office entrance. Decorative banners also hung in the Meeting-house for the entire year. How festive it all looked! The anniversary events received excellent media coverage in the local newspapers—oftentimes on the front page—on the radio and in Greenwich Magazine. Chris Moore created a 350th Anniversary brochure, and Gary Lico produced a multimedia presentation that captured our past, present and future with images, music and voices.



**To honor the past...** An Addendum to “The First 300 Years 1665-1995” was commissioned. Pat Larrabee and a team of writers and researchers convened to record the last 50 years of First Church history. We compiled memories from senior members. We heard a First Church Flashback (a nugget from our history) every Sunday morning. We hosted a historical tour of our famous stained glass windows and both the main and Tomac cemeteries. We actively participated with the Town of Greenwich’s 375th Anniversary of its settlement in 1640 and helped the Town’s residents appreciate the role of First Church in its history.

**To celebrate the present...** Through music, arts, speakers, parades and parties, our families and the community enjoyed the fellowship and fun that makes us First Church. The detailed celebration calendar is below.

**To lean into the future**... We carried out a successful Capital Campaign, raising \$1.7 million, to make significant improvements in and around our church home. We designated \$350,000 (\$1,000 for every year we were a church) for outreach to serve “the least of these, our brethren” locally and beyond. Of that amount, we made a lead gift of \$250,000 to Inspirica in nearby Stamford towards a new building offering “deeply affordable” housing to address homelessness in our area. The balance would support youth-directed Outreach and other First Church sponsored service projects, giving us resources to have even greater hands-on impact in the communities around us.

The 350th Anniversary Celebration ended with a soul-stirring worship service on April 24, 2016 featuring exceptional music as we shifted our focus to the future. Over 100 members of all ages from the First Church family contributed to the Time Capsule, which is to be opened in 2065 on the 400th Anniversary of First Church. The Time Capsule was filled with messages to the future congregation in the form of letters and drawings, artifacts (Jerusalem cross, safety goggles from SPF trip to Appalachia, a prayer shawl, custom designed box of 350th Anniversary crayons), books, 350th video, photographs, memorabilia from 350th events and other historically interesting documents. Filling the Time Capsule was a moving climax to the celebration. A festive fellowship brunch followed the service in the Auditorium that was transformed using the 350th logo colors.

The 350th Anniversary Celebration touched so many from our youngest children to our Heritage members. It was an extraordinary year. Whether one worked on the Anniversary Celebration Committee, helped out with one or more of the activities (countless hands were involved in the Lobster Roll luncheon, the parades, hospitality for speakers and other events), contributed to the Capital Campaign or simply participated in the fun, the congregation was brought together in a new and meaningful way. In the end, the 350th Anniversary Celebration proved to be a united effort and a uniting experience for all.

## **350th Anniversary Celebration Calendar & Activities, 2015-2016**

### **May**

**10** - Opening Celebration of the 350th Anniversary.

**16** - Neighborhood Tour, a slide show talk led by Pat Larrabee to kick off the Neighborhood Tours for the Town of Greenwich 375th Anniversary. Tamara Ng-Yow also talked about our chapel stained glass windows. Over 125 people attended the presentation.

**25** - Memorial Day Parade featured the 350th float, First Church Through the Years, with singers dressed in costumes from different eras. Music Director Craig Symons played the keyboard with white wig and black robe. A team of 10 people carried two pews out of the Meetinghouse and fastened them to a flatbed truck for a ride down Sound Beach Avenue.



### **July**

**19** - “Old Tyme” Founders Day—a re-creation of a 17th Century service that opened with the sound of a conch shell calling us to worship! A delicious lobster roll luncheon,

prepared by our own Rev. Richard DenUyl, and assisted by his wife Barbara and daughter Sophie, followed the service. This new event was a wonderful mid-summer gathering for the congregation and brought many from church and community together. Some church historical items were on display as well.



## September

**27** - The First Church 350th float went on the road again for the Town of Greenwich 375th Gala Parade. As the float traveled down Greenwich Avenue, viewers happily joined in singing the hymns our “mobile choir” led.



## October

**24** - Pumpkins, Pizza & Prose was a fun gathering for children of all ages. A pizza truck parked outside the Auditorium and provided tasty custom pizzas for the pumpkin carvers. Afterwards, everyone moved to the Meetinghouse for storytelling by Ms. Karen.

Our 350th Anniversary float

**25** - Sunday worship service featured a multimedia presentation, produced by Gary Lico, capturing our church past, present and future through voices, images and music.

## November

**1** - Special All Saints’ Day Service—Our Confirmation class read “Voices from the Past” to the Meetinghouse. A smoke machine created an appropriately eerie atmosphere.

**22** - Harvest Sunday—The congregation responded resoundingly to meet our goal of collecting 350 bags of food for distribution to the local food pantries.

## January 2016

**20** - Women’s Fellowship Afternoon Tea had Pat Larrabee’s talk on “Women in the History of FCCOG”.

## April 2016

**24** - 350th Anniversary Closing Celebration.

## The Rev. Dr. Brenda J. Stiers Memorial Speaker Series

**May 17** - Dr. Maryan Ainsworth, Curator of European Paintings, Metropolitan Museum of Art: *Saints and Relics*

**October 3** - Dr. Heidi Hadsell and Dr. Feryal Salem: *Can We Get Along? A Christian/Muslim Dialog*

**November 14** - Rev. Dr. Serene Jones and Dr. Robert Johnson: *Prophets & Profits, Economics and Theology in Today’s World*

**December 6** - Jim Ziolkowski: *Faith and Mission*

**February 21, 2016** - Gregory E. Sterling, Dean and Professor of New Testament, Yale Divinity School: “When ‘Neighbor’ is the ‘Other’”

**Additional activities:** Each Sunday, readers presented a *First Church Flashback*. The Crayola Company donated 350 boxes of “First Congregational Church of Greenwich” cray-



ons in honor of their founder, Edwin Binney, and his place in our church history. A uniquely designed brass ornament, thanks to the efforts of Wendy and Harlan Reynolds, was created. It reproduced the stained glass Christmas panel from the Chancel window. Proceeds from the sale went to the 350th Capital Campaign.

Several events connected to the anniversary took place in the weeks just prior to the official launch:

- The annual **Spring Festival of the Arts** ran from May 1-3 and featured outstanding concerts and an art display from members of the Art Society of Old Greenwich.
- First Church Preschool students planted a tree on Earth Day, April 22, 2015 to commemorate the 350th Anniversary. Sam Bridge Nurseries donated the tree. Each child participated by adding a shovel full of soil to fill the hole in which the tree was planted. It was a beautiful day and a perfect, simple beginning to our 350th celebration—honoring the past, celebrating the present and leaning into the future—replacing a treasured tree lost the prior year, enjoying the children’s participation and looking forward to the growth of the lovely new Rosebud Cherry “Autumnalis” tree outside the Memory garden wall.
- On Sunday, May 3, 2015, a long tradition, started by former Music Director Richard Vogt and continued by his successor John Stansell, was revived with a **Maypole Dance** on the front lawn of the church. The children were the real stars as they skipped in joy weaving 20-foot long silk ribbons around the Maypole on a spectacular spring morning.



### The 350th Anniversary Celebration Committee

Pat Mendelsohn, Chair	Dr. Craig Symons, Director of Music
Rev. Richard DenUyl, Senior Pastor	Elaine Teeters, Senior Deacon
Rosemary Lamie, Director of Family Ministries	

### Subcommittees

#### Capital Campaign

Pat Geismar, Chair  
 Richard DenUyl  
 Pat Mendelsohn  
 Chris Moore  
 Cara Olmsted  
 Erna Olson  
 Ken Olson  
 Wendy Reynolds

#### Speakers

Chris Hartwell, Co-Chair  
 Richard DenUyl, Co-Chair

#### Communications

Meg Sherman, Chair  
 Gary Lico  
 Pat Mendelsohn  
 Chris Moore  
 Cara Olmsted  
 Barbara Wilkov

#### History

Pat Larrabee, Chair  
 Rosemary Lamie  
 Tad Larrabee

#### Events

Judy Gordon, Chair  
 Art Delmhorst  
 Shirley Flierl  
 Frosty Friedman  
 Lisa Hudson  
 Betsy Kreuter  
 Mary Lennon  
 Craig Symons







# Appendix





## Pastors since 1665






We are blessed to have such a long congregational history. The pastors in bold font stayed 10 years or more. Our church records burned in 1895, so much information before then is missing.






### Senior Pastors








Pastor	From-To	Notes
Eliphalet Jones	1669-1673	He attended Harvard College. He shared his time with other churches.
	1673-1678	Several pastors were called in this time period, but never came.
<b>Jeremiah Peck</b>	1678-1689	 He was one of the “27 Proprietors of 1672” of the Town of Greenwich. He served for 11 years as our first settled minister. He refused to baptize the children of non-professors and was dismissed in 1689. (The Half-Way Covenant Dispute.)
Abraham Pierson, Jr.	1691-1694	 (1641-1707) He graduated from Harvard College in 1668, assisted his father in his ministry, and later became the first Rector of Yale College in 1701.
Salmon Treat	1696-1696	(1672-1762) Every 3rd Sunday in 1696 he also held services at the 2nd Congregational Church. It was created in 1705. (1)
Joseph Morgan	1697-1700	(1671- ca 1742) He graduated from Yale in 1702. He was in the first class at Yale, and was the only one there who did not also take his degree at Harvard. He was licensed to preach in 1697, and ordained in 1700. He also ran a mill in town, which people felt was too distracting for him.
Nathaniel Bowers	1701-1710	(ca 1669-1712) He was paid in land east of the Mianus River.

John Jones	1710-1711		He remained for seven months and later sued the society for his salary. (1)
Richard Sackett	1712-1717		(1688-1727) He graduated with honors from Yale College in 1709, studying for the ministry. He and his family moved in 1717 to Horseneck (west Greenwich), where he was ordained and preached at the Second Society (now Second Congregational Church). He was kind, mild and well loved.
<b>Ephraim Bostwick</b>	1733-1746		(1706-1755) He was a graduate of Yale College, Class of 1729. He was called to settle at the First Church in Greenwich, December 23, 1734, and again September 5, 1735. On October 8th, 1735, he was ordained there by the Fairfield West Association. He left for Stamford, where he died in February or March 1755. (1)
In 1755, the church had been without a pastor for nearly nine years and was unable to settle and support one among them. The Associated Pastors of the Churches of Christ in the Western District in Fairfield County brought the matter before the General Assembly, and it was proposed to annex this parish to the Parish of Horseneck (now Greenwich). A committee was appointed to view the state and circumstances of each of said parishes, and the matter was amicably settled and the two parishes were allowed to continue as before. (1)			
Ebenezer Davenport	1763-1769		(1732 – 1773) He was ordained in our church in 1767. Before he came, Greenwich had to repair the parsonage and collect rates to support him. He is buried in Tomac Historic Burying Ground.
Blackleach Burritt	1779-1779		(1744 – 1794) He graduated from Yale in 1765. He was installed as the pastor here in early 1779. He strongly advocated for the American cause during the Revolutionary War, was captured on June 18, 1779, and imprisoned in New York City for about 14 months.
<b>Robert Morris</b>	1785-1794		(1751-1794) He settled in Greenwich, and was given a stipend, a house and firewood. He was a bachelor, and lived with his mother in the parsonage. He is buried in Tomac Historic Burying Ground.
Abner Benedict	1794-1796		(1740-1818) He graduated from Yale in 1769, and in 1771 was ordained and became pastor in Middlefield parish, CT, for 14 years. He influenced all members of his church to free their slaves. (Photo courtesy of the Benedict Family Tree.)

Platt Buffett	1796-1797		(1764-1850) He graduated from Yale in 1791. In 1797 he preached 1/3 time here and 2/3 at Stanwich Congregational.
Mr. Simons	1797-1797		He preached half time for a while.
Abner Benedict	1797-1800		(See his 1794 listing, above.)
Samuel Sturges	1800-1807		(1770-1845) He graduated from Yale in 1787. He had also preached in Bethel, CT.
Mark Mead	1807-1808		(1782-1864) He graduated from Yale in 1802. Acting pastor.
Simon Backus	1808-1809		(1738-1823) He graduated from Yale in 1759. Acting pastor.
<b>John Noyes</b>	1810-1824		He served 14 years here, after serving 23 years in Weston, CT. He wrote a new Confession of Faith and Covenant.
<b>Charles Frederick Butler</b>	1824-1835		(1790-1866) He graduated from Yale.
Thomas Payne	1836-1842		(1804-1852) He came to America from Ireland when he was 26. He was originally Methodist. He helped grow the church here to 60 members. The old parsonage was on Arch Street, Riverside.
<b>S. B. S. Bissell</b>	1842-1853		(1812-1894) He graduated from Yale and Princeton Theological Seminary. He was a missionary among slaves in the south, and then served here 11 years in the wave of Puritanism. By 1850, he preached both at our church and at the Mission Chapel, later called the North Mianus Congregational Church. In 1853 he drew a map of "Old Greenwich and Vicinity" and was our first church historian. He also cataloged all households in the area.
<b>William Albert Hyde</b>	1854-1864		(1805-1874) He graduated from Amherst College and Andover Theological Seminary. He brought in 35 new members. He championed the causes of temperance and freeing the slaves. He also split his preaching with our church and the Mission Chapel, like S.B.S. Bissell.
William F. Arms	1864-1866		Acting pastor.
William P. Hammond	1867-1872		(1831-1888) The Meetinghouse and parsonage were repaired during his years. He is buried in our main cemetery with his wife and other Hammond family members.

John S. Bayne	1873-1875		(1842-1915) During this time, 26 new members joined, new horse sheds were built, a Sabbath School library was created and the cemetery was enlarged.
Granville W. Nims	1876-1878		(1848-1925) He was a graduate of Amherst College and Union Theological Seminary. More new horse sheds were built, a new organ was installed and the church got a new roof.
Frank S. Child	1879-1881		(1854-1922) He resigned due to impaired health, which was accepted with sorrow and regret. He wrote a history of the church in Greenwich, Historical Discourses, published in 1879 and 1895. By 1917 he was president of the Fairfield Historical Society.
H. Martin Kellogg	1882-1886		(1851-1911) He graduated from Dartmouth, with theological training at Princeton and Union Theological Seminary. There were more improvements to the church building and grounds during his years.
Albert W. Lightbourne	1886-1888		(1858-1916) He began a Musical and Literary Association in the church.
Albert E. Kinmouth	1889-1892		(1846-1928) Church membership was now 85, with 105 in Sabbath School and 13 teachers. They built a new barn and bought 60 new hymnals.
A. Lincoln Shear	1892-1894		(1860- ) He was a young, forceful and evangelical speaker. The Meetinghouse building was getting shabby and there was controversy about a possible new church building on the corner of Sound Beach Avenue and Grimes Lane, south of the village. He and about 40 parishioners left and formed the Pilgrim Congregational Church in 1894, which later became the Presbyterian Church.
<b>DeWitt C. Eggleston</b>	1894-1910		(1849-1939) He did much good in mending the rift in the congregation and helped with the building of the new stone church and the 3-day celebration of the church's 225th anniversary. He and his wife selected the Lamb Studios for creating the stained glass windows now in our north Transept. He is buried in our cemetery.


Thomas Relyer	1910-1911		Interim pastor.
<b>Lewis W. Barney</b>	1911-1927		(1864-1951) He was a graduate of City College and Union Theological Seminary with a doctorate from New York University. He formed the Men's Club. There was a weeklong celebration of the church's 250th Anniversary in 1920.
Allan I. Lorimer	1927-1934		(1902-1980) He was a graduate of Amherst College and Union Theological Seminary. He was energetic and grew the church. He helped found the local Lions Club, the Greenwich Historical Society and was Grand Chaplain of the Masonic Lodge in CT. He suggested to Mrs. Binney to buy the swamp across the street and convert it into a park. In 1930 we gained the June Binney Memorial parish house, and the chimes to the bell tower, donated by the Stewart family.
Robert W. McLaughlin	1934-1935		Interim pastor for five months.
Alden S. Mosshammer	1935-1941		(1907-1975) He was a Phi Beta Kappa, cum laude graduate of Amherst College and a magna cum laude graduate of Union Theological Seminary. He worked on youth activities and community work in town (Boy Scouts, YMCA, Greenwich Community Chest and Old Greenwich Lions Club), plus state and county Congregational committees. He put the church on a sound financial basis.
William S. Beard	1941-1942		Interim pastor for a few months.
<b>Vincent H. Daniels</b>	1942-1963		(1905-1963) Dr. Daniels graduated from Marietta College and was head of his 1933 class at Yale Divinity School, getting his PhD there in 1939 as Dwight Hooker Fellow. He taught English and Medieval History for a year at Marietta College, which gave him an honorary doctorate in 1953. He increased the congregation to more than 2,000 members during his 21 years. The church school went from 300 to 1,200 students during his time, with 150 teachers. He is buried in our main cemetery.
Harry B. Adams	1963-1964		He graduated from Yale College in 1947 and the Yale Divinity School in 1951, and has been a professor at the Yale Divinity School. He filled in as interim pastor for the months after Dr. Daniels died.

Francis E. Potter	1964-1972		Duke Potter helped the church celebrate its 300th anniversary from its charter date of 1665. The church bought a new parsonage for him at 22 Watch Tower Lane in 1964.
L. Alexander "Zan" Harper	1972-1973		(1925-2007) Interim Pastor for six months. He graduated from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and Yale Divinity School. He brought Dr. Herman Reissig as his Associate Pastor.
Paul W. Yinger	1973-1976		(1914-1992) He was a graduate of DePauw University and Union Theological Seminary. Dr. Yinger was a nationally known preacher and thinker.
<b>Thomas L. Stiers</b>	1977-2003		Tom began as an Associate pastor in 1974 under Paul Yinger, then was named senior pastor when Dr. Yinger left. From 1970 to 1975 Tom was adjunct professor at Yale Divinity School. Tom initiated the Pastor's Advisory Committee at our church. The columbarium was added and a new organ was purchased. Tom began a parish nurse position and we adopted a policy of Open and Affirming. He is now Pastor Emeritus.
Ralph Ahlberg	2003-2005		Interim Pastor. He's a graduate of Hartford Seminary M. Divinity and D. Ministry; served congregations in Rockville Centre, NY, Garden City, NY (from 1973 to 1987) and 11 years at Round Hill Community Church in Greenwich, CT. Staff positions with New York Conference, United Church of Christ. Presently trustee at Hartford Seminary. He retired in 1998.
David D. Young	2005-2012		David earned his BA in Religious Studies at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, and has a Master of Divinity at San Francisco Theological Seminary. He also has a doctorate from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. He initiated seven types of Mission Teams, Wonderful Wednesdays, the idea for linc service and reactivated the Historical Committee.
John P. Collins	2012-2014		Interim Pastor. John has been a settled pastor and an interim pastor. He led Lordship Community Church, a United Church of Christ church in Stratford, CT, for 21 years. Beginning in 2001, he began intentional interim ministry



and has served through transitions at four UCC churches in Connecticut. From February 2011 to April 2012, he was Interim Senior Minister at Monroe Congregational Church. He also served in that role at First Congregational Church of Southington; Huntington Congregational Church, in Shelton; and First Congregational Church of Watertown.

Richard S. DenUyl, Jr.
2014-current






Richard earned his B.A. in business and religion at Hope College in Holland, MI and his Masters of Divinity at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. After seminary, Richard worked for several years as a psychological crisis counselor for three towns in the New Haven, CT area. He started his ministry at Westhampton Presbyterian Church, NY, as a youth minister and then served at Norfield Congregational Church in Weston, CT as an Interim Associate Pastor before being called to be Senior Pastor at The United Congregational Church of Little Compton, RI in 1993.

- Sources:*
- (1) Ye Historie of Ye Town of Greenwich, County of Fairfield and State of Connecticut by Spencer Percival Mead
  - (2) All other information up to 1965 is from The First Three Hundred Years, The History of The First Congregational Church of Greenwich, Connecticut.
  - (3) Photos and information from 1965-1990 are from The Last Quarter Century, 1965-1990 by Helen Sickels Allen, 1990.

### Associate and Assistant Pastors

Pastor	From-To	Notes
David Miller Shapleigh, Jr.	1949-1954	(1927-1999) Assistant Pastor
Merton E. Libby	1956-1972	(1911-1995) Associate Pastor
Robert W. Croskery	1959-1960	Associate Pastor
R. Alan Johnson	1969-1972	Associate Pastor

Herman F. Reissig	1972-1985		(1899-1985) Interim Associate Pastor, then Pastor Emeritus
James A. Fung	1973-1976		Assistant Pastor
Ann Suzedell	1976-1977		Interim Associate Pastor
Paul S. Fraser	1977-1980		Associate Pastor
Sarah-Anne "Sally" Colegrove	1978-2003		Assistant Pastor, Associate Pastor, Senior Associate, now Pastor Emeritus
David T. Taylor	1980-1983		Associate Pastor
Dale M. Greene	1980-1989		Associate Pastor
Meg Boxwell Williams	1982-1987		Assistant Pastor and Director of Children's Ministries
William "Bill" C. Hart	1983-1987		Interim Associate Pastor
Dean Ahlberg	1983-1985		Parish Associate. His father is Ralph Ahlberg, our Interim Pastor 2003-2005.

Marie Reed	1987-1988		(1933-2015) Interim Assistant Pastor
David L. Fountain	1988-1990		Associate Pastor
Susan "Susie" M. Craig	1988-2007		Associate Pastor, Senior Associate
Brigitta S. Remole	1989-1992		Assistant Pastor, Associate Pastor
William "Bill" T. Federici	1991-1997		Assistant Pastor
James D. Ebert	1998-2001		Assistant Pastor
M. Ashley Grant	2003-2005		Associate Pastor
Ron E. Halvorsen	2006-2008		(1944-2008) Minister of Pastoral Care
Dan B. England	2007-2014		Associate Pastor
Mark D. Montgomery	2008-2015		Associate Pastor
Kate Forer	2008-2009		Associate Pastor

Avery C. Manchester	2009-present		Minister of Pastoral Care
Susan Murtha	2010-2011		Associate Pastor
Meghan D. Young	2015-2016		Transitional Associate Pastor
Patrick Collins	2016-present		Associate Pastor

## Church History Timeline

### 1600's

- 1656 The first recorded religious services in town were held in the houses of settlers.
- 1664 The 7 Proprietors: Jeffrey Ferris, Senre; Joshua Knapp, Senre; Joseph Ferris, Jonathan Reynolds, Angell Heusted, John Mead and John Hobbe wanted their own church & town separate from Stamford. Church and government were inseparable. They had Congregational values of free choice.
- 1665 May 11 Charter: The church was incorporated by the General Court of the Colony of Connecticut as the First Church of Christ in Greenwich.
- 1667 A newly built schoolhouse became the place of worship as well as a central meeting place.
- 1669 The first pastor was Eliphalet Jones who was shared by other churches.
- 1670 William Grimes willed his land, about 32 acres in Shorelands, for town/church improvements. This was our first endowment. We rented the land for grazing.
- 1678 Jeremiah Peck became the first settled minister.
- 1694 A second new church was built at Tomac and Lockwood Avenue. It was 32 feet long by 26 feet wide.

### 1700's

- 1705 The General Court in Hartford split the Horseneck Society from the "East Society" (our old name), becoming what is now the Second Congregational Church in Greenwich. The dividing line between the two Ecclesiastical Societies was the Mianus River. Before this, both groups shared pastors, causing many years of disputes. Several pastors left due to this.
- 1735 A third two-story wooden building for the church, the Gallery Church, was built on the same spot as the first. Episcopalians helped build this church in return for them being able to hold their services there on Sunday afternoons.

- 1785 Members of the church had to buy a pew space and build their own pew. The Revolutionary War left our town in very bad shape financially.

## 1800's

- 1812 The War of 1812 bypassed Greenwich.  
1816 Sunday School began here.  
1835 A fourth wooden building for the church was built on Sound Beach Avenue, after buying part of the Ebenezer Peck estate property. Our current cemetery was established there as well. This white-pillared building burned down in 1895.  
1835-36 Regular church attendance or you were fined. Attendance was more than a duty – it was a social obligation. Sabbath breaking, intoxication and profanity were causes for excommunication. Due to those rules, for these years only women were members of the church.  
1843 A new parsonage house was built at 106 Sound Beach Ave. The old parsonage on Arch Street, Riverside, was condemned.  
1847 Our church sold some of its land to the new railroad being built.  
1869 Mr. Boulton was hired as Chorister for six months.  
1872 Our part of town changed its name to “Sound Beach” as the railroad brought summer residents.  
1874 Miss Minnie Brush was hired as our first Director of Music for \$50 a year.  
1877 Our first organ cost \$182.24. It was a small parlor-type reed organ. Someone saved it from the 1895 fire by throwing it out the window.  
1890 The church was renamed to “First Congregational Church of Greenwich”. We had 85 members, and 102 children in church school.  
1895-96 The stone Meetinghouse, our fifth, was built for \$21,453.  
1895 The wooden church in the cemetery was destroyed by fire, including church school records and library. Silver, pewter, the organ and piano were saved. People worshipped in the schoolhouse until the stone Meetinghouse was finished.

## 1900's

- 1900 The church bought the McAfee property for enlarging the cemetery.  
1906 The church sold the 32-acre Grimes property for \$31,363 to George A. McIntosh.  
1919 We accepted Hubert Dalton's offer of the house at the corner of Tomac and Forest Ave, as long as we paid to have it moved. The basement was dug and in 1920 the house was moved to “the northeast corner of our property”. It is our parsonage at 11 Forest Ave. Dalton wanted to make room for his new Dalton Tool factory, which later became the Electrolux factory.  
1927 Allan Lorimer became pastor. He helped organize the Lions Club, was Grand Chaplain of Masonic Lodge, CT, and a founding member of the Greenwich Historical Society.  
1928 Edwin Binney, Sr., gave Binney Park to the town. It was swampy mire before.  
1930-1931 The June Binney Memorial Parish House (church offices and auditorium) was built.  
1930 Mr. and Mrs. Robert Stewart gave the 12-bell chimes in the bell tower where there had been only one bell.  
1930 The Women's Guild was founded. It's now called the Women's Fellowship. They have raised a great deal of money for the church and charities.  
1931 Our part of town changed its name from “Sound Beach” to “Old Greenwich”.  
1935 Rev. Alden Mosshammer followed Rev. Lorimer. He worked with the youth group, Boy Scouts, YMCA, Community Chest, Lions Club, Men's Club and put the church on a sound financial basis.

- 1938 Helen Binney Kitchel and the Old Greenwich Garden Club guided the restoration of Tomac Cemetery.
- 1941 Rev. Vincent Daniels became pastor, making the church even more community minded. The church membership grew very large.
- 1943 The traditional Easter sunrise service at Greenwich Point beach began, with the youth group leading it almost continuously to today.
- 1950-62 Pastor Herman Reissig added new dimensions to the church's social consciousness and outreach.
- 1952 The Education wing was added and dedicated. (The current lounge/kitchen/3rd floor/offices) The Meetinghouse was also enlarged to hold 250 people.
- 1952 We bought 15 Forest Ave, the Staby property, as an extra parsonage.
- 1955 Peg Roberts began the Nursery School for 3 and 4 year olds on weekdays. (Later it was renamed the Preschool.)
- 1959 We bought 20 Forest Ave, across the street, as an extra parsonage.
- 1961 Our church became affiliated with the United Church of Christ.
- 1960-62 The Meetinghouse was doubled in size and the pews were rotated 180 degrees. The big chancel window was added, as well as the windows along the chapel and narthex. The undercroft and educational facilities were expanded.
- 1960s Outreach projects were underway to help many others outside our church.
- 1963 Dr. Vincent Daniels died suddenly.
- 1964 The Rummage Room opened, replacing the annual church rummage sale. We bought the 22 Watch Tower Lane parsonage for Rev. Duke Potter.
- 1965 The church's summer day camp began.
- 1965 There was a yearlong celebration of First Church's 300 years.
- 1965 We sold the 20 Forest Ave parsonage.
- 1966 The annual Handel's *Messiah* concert began, directed by Richard Vogt.
- 1966 The Meetinghouse News (later called the Meetinghouse Monthly) began as a bi-monthly.
- 1967 Our church services began being broadcast on WGCH radio. We bought the 5 Deepwoods Lane parsonage for Rev. Libby.
- 1968 The once-every-four-years *Noye's Fludde* production began, directed by Richard Vogt.
- 1970 The youth group began work projects in the local area and in other states and, now, countries.
- 1973 The 9:15 am and 11:00 am services joined into one 10:00 am service and a coffee hour.
- 1973 Recognition Sunday began as an annual event to thank the church school volunteers and staff and give Bibles to the third graders.
- 1973 We sold the Watch Tower and Deepwoods parsonages, and then bought the 22 Shady Brook Lane house for Rev. Yinger.
- 1975 Stephen Ministry originated in Saint Louis. It began at our church in 1990.
- 1975 The first woman, Allie Holmes, became a senior deacon. By 1990 there were still only 2 women who had been senior deacons.
- 1976 Rev. Tom Stiers was promoted to Senior Pastor when Rev. Paul Yinger left.
- 1978 A new Austin organ was installed.
- 1978-2015 Mary Babbidge was Cemetery Administrator and Vital Records Clerk.
- 1979 8:00 am beach services were started in June, July and August.
- 1979 The Columbarium, at the far side of the cemetery, was built to add 1,400 spaces.
- 1980 Rev. Dale M. Greene became our first female non-interim minister.
- 1981 The first Music Sunday in May was held with strawberries & cream and maypole dancing.
- 1988 The Helen B. Kitchel Memory Garden was created – paved and landscaped.
- 1989 The Daniels Center was named and remodeled from the old gym downstairs.



- 1989 The Board of Deacons was merged from the separate Deacons and Deaconesses.
- 1989 Long range planning began (Twelve Keys to an Effective Church).
- 1990 This was the 325-anniversary year of our church and the town's 350th anniversary.
- 1991 50 church families were dealing with unemployment. We housed homeless men in the Daniels Center at our church for two weeks, rotating with other places.
- 1991 Stephen Ministry training began at our church.
- 1991 First Person Singular began at our church.
- 1994 The United Church of Christ Musicians Association (UCCMA) began here with Jayson Engquist as president.
- 1995 Richard Vogt suddenly passed away.
- 1996-2014 George Handley was Business Administrator.
- 1997 Our fccog.org website was launched. By 2007 it has audio sermons and by 2009 audio Bible study classes.
- 1998-2000 Mary Ann McDevitt, RN, BSN, was our first Parish Nurse.

## 2000's

- 2000 70 members and youth of our church went to the Holy Land.
- 2000 Kirk Young was Financial Administrator (until 2014) and Dee Coover, RN, MPH, MSN, took over as Parish Nurse.
- 2001 Donna White began as Senior Administrative Assistant.
- 2002 Rosemary Lamie began as Church School Coordinator with Jenn Lepoutre for two years. Rosemary is now Director of Family Ministries.
- 2003 Our Open and Affirming policy was adopted.
- 2003 Rev. Tom Stiers retired after 29 years with our church.
- 2003 Rev. Sally Colegrove was called as Senior Pastor at Windham Hill, ME.
- 2004 Susan Asselin, RN, took over from Dee Coover as our Parish Nurse.
- 2005 Rev. Dr. David Young was called as Senior Pastor.
- 2006 Ginny Breismeister began as Director of Membership.
- 2007 Rev. Susie Craig was called to the UCC Conference in ME. We sold the 22 Shady Brook Lane parsonage.
- 2007-2014 Rev. Daniel B. England was Minister of Communication and Adult Education.
- 2008-2015 Rev. Mark D. Montgomery was Associate Pastor.
- 2008-2014 Maureen Bruno was Preschool Administrative Assistant.
- 2008 Our first same sex marriage was performed (John Stansell & Michael Pellegrino).
- 2009 Rev. Avery C. Manchester began as Minister of Pastoral Care.
- 2009 New Mission Teams were formed to help in the areas of environmental, hunger, international, literacy, national, shelter and visitation.
- 2010 John Stansell, Minister of Music, retired.
- 2010-2016 Barb Wilkov was Director of Publications.
- 2010 Dr. Craig Scott Symons began as Director of Music/Organist.
- 2011-2013 The 5:00 pm Sunday linc services were held, led by Rev. Mark Montgomery.
- 2012 Darla Kohler began as Preschool Director.
- 2012 Rev. Dr. David Young resigned.
- 2012-2014 Rev. John W. Collins was Interim Senior Pastor.
- 2014 Rev. Richard S. DenUyl, Jr., began as Senior Pastor.
- 2014 Steve Summerton began as Director of Church Administration and Finance.
- 2015 Melanie Garnett began as Preschool Administrative Assistant.
- 2015 We celebrated the 350th anniversary year of our church, from May, 2015, to April, 2016.
- 2016 Vance Briceland became Publication Coordinator.
- 2016 Rev. Patrick Collins began as Associate Pastor.

# Flashbacks

These tidbits of church history were originally called “Fun Facts” and were meant to be icebreakers to be read aloud at the beginning of the 350th Anniversary Committee planning meetings. They were meant only to be fun or interesting. Later we decided to create enough of them so one could be read in church almost every Sunday during the whole 350th Anniversary year. Because not all of them were fun, we renamed them Flashbacks.

## 1600s

- The Tomac Cemetery is on the site of the first settlement of Greenwich. A monument there reads: *“Around this cemetery was the nucleus of the early life of the Town of Greenwich.”*
- In 1694, the first Meetinghouse of our church was located at Tomac and Lockwood Avenues in Old Greenwich. That spot is just south of what are now Innis Arden Golf Club, and a little less than a mile from where our Meetinghouse sits today.
- In the early days of First Church, regular attendance at Sunday services was required for membership in good standing. It was easy to tell who was present because seating in the pews was assigned. Members rented their pews, with those paying the most being seated in the front. Children were seated in the gallery. In addition to paying their pew rents, members were subjected to a fine for each Sunday that they did not attend.
- In 1678 Jeremiah Peck became our first settled pastor. He was one of the “27 Proprietors of 1672” of the Town of Greenwich. He refused to baptize the children of non-professors to the church, according to the General Assembly’s Half-Way Covenant. He left the church in 1689 since several Quaker families refused to pay part of his salary. He was given 40 acres of land that came to be known as “Pecksland.” Today, in mid-country Greenwich, you can drive along Pecksland Road that runs between Round Hill and Riversville Roads.

## 1700s

- In 1705, because the town of Greenwich was getting bigger, the church split into two “Ecclesiastical Societies”, divided by the Mianus River. The “Second Society” became the Second Congregational Church.
- Twenty-three Revolutionary War Veterans are among those lying in Tomac Cemetery (many from the same family). The war severely hurt the whole town. Old Greenwich recovered slower than other neighborhoods.
- Rev. Blackleach Burritt was our senior pastor for only four months in 1779. He delivered passionate sermons in support of the American cause during the Revolutionary War and was arrested by the loyalists and imprisoned in New York for 14 months. He’s our only pastor who has ever been jailed. The British press said he was a “most pestiferous rebel priest and preacher of sedition.”

## 1800s

- The Sunday school first appeared at First Church sometime around 1816. It was very informal, and some members didn’t like the idea very much, but they put up with it because they thought it would keep the kids from getting into trouble while the adults were at the regular church services. Apparently, kids in the 1800’s weren’t too different from kids today -- when left to their own devices, they had a tendency to hang out with friends, run around in the open fields, and pick apples or grapes from neighboring farmlands.

- In 1835 the women of First Church kicked out all the men for swearing, drinking and not attending church every Sunday. There were only nine women at the time! Rev. Thomas Payne began as the new pastor there after he was assured it was proper for him to administer the Lord's Supper to only females and that he could admit new members without help from the church committee (traditionally male). He helped to mend the rifts and stayed for seven years. One influence on the men was Drake Lockwood, who sold rum and "probably made it, too." Men gathered at a place on Shore Road, also known as Hell Street. One man was known as "Old-Cuss-to-Death."
- In 1842 in the church on Sound Beach Avenue, membership was about 60.
- In 1847 our church sold some of its land to the new railroad being built. This transformed the town with many new summer residents, but left less land for our cemetery.
- A formal choir first came into existence in the 1870's. In 1874, Miss Minnie Brush was named director of music at a salary of \$50 for one year.
- The first organ was purchased in 1877 for \$182.24 and was financed by the Ladies Aid Society.
- Early worshipers in First Church followed the Forty Common Tunes. These psalms were sung at a brisk tempo and usually in unison for worship, so that God would not have trouble in understanding the words!
- One of the veterans buried in our church cemetery is Walter H. Cox, who was a soldier in the Union Army during the Civil War. He enlisted in the Connecticut Volunteer Infantry on July 23, 1862, at the age of 18, and served as a corporal in Company B of the 17th Regiment. He was captured on May 19, 1864, in Welaka, Florida, and imprisoned in the dreaded Andersonville Prison in Georgia. He was paroled in November, 1864 and made his way home to Greenwich, but he had been so weakened by his imprisonment that he died six months later, at the age of 20.
- Rev. H. Martin Kellogg, our pastor from 1882-1886, resigned due to his family pressuring him to leave this area because of the swampy bog across the street in what is now Binney Park. There were a few cases of malaria in town in those days and they were scared he might catch malaria from the bog.
- The official name of our church, "The First Congregational Church of Greenwich," was not chosen until 1890. Before that time, the church was referred to in a number of different ways. Initially, it was "the congregation" or "the Meetinghouse" of Greenwich. Then, after the formation of what is now Second Congregational Church, our church was known as the "First Society" or "First Ecclesiastical Society," and later still as the "East Society" or "East Ecclesiastical Society." By the late 1800s, two names were used somewhat interchangeably: "The First Church of Christ in Greenwich" and "The First Congregational Church of Greenwich." In 1890, the latter of these two was adopted as our official name, and has remained so ever since.
- Soon after the opening of our first stone church building in 1895, we also got our first pipe organ. Built by E.W. Lane of Waltham, Massachusetts, and paid for by subscription of the members, it allegedly had workmanship and sound quality far superior to prior organs. The new pipe organ was pumped by hand, and there was a long wooden handle in the basement under the organ for this purpose. The sexton usually managed the job, but at times the boys in the church were pressed into service for this chore. It was a job requiring strict attention and if, on occasion, a small boy became distracted and failed to pump evenly, the organ would begin to groan and die away. The organist would have to tap sharply on the floor to regain the attention of the pumper.
- When the white pillared church in the cemetery burned down on December 7, 1895, among the few things rescued were hymnals, the Mason and Hamlin organ, and a piano. The organ stood on the right side of the pulpit and was rescued through a window on that side, while the piano went out another window.
- The largest bell in our bell tower literally weighs a ton. It's the one that dons the count of the

hours. It was recast from parts of the old bell that had been in our white wooden church building in the cemetery, after that building burned in 1895.

- The main parts of our oldest stained glass window, in the north narthex (rear right of the Meeting-house), were selected by Rev. Dewitt C. Eggleston and his wife around 1895. It is in the Tiffany style but was created by the Lamb Studios. It is a joining of three separate windows in the original stone church, with the head of Christ in the east window (chancel), St. Cecilia and her pipes on the south window (cemetery side) and Jesus at the dinner at Bethany in the north window.
- In the late 1800s, J. Kennedy Tod owned a mansion on what we now call Tod's Point. Even though he was not a church-going man, he became friends with our pastor, Rev. DeWitt Eggleston and his wife, and generously sent them on a trip to Europe! This was sometime between 1894 and 1910.

## 1900s

- Around 1900, several gravestones mysteriously disappeared from the Tomac Burying Ground. Some were later found in the backyard of a Highview Avenue home, where they were to be offered for sale as garden ornaments. Some were never found. The oldest gravestone, that of Gershom Lockwood, who died in 1718, is now held for safe keeping at the Greenwich Historical Society archives.
- One World War I veteran buried in our cemetery is Clifford Henry, who was a handsome Harvard graduate who loved poetry. He was killed in the war. He was engaged at the time to a beautiful Smith College student from Atlanta, GA, named Margaret Mitchell. She went on to write "Gone with the Wind" and it is widely assumed he was her role model for "Ashley" and the love of her life.
- During World War I, times got so hard that the pastors planted a vegetable garden on the church property. It was first located behind the parsonage house at 106 Sound Beach Avenue. Later, when times got even worse, they moved the garden to the front lawn where there was more room.
- In 1927 our regular church attendance was down to about 11-12 people since the senior pastor, Rev. Dr. Barney, was becoming more of a fire-and-brimstone preacher. That didn't sit well with most folks. It was time to find someone new. Our pastor-emeritus Sally Colegrove's grandfather, Ed Grant, was senior deacon at the time as well as Registrar of Columbia University. He went to talk to Henry Sloane Coffin, President of Union Theological Seminary, to find the most talented student there. Coffin said it was Allan Lorimer, but he was only a freshman in a 3-year program and Coffin couldn't let him leave because of that. Ed Grant said, "Dr. Coffin, you're in the Presbyterian Church and we're Congregational and we can do anything we want to." Allan Lorimer came here soon after that.
- The second Sunday that Allan Lorimer preached was Palm Sunday, 1927. The church was packed to overflowing since everyone was anxious to hear the new young pastor who brought with him a fine bass soloist from NYC's Metropolitan Opera, Fred Patton. The Meetinghouse could only hold about 120 people then. People sat and stood out in the cemetery and ushers opened the windows as much as possible so people outside could hear. Lorimer was very nervous and had to speak very loudly. The ushers panicked upon taking the collection since there were only two small collection trays in those days. They borrowed men's derby hats to help take the collection, even from the people outside.
- Rev. Allan Lorimer's wife Mary used to put their baby outside the parsonage at 106 Sound Beach Avenue to nap in his playpen in the sun—totally naked. The church ladies were shocked—what if a young girl came by and saw him!\*
- Rev. Allan Lorimer changed the spelling of his first name from A-l-l-e-n to A-l-l-a-n during the seven years he was pastor here. We're not sure why, but it could be due to deep regard for Allan

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\*Carolyn Grant Colegrove, *Sound Beach* (Musicon Ministries, New Britain, CT, 1990), p. 94.

Kitchel, who stood up for him after his impassioned sermon against the radical and intolerant elements in America then by the KKK and American Legion, and the subsequent cross burning on our church's front lawn. Allan Kitchel had been a colonel in World War I and his friend, Bill Cook, had been a major. In full dress uniform, the two of them confronted the American Legion men in the Senior Pastor's office with Lorimer and got them to apologize. The full story of this is on our website on the Oral Histories webpage.

- Back in the 1930's, Annual Meetings were held in the evening, following a turkey dinner with all the trimmings, prepared by the church ladies. The dinner was cooked and served from the downstairs kitchen, by what is now called the Daniels Center. The upstairs kitchen wasn't built until 1952.
- The Cross Walk on Good Friday and the Sunrise Service on Easter Sunday have been important traditions at First Church for many years. The sunrise beach service at Tod's Point began in 1943, led by the youth of the church. When our youth program became less active for a few years in the early 1950s, we agreed that the Presbyterian Church in Old Greenwich would run the sunrise service at the beach with our help. But we soon reassumed responsibility for the sunrise service. Around that same time, we initiated the Cross Walk on Good Friday, when our youth lead the way carrying a 70-pound wooden cross from our church down through Old Greenwich to the beach.
- In the early 1960's, some Sunday school classes were in the 106 Sound Beach Avenue, the former parsonage. Sally Colegrove's 3rd or 4th grade church school class was held in the dining room. There were French doors that closed and the next oldest grade met in the living room of the parsonage. Rick Woodman's class was behind those French doors.
- In 1957 the United Church of Christ was formed when two Protestant Churches - the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches - united. In January 1961 First Church established a committee to study whether First Church should affiliate with the United Church of Christ. After study, the committee recommended approval of the affiliation and duly called a congregational meeting to vote on the proposal. When the meeting was held on April 18, 1961, less than 50 of the Church's nearly 200 members attended. Although some members argued that such a small number should not make a decision that could significantly affect the church, the affiliation was approved by a vote of 36 to 8 with 2 abstentions. The quorum required at that time was only 20 members.
- Our large stained glass window in the chancel is of a very rare technique called "sculptured gold" by the Willet Studios. The lead between the glass is sculptured to give it a three dimensionality, like a bas-relief, which is then coated with 23 carat gold. This quality gives it a golden glow during nighttime concerts and events. Henry Willet invented that technique only about 10 years before we ordered our chancel window in the early 1960's.
- The first African-American man to sing at our church was a wonderful tenor named Seth McCoy, who sang with us in 1968. He was a postman in Harlem, and was discovered singing in a New York City church and then mentored by our Minister of Music, Richard Vogt. Seth later made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera. His talent was enormous. For many years, Seth came back every time we did *Noye's Fludde*, and he always played the elephant. Seth was a very large man, and the elephant head was made especially for him.
- **Read by Betty Bonsal:** In the late 1970's, I was a deaconess. Yes, in those days we had the board of deacons and the board of the deaconesses. Now – we deaconesses had a few jobs to do: one was to polish the church silver once a year. And another was to wash and store the glass communion cups on the first Sunday of each month after the communion service. In the late 1980's a former member of our church, Karen Watt became a deaconess, but Karen didn't want to be a deaconess, she wanted to be a deacon. She thought there should be one board: the board of deacons, which would incorporate both men and women. So, with the blessings of the other deaconesses, she brought the matter up with the church committee. The church committee agreed and thus was formed just the one board: the Board of Deacons. Now, it wasn't too long

after that that the glass communion cups disappeared and we started using plastic disposable communion cups. That's right – you figure. Oh yes, I have no idea who polishes the church silver these days, but I have a feeling it's not the deacons!

- In the 1980s, a dozen local congregations participated in a shelter for the homeless that rotated locations each week. About every 12 weeks, beds and blankets would arrive at First Church, and the Daniels Center would become a shelter for the next week. Some 60 members of our congregation volunteered their time to operate the shelter.
- Our longtime Associate Pastor, Sally Colegrove, made 25 mission trips over a 25-year period, usually leading youth members of the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship. The first SPF trip was in 1980 to West Virginia. The group returned there the following year and worked with impoverished residents of Appalachia. But Sally wanted our young people to realize there were also desperately poor people here in New England, so she called the Homeland Board of the UCC to see what they suggested. They put her in touch with a group in Maine called “Homeworkers Organized for More Employment” or “H.O.M.E.” for short, and for the next 17 years running the SPF went on a mission trip to H.O.M.E. during the week of April vacation. The group usually numbered 25 to 30 youth and adults.
- When First Church decided to undertake an overseas mission in 1986, Sally initially explored Honduras but felt it was too dangerous to take the young people there. Honduras was in the midst of the Central American wars. Instead, a team of six adults and one teenager went to Ankara, Turkey to investigate mission opportunities. After that, the SPF went to Budapest, Hungary right after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the churches were starting to get their buildings back. Two years later, the church decided to go back to Honduras as there was a hiatus in the wars and the needs were enormous. Subsequently, they did six trips to Honduras with the youth program, the last one with Sally being in 2003.
- Tomac Cemetery is about one acre, is owned by our church and has burials from 1718-1904. It is listed on the State Register of Historic Places. For years before Rev. Dr. Vincent Daniels came, the church forgot that we owned Tomac Cemetery and were responsible for its upkeep. It fell into very bad shape. The garden club rescued it. In 1993 Pat Larrabee created a database of the names of people interred at the Tomac Cemetery. Approximately 49 surnames were on the grave markers, with about 224 named people buried there. For example, there are 41 Lockwoods, 33 Pecks, 27 Ferrises and 14 Fords. Gershom Lockwood is the oldest marked headstone found, dated 1718, but his headstone is at the Greenwich Historical Society archives for safekeeping. The last of the Lockwoods were interred in 1836. The average age of those in the cemetery was 48.
- On October 31, 1998 Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras. (See the Events and Innovations chapter for details.)

## 2000s

- **Read by Olivia Hartwell:** During the 41-year period from 1968 through 2009, our church presented Benjamin Britten's chancel opera Noye's Fludde approximately every four years. It was initiated and directed for the first 30 years by Richard Vogt. This musical telling of the story of Noah's Ark is taken from a medieval mystery play. The cast and orchestra were made up of both professionals and amateurs representing a broad spectrum of our congregation and community. Most of the costumes and scenery were designed, made, and updated over the years by members of our congregation. There were many great performances over the years, but I must say, that, for me, the highlight was in 2005, when an 8-year-old starlet named Olivia Hartwell made her Greenwich modern dance debut as the Dove. After running down the aisle of the Meetinghouse in a costume of feathers and flowing white chiffon, with an olive branch in my mouth, I was hoisted onto Tom Woodman's shoulder as he joyously sang, “It is a Sign of Peace”!
- The town of Greenwich tried to impose a sewer tax on our Tomac Cemetery even though there



are no water lines at all in that dormant cemetery! They would not listen to reason about it, so we had to sue the town. They backed down.

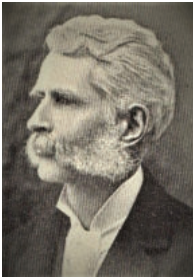
- Since 1950 our church has hosted about 1600 weddings, 2000 baptisms and 1900 memorial services.

## Major Expansion Project: 1961–1962

The Meetinghouse expansion project in 1961-2 was so fresh in everyone's mind when *The First Three Hundred Years 1640-1965* book and *The Last Quarter Century 1965-1990* booklet were published that it was not discussed with much detail. Often new members joining our church ask about this major change to our church.

The 1895 stone church was much smaller than today's Meetinghouse. The cornerstone was laid in 1895 shortly before the 1835 wooden Meetinghouse burned down.

The new stone building was dedicated in 1896. The wood structure was located in the cemetery about 25 yards south of the stone structure. The rough outline of the wood structure's location surrounds the current Binney family burial site and extends a bit further. The gravestone of Reverend Dewitt C. Eggleston (our pastor from 1894 to 1910) is where the pulpit was located in the wooden church building.



Dewitt C. Eggleston



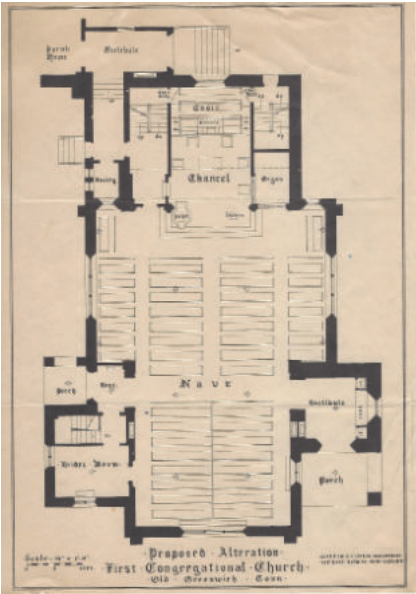
1835-1895 Meetinghouse



Approximate Location  
(White Rectangle) of the  
1835-1895 White Pillared  
Church


## Meetinghouse Expansion in 1939

Even though the 300 year history book on our church mentioned the reasons for this renovation, we found a before photo and the expansion plan design, below. They removed the partition wall at the rear of the church to allow for more pews since that area was not needed for a church school classroom any more. The new center aisle for weddings was very popular, along with the complete redecoration of the interior of the Church to modernize it.



## The Meetinghouse Expansion in 1961

The original stone church, pictured below from about 1932, shows the former stained glass window that was at the rear of the Meetinghouse. The entrance to the Meetinghouse was through a door at the western base of the bell tower (the dark porch on the right under the awning roof.) During the reconfiguration of the Meetinghouse in 1961, the original entrance was closed and a new entrance on the south side of the bell tower was created. However, the primary entrance to the Meetinghouse, a bit further east from the bell tower, was also created in 1961, entering through what was formerly the small choir area at the front of the former Meetinghouse.

A black and white photograph of a stone church building. The church features a prominent bell tower on the right side, which has a small arched window and a dark porch area at its base. To the left of the bell tower is a large, multi-paned stained glass window. The church has a steep gabled roof and a chimney on the left side. The photograph is taken from a low angle, looking up at the church.

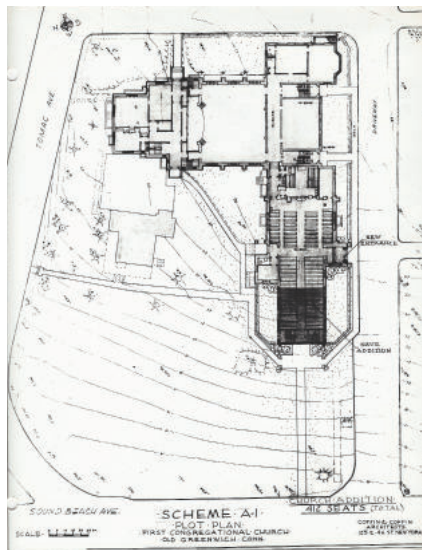
The 1961 expansion of the Meetinghouse extended toward Sound Beach Avenue directly toward the photographer in the image opposite.

The stones for the new extension are identical to the stones in the original 1895 church. In about 1955, an Episcopal church on Broad Street in Stamford was torn down since the parishioners decided to move it to a lower cost location and sell the much higher priced land. That church had been built at about the same time as our original stone Meetinghouse from 1895 and the stone was from the same quarry. Percy Letts (shown right), a Trustee, learned of this coincidence and the Trustees agreed that we should purchase the stones from that church and store them in the back corner of our cemetery until we expanded our church. When the expansion of our Meetinghouse began in 1961, the matching stone was already available. What wonderful foresight!



## Original Coffin & Coffin Design of the Meetinghouse Expansion

One of the many schematic drawings of a smaller expansion of the Meetinghouse shows that the early concepts kept the orientation of the Meetinghouse as it had been, facing east. And because the church was experiencing rapid growth, potential new space was sketched in between the Binney Memorial building (the church offices) and the parsonage at 106 Sound Beach Avenue. This plan was not used since it did not give enough room for expansion.



## Final Coffin & Coffin 6/1/1959 Design of the Meetinghouse Expansion

Sunday school enrollment in February 1961 was 954 children and 150 teachers and officers for a total of 1,104. These figures inspired the architectural sketch below that looked forward to a possible 1975-1980 period when additional space might be needed. It shows a new wing to the building complex that would expand over the parsonage at 106 Sound Beach Avenue. Sunday school enrollment today is far less. Demographics changed significantly from the late 1940s to the 1950s baby boom years.

After much planning and discussion, the final expansion plan was formally adopted in late June 1960. Substantial fundraising had already occurred by then. The groundbreaking ceremony was held on October 9, 1960 with the cornerstone dedication ceremony on January 8, 1961.

The dedication bulletin shows an artist's rendition of the old Meetinghouse above a design of the extended Meetinghouse.

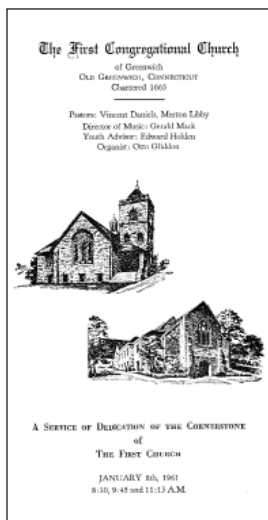
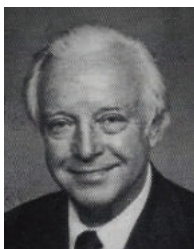
The new Meetinghouse Dedication Service was on January 21, 1962.

A December 1, 1961 report from the church lay leaders indicated that "The ventilation system is not complete, and real air conditioning is a distant dream." Air conditioning for the Meetinghouse was finally installed in 1996 when a member donated money for that purpose before her daughter's wedding.

Jackson Smith (shown right), a church member who was also an architect, said in his oral history that he was asked what he thought of the new Meetinghouse expansion design. After studying it, he came upon a proposal that the whole seating plan should be turned around 180 degrees so that the church could be expanded far more toward Sound Beach Avenue to truly accommodate the doubled size of the congregation. He had to be diplomatic since it was a code of honor among architects that they do not disparage other architects' work. The trustees loved Jackson's proposal—it was the difference between the original and final designs by Coffin & Coffin that gave us the extra space we needed.

The photograph opposite shows the new building under construction in 1961. It shows the boarded up back of the Meetinghouse with the bell tower on the right before the old front door was blocked with new stone and the entrance changed to its current location. The partial stonewall is the southern side of what are now the Undercroft/Preschool classrooms. The parsonage at 106 Sound Beach Avenue can be seen peeking over the new stone walls on the left.

Building improvements and maintenance will continue, of course. Unfortunately, rain damage to the Education wing beginning on May 31, 2015, ac-





celerated a number of changes and building modifications, and the repairs will stand us in good stead going forward.

## Moving the oldest stained glass windows in 1960–1962

### 1895 South Narthex Window

Through 1960, the pews in the Meetinghouse faced east, as shown below, 180 degrees from their current orientation. Recently discovered old photos of the 1895 windows prompted this topic.

This large stained glass window was on the south side (cemetery side) of the narthex between what is now the bell tower and the rear of the church. The photo shows it on a parishioner's right side facing east toward the former front of the Meetinghouse.

The center panel of the window shows St. Cecilia with her lyre. This center panel is now in the left panel of the North Narthex window.

Raphael's painting, St. Cecilia, inspired this image. She is the patron saint of musicians and Church music. In Raphael's painting below she is listening to a choir of angels and is standing with St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist, St. Augustine and Mary Magdalene.

*Photo Source:* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Ecstasy\\_of\\_St.\\_Cecilia\\_\(Raphael\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ecstasy_of_St._Cecilia_(Raphael))



### 1895 North Narthex Window

This large stained glass window was on the north side of the narthex opposite the St. Cecilia window (above). It overlooked what is now the Memory Garden. At the time, it was on a person's left side sitting in a pew facing east toward the former front of the Meetinghouse.

This center panel is called the Bethany lancet. It was copied from Heinrich Hofmann's *The Home at Bethany*, shown below.

These two windows were the two primary stained glass windows in the Meetinghouse.

One other large window, called the *Christian Endeavor Window*, was positioned on the west end (Sound Beach Avenue side) in what was then the rear of the sanctuary, but it was only an ochre-colored patterned design like the side panels shown here. None of this window was carried over to the extended Meetinghouse in 1961.



*Photo Source:* <http://art.com>

## 1895 East Narthex Window

The fourth and final stained glass window in the original stone sanctuary was the Grimes Memorial *Head of Christ* (shown right), now called the *I Am* window. Heinrich Hofmann's *The Light of the World* inspired the image. This was the chancel window in what was then the front of the Meetinghouse in 1896. It was a memorial to our first church benefactor, William Grimes, a bachelor who willed the church 32 acres in the Shorelands area of Old Greenwich in 1670.

When the Education Building was constructed in 1951-2, it blocked light coming through that window, so the window was moved for safekeeping and installed in a window of the Historical Room for a decade. That room became the Music Director's office on the 3rd floor of the Education Building.

It was a happy solution when enough money was raised and the design approved for the Grimes Memorial to be put back in the expanded Meetinghouse in 1961 as a part of the reconfigured north transept window in the narthex at the rear.



## 1961 (Current) North Narthex Window

This reconfigured three-panel stained glass window, now on the north side of the narthex at the rear of the Meetinghouse, combined the three window panels discussed above.



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