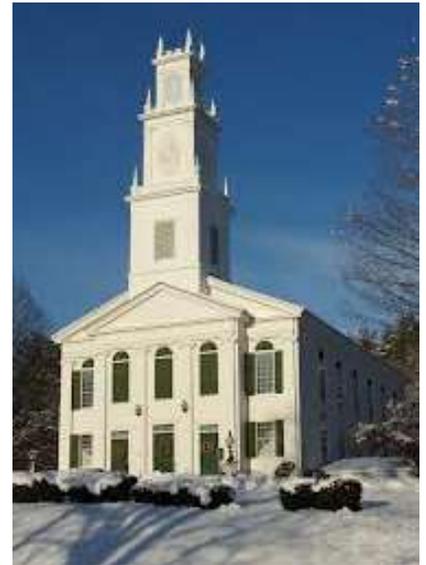


THE CORNERSTONE

*First Church is an Open and Affirming Congregation
of the United Church of Christ*



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JANUARY 2016 WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Join Us!

Worship Services: 8:30 am in the Chapel, 10 am in the Sanctuary

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Dear Friends,

This will go down as the biggest surprise farewell celebration in First Church’s history! How it was pulled off by a few hearty quiet souls, who were later joined by dozens of very kind and unassuming people – all during a very busy time in the life of our church – will remain a mystery. All I know is that my husband Steve left after breakfast to presumably drive to his church, but somehow at the right moment reappeared, hiding with our beloved choir in the back row; oh yes, with a pair of black Groucho Marx glasses, replete with thick eyebrows...and our son Jonathan, back from college, was sitting with the congregation.

Thank you so very much to Barb Patterson, Lorrie McElligott, Bruce Powell, Bill Lawry, Carol Pollack, and *everyone*, who must have snuck around for weeks, not looking me straight in the eyes but scheming all the while! I admire you for your skill, energy, good cheer and kindness. Thank you also for every detail, which did not go unnoticed—the beauty of the sanctuary, flower arrangement with birds of paradise, rendition of “Aloha O’e,” as well as the card, orchid flower lei, prayer shawl, shadow box to remember First Church, colorful cake, overflowing reception table, and generous contributions to the Women’s Retreat Fund and purse.

As someone assured me when I was starting to fret about having caused you to do one more thing during this holy-day season, “It was a labor of love.” Indeed, there was no mistaking that; and for your thoughtful words of farewell and overflowing generosity, Steve, Jonathan and I thank you ever so much. We thank God.

Gratefully and devotedly,
Rev. Dianne

Pastor Pondering



Rev. George Harris
Senior Minister

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Greetings favored ones! God forms us into a new family of parents, shepherds and angels and through us, births something new into the world. As members of **this family of faithful, we have been entrusted with nurturing God's creation** in this place, strengthening and encouraging the growth of the body of Christ that is our church.

I remember when Lourdes and I first brought Abby home from the hospital. As a first time father I was overcome by one thought - part panicked exclamation, part prayer – **“Oh God, what do I do?!”** I quickly learned that in those first weeks **and months there wasn't a lot to do** except to feed her, change her diaper, and shower her with love. Of course Lourdes and I are now fully engaged in all the hard work of parenting together, but I treasure the time we had to just get to know and love each other as a new family.

This is now the third time I have begun a ministry at a church, and each time I **hear urgent questions similar to my own when we brought Abby home, “Pastor George, what are you going to do?! What are we going to do?!”** I know people are very excited about beginning our ministry together, and I share your excitement and readiness to get to work! That said, I suggest that the most important thing we can do in these first months is take time to get to know and love each other as a new family.

I laughed when I read the first verse of the gospel lesson for my first Sunday at **First Church, January 10. Speaking of John the Baptist, Luke writes, “As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah.”** The crowds from Jerusalem were excited because they were hoping John was the one who would lead them **in God's way and return Israel to glory. I laughed because you might also be** filled with expectation and have lots of questions concerning me! Of course, like John, I am not the Messiah. Like John, I will do my best to point to Jesus in our midst and make room for the Holy Spirit to move among us.

I intend to reach out to as many of you as possible just to listen and learn about you and this good church. What makes you happy and excited? What challenges do you face? What keeps you up at night? What keeps you coming back to **First Church? And don't be shy about reaching out to me; I want to hear from you.** Inspired by the Holy Spirit, these conversations will point us toward our Messiah, Jesus Christ; and the loving relationships we nurture today will provide the foundation for all we do in His name for years to come.

In Christ,

Pastor George

A Message from Rev. Kevin Weikel

Happy New Year!

The calendar is changing from 2015-2016, and there is change in the air at First Church as well. The end of December marked the conclusion of **The Rev. Dianne Arakawa's time with us as our Transitional Senior Minister**. I would like to thank her for her dedication over these past two and a half years. I wish her well, along with her husband Stephen, and her son Jonathan.

The turn to the New Year also marks the beginning of The Rev. George Harris's ministry at First Church as our new settled Senior Minister. I would like to offer him and his wife Lourdes and daughter Abby a warm welcome! I, like you, am very excited about their arrival at First Church. I am eager to get started doing ministry with him and all of you.

As I was reflecting on a possible topic for this article, I felt pulled in two very different directions. On one hand, I wanted to share a few thoughts about how we might best welcome George and his family. On the other hand, I felt compelled to write about the change we have made with our children coming back to worship **for Communion on Communion Sunday's**. **Instead of choosing one or the other, I decided just to go ahead and write about them both...**

Welcoming George and his family...

If you are a Facebook user, you have certainly noticed the fascination that we as a culture seem to have with lists. Every other Facebook post seems to be a number

ordered list, "The top ten ways to discipline your kids," or "The top five ways to stay true to your New Year's Resolutions." In this spirit, I am going to offer, "Kevin's top six ways to welcome George and his family."

1. Introduce yourself to George. Then, when you see him next, mention your name again. Over time, George will get to know all of us well, but reminding him of our names will be a big help as he settles in.
2. There will come a time when new and different worship components, ministries, and processes will be discussed and implemented, but it is important for George and for us to build relationships with each other first. We must be patient.
3. George is interested in our ideas for First Church, but it is most important that our initial conversations with him revolve around getting to know him as a person and minister.
4. **George's spouse Lourdes and daughter Abby will be a blessing to each of us. It is important for us to be intentional about building relationships with them as well.**
5. Our church is filled with many great programs outside of Sunday morning, but worship is still the glue that holds a church together. Attending worship regularly and being open to the ways in which the spirit is moving within worship is extremely important.
6. Trust and Pray. Trust in the fact that God has called George to us, and us to George. Trust that the future of First Church is bright, and keep First Church in your prayers.

Children and Communion...

If you attended worship on our last Communion Sunday, you noticed that our children were dismissed for Church School directly after the announcements, and they came back to join us for Communion. While this was not the first time our children have participated in Communion, it was the first time they came back from Church School to join us for it.

(continued on p. 2)



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Out of Office
Wednesdays

(continued from p. 3)

The idea of having our children come back to worship for Communion developed as the Christian Education Board discussed ways to make Communion available to our children. After first planning to have members of the Worship Board serve Communion to our children during Church School in the Chapel, the thought came that it might be more meaningful for children and parents, and our congregation as a whole, if our children came back to worship so we could share in Communion at the same time and in the same place. After all, as the thinking went, we as a congregation do much separately (Church school, youth groups, supper club, small groups, etc.), how nice would it be to share in Communion together?

With this in mind, the Christian Education Board and the Worship Board engaged in some good conversation and decided to give this new way of doing Communion a try on the first Sunday in December. I give these two boards a lot of credit for collaborating with each other, for being creative, and for thinking through every detail to ensure that it would go smoothly. And, as the children came back into the sanctuary, processing down the aisle during the Offertory Response, I for one was quite touched. Children always seem to have a way of bringing the realm of God closer to adults!

At the same time, while I know for a fact that every member and friend of First Church loves the children of our church, I also appreciate those who have been honest with their questions concerning the appropriateness of children taking Communion. This concern is understandable considering many of us (including me), grew up in churches where children did not take Communion until they were Confirmed. And so we wonder, will the children be able to understand what Communion means? Will it mean something to them? Will they be respectful?

These are good questions, and I am glad that this new way of doing Communion has us thinking and talking about them. For me, I understand Communion to possess not just one meaning, but also many meanings, and I am not sure I can fully grasp, or am even supposed to grasp fully, all of them. In many ways, what happens at Communion remains a mystery to all of us. Part of the power of Communion is **that it can't be reduced to one understanding or explanation.**

On Sunday, December 6th, before our children came back to the sanctuary for Communion, we spent the entirety of Church School discussing the different meanings of Communion with them. While some of our students clearly have a better understanding of the varied meanings of Communion than others, I do not think Communion should be unavailable to those who struggle to comprehend or articulate what it means to them. My viewpoint on this comes from my understanding that there is one thing our children can clearly comprehend, and that is what it feels like to be left out and excluded.

I believe there is intrinsic value in our children growing up knowing that they are welcome to participate in Communion. Over time, they will develop an appreciation, and even love, for Communion as they grow. More importantly, they will gain a deeper understanding of the love God has for them. For me, there is nothing more important than that!

While the Christian Education Board and Board of Worship have decided to continue this new way of **doing Communion, please keep two things in mind. First, the final call on a child's participation in Communion is always up to the parent(s).** We always respect the parent(s) wishes. Second, discussions like these are always part of an ongoing conversation in the life of a church, and so I would encourage us to keep talking. In so doing, we will find our own understandings of Communion to deepen.

One final note, I will be preaching on this topic in my sermon on January 3rd, and I will be inviting folks to talk after that service in the Church Parlor after the service. If you are interested in talking more, I hope to see you there!

Happy New Year!

Peace, *Kevin*

Musical Notes



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Out of Office
Tuesdays

As I am writing this, it is before Christmas, and we are in the midst of trying to tie up all loose ends to insure that all Christmas services go as well as they can, and that they give you a meaningful experience for this season of joy and light. **As you are reading this, Christmas has already happened; you've seen the Star Wars movie; you're thinking about taking down the tree, and wondering where to put all the new stuff that has entered your house. It's interesting trying to project one's self into the future and to write as though things present are in the past. Kind of a time/space warp in our heads...**

But I do want to thank all those that have contributed much time, talent, and treasure to have made this whole season, and program, special – many groups and individuals have gone far beyond the call of duty: Doug Maher, the **Uncommon Band (Erica and Annie)**, **Women's Praise (a very successful Wadsworth Atheneum performance – and supper club!)**, Chancel Choir (Lessons and Carols and Sundays – wow!), The Choral Bells (for some great Sunday morning playing and the Bell Concert!), **Men's Choir (sounding better and better! and...getting bigger!)** **Junior Choir (singing more often, from the Interfaith Service on)**, and the Cherubs, who sing really well, even if they don't have to because they're so darn cute! Thanks to all those who contributed to the Christmas "Mini Concert". Also some of the ones who have done much behind the scenes – Nadia Aguilar - directing the Junior Choir (and the moms who contribute snacks), Suzanne Osborne for directing the Cherubs, all those who have sung and played (Craig, Becky et al) and, of course, the amazing and inimitable Jim Martocchio! How I love my Sunday mornings with him! And all the individuals who have kept me as organized as they can – Margo, Cynthia, Carolyn Keiley - Oh, yes, and we have, I think, one of the best boards around, too! If I forgot anyone, believe me, I love you as much.

So now we look to the future. Working with George has the promise of being a marvelous adventure – **and I'm very excited about what lies ahead! We are** thinking about Easter and beyond, and have some plans for that and other things. There is a jazz cabaret scheduled to be held Palmer Hall – something that many have enjoyed in the past: Matt and Atla DeChamplain, along with the fantastic Doug Maher on guitar, are returning on Friday night – February 5th. Come, hear some of the best jazz in New England, and enjoy refreshments – right here in our very own backyard. Other concerts are planned as well.

Join us in one of our many musical organizations! There is something for everyone, and I will certainly work with any one of you to make you feel comfortable. Music is a marvelous thing to share – and a terrific thing here at First! Make a new Year resolution to take part – it will do more for you than you can imagine!

Please have a happy and safe New Year.
Mark

Dear friends,

Each of us has pivotal moments, events that become highlights or lowlights in the tapestry of our lives. Tuesday, December 8th, 2015, was certainly one of mine. What a blessing it was to be ordained into the Christian ministry at First Church with many of you there with my family and me. To witness your welcoming of my colleagues and friends from my seminary years and hospital chaplain training was a joy! I am deeply grateful for this, as well for your hosting of my **service of ordination and the beautiful dinner reception in Palmer Hall. As the Patriarch Jacob said so long ago, "Surely God is in this place!"**

With prayers of gratitude and wishes for a blessed New Year,

Erica

The Reverend Erica Nierendorf



Kids @ First

Grow your heart at First Church



Visit www.firstchurchsimsbury.com to see the church school schedule, videos, and information about what the kids are doing at First Church. Weekly church school emails are sent to parents on Fridays. If you are not receiving the emails contact ccole@fccsimsbury.org.

Jan 23: First Church Family Skate at Simsbury Farms Rink

Children's Ministries will be renting the skating rink from 4:30-5:30 pm for families to come and skate together.

- ◆ Skating and skates will be provided for free.
- ◆ No hockey sticks will be allowed.
- ◆ Invite your friends to come.
- ◆ Hot chocolate will be provided.
- ◆ We are asking families to bring cookies to share.
- ◆ Parents/guardians are responsible for supervising your children or others that you bring with you.



January 3: Kids and Communion

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14)

Students begin in church: Student will begin in church with their families. This is important so students know where their family is when they return to church for Communion. Students will be dismissed after the announcements so there is time to complete their church school lesson. Students will go directly to their classes or chapel as designated in the church school schedule in the bulletin.



Early Warning System by the ushers: The ushers will signal the church school leaders with a chime 10 minutes before they need to return with the children to give them time to bring what they are doing to an appropriate conclusion. Students k-7 will gather and proceed to the sanctuary. Preschool and nursery (age 4 and under) will remain in class or can participate in Communion if parents choose to pick their child up from the classroom.

Entering the Sanctuary: The pre-confirmation teachers will pick 2 students to down the aisle carry the bread and chalice.

The church school students will follow, sliding into the pews to sit with their parents. Students will remain with their parents until the conclusion of the service.

At the conclusion of the service: Students will need to return to the classroom to collect their projects and assist in cleaning up the classroom before proceeding to choir practice or Palmer Hall for coffee hours with their parents.

Valentines Party/Parents Night Out

Save the date: Sat, Feb 6, 2016 in Palmer Hall
5pm-8:30pm

Please sign up and fill out the registration form

High Energy Activities: indoor basket ball, bowling, Valentine Twister, bounce houses

Group Activities: Valentine Bingo, Valentine tag, Chocolate heart hunt, Indoor Snowball fight

Movie: Veggie Tales Beauty and the Beet

Quiet Activities: play dough, doll house, crafts, Legos

Ages: 3 (potty trained) - 6th grade, teen helpers are needed

Cost: free will offering

Dinner: Pizza, fresh fruit and vegetables, decorate your own cupcakes



Children's Ministry News



Upcoming Events for your Calendar

Jan 3: Church School, Children participate in Communion.

Jan 10: Board of Christian Education prepares coffee hour

Jan 17: Church students in grades k-7 are in Palmer Hall for an activity and movie during church school

Jan 23: First Church Family Skate at Simsbury Farms Rink, 4:40-5:50pm

Feb 6: Valentines Party/Parents Night Out

Martin Luther King Jr.:

Martin Luther King Jr. loved God and understood that we're all loved by God. He knew it didn't matter to God what color eyes or skin we have. He worked hard throughout his life to make sure everyone else understood how special each of us is to God. On January 18, we'll celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and remember his efforts to create a world where all people were treated the same.

Video for kids—MLK—The King and His Dream: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6Au81aHuSg>

Family Activities:

1. Each family member can discuss at dinner what they can do to make the world better.
2. Draw pictures of your dream for God's world.
3. Find I Samuel 16:7 in your Bible and read aloud. *"But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn't make decisions the way you do! People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at a person's thoughts and intentions.'"*

Church School Toiletry Kit Mission Project:



Our winter church school offering will go to purchasing toiletry items for children and adults at South Park Inn. We are looking for travel toothpaste, travel shampoo and conditioners, deodorant, hairbrushes, and comb, small tissue pkgs., small shaving cream cans, razors, etc.

Church School Volunteers

The church school is a co-operative program where adults in the congregation keep their baptismal promise and work together with children to learn about our faith. Please contact ccole@fccsimsbury.org for information about opportunities to volunteer.

President's Message

Happy New Year! Now there's a simple phrase that you have probably said, and heard, many times as we begin 2016. Yet, that simple greeting brings with it wishes for a bright future, renewed hopes and dreams, and optimism for a better, yes happier year.

For us at First Church what a great time of year to welcome our new Senior Minister, Rev. George Harris, his wonderful wife Lourdes, and their terrific daughter Abby! I look forward to a repeat of the genuine excitement and enthusiasm that we all shared with George, Lourdes and Abby just a short time ago as we welcome them to our first Church family. **Let's fill the church as we start this very Happy New Year!**

Faithfully yours,

Jim Trimble

Youth and Young Adults

Junior Fellowship (JF) is our youth group for 7th and 8th graders. JF gathers approximately once every three weeks, from 2:10-4:30 pm during the school year. At JF, we eat together, play games together, and participate in engaging activities and faith-based discussions together.

Fridays, January 8th, 29th — 2:10 pm-4:30 pm, with after-school pickup at HJMS!

The *Confirmation* year is a concentrated time for 8th graders to explore what it means to be Christian. Through large and small group gatherings, mission/service work, experiencing and reflecting on worship, going on retreat, participating in the events and activities of JF, and much more, our Confirmands build positive and grace-filled relationships with one another, and develop a deeper understanding of God's love for all people, while exploring what it means to follow Jesus.

Sunday, January 3rd Session 6 in the Youth Room (5-7 pm)
Bible Reading: "Prophets" - Lesson: "Worship"

Wednesday, January 13th Session 7 in the Youth Room (5-7 pm)
Bible Reading: "Jesus' Temptation and Jesus Calls Disciples" - Lesson: "Baptism & Communion"

Sunday, January 24th Session 8 in the Youth Room (5-7 pm)
Bible Reading: "Sermon on the Mount" - Lesson: "Prayer"

Pilgrim Fellowship (PF) is for all 9th through 12th graders no matter their religious background, or ideas about God. Everyone is welcome. PF is a place to play, discuss, worship, grow, serve, and love. PF is a place for teenagers to journey together in faith. PF meets for fellowship, retreats, mission opportunities, and more.

Sundays, January 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th, and 31st—7-9 pm in the Youth Room

Young Adult Opportunity!

Looking for a meaningful event with other young adults? Join us on January 10th for Cathedral In The Night (<http://www.cathedralinthenight.org>), a service project and alternative worship experience in Northampton, MA.

Young Adults ages 18-29 will prepare food, participate in outdoor worship, and share a meal with folks who are experiencing homelessness. Friends are welcome!

Schedule on January 10th...

<i>Contact Rev. Kev with questions and to sign up!</i>	1:30pm, Meet in First Church Parking Lot and Carpool to Northampton
	3pm, Arrive, meet and greet the other young adults, food prep, set up.
	4:30pm, Outdoor set up and worship prep.
	5:30pm, Community meal and hospitality.
	6:30pm, Clean up, debrief, and closing prayer.
	7:30pm, Head Home ... (9pm, Arrive back at First Church)

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FELLOWSHIP HOUR SCHEDULE

January 3	Committee for Endowment Development
January 10	Board of Christian Education
January 17	Pastoral Relations and Board of Personnel
January 24	Board of Mission and Outreach
January 31	Volunteer Fair (tentative)

Mission and Outreach wants you to mark your calendars for January 22nd for a powerful film on Poverty.

This award-winning documentary "The Line" tells the stories of people across the country living at or below the poverty line. These people have goals, they have children and they work hard.

Join us in Palmer Hall at 6:00pm---
more details to follow

Save the Date!
Women's Retreat
2016

April 22nd—24th
Silver Lake Conference
Center, Sharon, CT

nestled in the picturesque
foothills of the Berkshires of
Litchfield County.

*~ Please notify the Church of any address changes. ~
Sign up for our emails and check our website.*

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