

THE CORNERSTONE

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

February 2017 Worship Schedule

- February 5th** Sermon: Pass the Salt, Please
Matthew 5:13-20
8:30 am in the Chapel
10:00 am in the Sanctuary
with Holy Communion
Rev. George Harris, preaching
- February 12th** **New Member Sunday**
Sermon: The Fine Print
8:30 am Worship in the Chapel
10:00 am in the Sanctuary
with the Sacrament of Baptism
Rev. George Harris, preaching
- Financial Meeting will Follow 10 am Service
- February 19th** 8:30 am Worship in the Chapel
10:00 am in the Sanctuary
Rev. Kevin Weikel, preaching
- February 26th** 8:30 am Worship in the Chapel
10:00 am in the Sanctuary
Guest Preacher, Rev. Dr. Damaris Whittaker,
Center Church Hartford

Call to February 12th Financial Meeting:

On February 12th, First Church will hold its annual Financial Meeting after our 10am service. This is an important meeting for our congregation and I encourage all to attend. The meeting requires a quorum to approve a budget, so please consider attending this important meeting.

The meeting will report First Church's 2016 financial results and review the 2017 budget recommendation from the Executive Council and the Board of Finance. Approval for the 2017 budget will be requested from the congregation, after a presentation of the budget handouts and time for questions and answers.

In addition, we will review our stewardship campaign, our church's endowment performance, and the endowment development efforts by members of our church.

I look forward to your attendance and participation in the annual Finance meeting. This is a great opportunity to show your support for First Church and the services it offers.

Linda Peach, Treasurer



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Pastor Pondering

An Angel Remembered: Rick Lamb

“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Hebrews 13:2



**Rev. George
Harris**

Senior Minister

860-651-3593 x14

gharris@
fccsimsbury.org

**Out of Office
Tuesdays**

I met Rick in a beach park in Honolulu. With Central Union Church, I founded a homeless ministry there, setting up a canopy and about 30 chairs for a worship service and shared meal each Thursday evening. Rick walked up as I arrived in the church van one day and offered to help set up for the service. Fifty something, Rick was ruggedly handsome, but the lines on his face betrayed years of hard living. He spoke proudly of his accomplishments including having owned an HVAC company and becoming a licensed pilot. And he also lay claim to more colorful chapters in his life including riding with a motorcycle gang; he carried a picture of his Harley with a holstered gun strapped to the handlebars.

And, I quickly learned, Rick was a serious alcoholic and lived in that beach park; he was homeless. I worked very closely with Rick for about four years. He made repeated efforts to get back on his feet, recommitting himself to sobriety and seeking employment. But there were many other times when he would call me, very, very drunk and in no shape to help himself.

Rick was the first person to call me pastor, though he would also sometimes call me “Pastor Pagan,” a rather questionable term of endearment that I never quite understood. He would also sometimes attend worship at Central Union Church, wearing his pilot’s uniform of black pants, a white shirt with military-style shoulder boards, and aviator sunglasses. The church loved him through all his ups and downs, and so did I. He attended my wedding.

One day, Rick got the news that his mother had died. He loved his mother, and she loved him. He had lived with her for a time, though I imagine that his drinking caused her much heartache. She left him a modest amount of money, enough to buy a cabin cruiser which he named Tailspin (a humorous nod to his love of flying, but also, perhaps, a darkly ironic premonition of things to come).

Living aboard his boat was going to be Rick’s ticket to a better life, he was sure of it. Indeed, he stayed sober for a few months but, sadly, again succumbed to his addiction. One night I got a call that Rick had gotten into a drunken fight on the waterfront. He was beaten badly and, after several days on life support, died.

Unbeknownst to me, Rick had made me, his Pastor Pagan, a beneficiary of his estate. There wasn’t a lot of money left after his debts were paid, but there was enough to cover some of the expenses of my seminary education.

Rick’s picture sits beside my computer in my office to remind me of the ways God worked through him to call and equip me for ministry, a ministry that has happily led me here to First Church Simsbury, another assembly of angels unaware.

Sunday, February 12, will be the fifteenth anniversary of Rick’s death, and this year marks the tenth anniversary of my ordination.

Thank you Rick. Soar with the angels.

In Christ,

Pastor George

A Message from Rev. Kevin Weikel

More Than A Meal

Serving a meal at a shelter can be understandably intimidating, especially for youth. There are many pre-conceived notions about those experiencing homelessness, after all, and most of these stereotypes aren't good. Therefore, the typical response from a young person volunteering at a shelter, especially if it is his or her first time doing so, is to serve the food using the counter as a sort of unconscious barrier. The servers on one side, the clients on the other. The interaction is minimal, and the eye contact is almost nonexistent. The conversation consisting of only the essentials,

Youth: "Would you like mashed potatoes?"

Client: "Yes."

Youth: "Okay."

Client: "Thank you."

Youth: "Your welcome."

Over the years, the PF Advisor Team and I have spent considerable energy thinking about ways to break down the wall between the youth and the clients during a soup kitchen. We have wondered together how we might be able to put our young people in a position to hear the stories of the clients so that the Holy Spirit might come alive in their midst and open up new understandings within the hearts and minds of our youth.

And so, a few years ago, we began implementing some components to our shelter experiences that have become key to deeper connections. We started to make enough food for both the clients and our youth. After serving the clients, our youth now fill their own plates and then find a seat to eat among the clients. Of course, the clients aren't used to such a thing and are at first quite surprised. It isn't long, however, before some conversation begins. Often, pleasantries evolve into questions about favorite sports teams, where one grew up, and in some cases, life stories.

Over time, we also began bringing personal cards and knit hats with us to give to each client at the shelter. The cards are handmade and signed by our youth, and include inspirational messages. Some of the hats are handmade as well, mostly by church members Don and Debbie Skinner. The remaining hats are store bought by church members and youth families.

The clients are overwhelmed when, after serving the cupcakes for dessert, we tell them we have cards and hats for them. As we hand out our gifts, one can see the gratitude in the faces of each person. It is evident that for most of that it has been a long time since they received a personal card and gift.

At our soup kitchen last month, the connections made and the movement of the Holy Spirit in the room were exceptionally strong. It just so happened that after our group served the meal and handed out the cards and hats, the Green Bay/Dallas football game went into overtime on the shelter television. There everyone stood, youth and clients, watching intently.

It has been said that sports possesses the ability to bring people together, but I've never experienced it quite the way I did that night, bridging people from two completely different worlds. Those rooting for Green Bay, client, and youth, egged on those rooting for Dallas and vice versa, all in good fun. And when the game was over there were high fives, and there were condolences.

At the end of the evening, after we had served and shared the meal, given personal cards and hats, watched a tense football game together, and began to put on our coats to leave, the usual comments of "Thank you for the meal" were different. Instead, we heard, "That was a great night!" "We had so much fun tonight!" "Please come again!"

It was if the wall between the youth of suburban Simsbury and the men at the ImaCare shelter in Hartford had been completely broken down. Instead of leaving clients at a soup kitchen, we felt like we were leaving new friends. Praise be to God.

Peace, Rev. Kev



Rev. Kevin Weikel
Associate Minister
for Youth and
Young Adults

860-651-3593 x16

kweikel@
fccsimsbury.org

Out of Office
Wednesdays



Musical Notes



**Mark Mercier,
Director
of Music
Ministries**

860-651-3593 x21
mmercier@
fccsimsbury.org

Out of Office
Tuesdays

So here we are. 2017 is well underway and, although winter is still here, we are on the road to spring. Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter will be here before we know it, and musical preparations are taking place.

We have had some great experiences, though – all choirs and groups are playing and singing well; we have had some terrific solo contributions, and the music program continues to grow and evolve, sometimes in some surprising directions.

We regret to tell you that the January 29 concert planned by Nadia Aguilar, our beloved soprano support singer, will be postponed, probably until next fall. She is trying to conserve energy for her upcoming, shall we say, family expansion. But she has many surrogate parents and grandparents in the choir, all of who are tremendously supportive and excited for her, and would like to do all they can to make sure all goes well in her final few weeks before the baby comes. We will keep everyone apprised.

We plan on beginning our “Choir 101” program on the first Monday in February, at 7 PM in the choir room. This is a series for anyone of any age who would like to gain some useful information about group singing before they decide as to whether they would like to join a choir or not. I know that many are self-conscious about coming in to an established group, sitting next to people they don’t know, trying to follow music that they are not familiar with, and meanwhile going through the sometimes intimidating process of opening their mouths and actually singing. Even when I write this, it sounds hard.

But believe me, it’s easier and infinitely more enjoyable than you might think.

This program will run, at the moment, for 4 weeks, for an hour each Monday night. Then after that I’d be happy to continue for any that think they would like to learn more. We will begin to learn to unravel the rudiments of that code of notes, rhythm, barlines and rests called music; we will learn about vocal production – how the voice works to produce a controllable sound called “singing”; we will learn about songs and different kinds of music; and we will learn about singing in parts with voices higher or lower than ours to create harmony. We will do all this in an informal, fun way with some refreshments as well. It’s great stuff, and even if, at the end of the program, you opt to not join any of our groups, you will be a more knowledgeable listener. And if you’d like to join us just for that purpose, that would be fine.

There has been a really good response about this, and I’m really looking forward to the whole program. If in fact you would like to take part, please let me, or any member in any choir, know, so we will be able to estimate how many will be there. But don’t let that stop you from coming, particularly if you wait and decide at the last minute to come over to the church. However, please keep tabs in the bulletin and through the weekly email for any last minute changes in this, either because of conflicts with other meetings or because of weather. I don’t want to not be here for you.

So... listen to music whenever you can. Turn on the stereo, or the car radio; go to a concert; hear it in the background of your favorite movies; in stores, in elevators, in church (of course!) – and realize what integral part music plays in our lives. And the more you know, the better it becomes.

I hope everyone’s new year is going well. Enjoy!

Mark





Kids @ First

Grow your heart at First Church



Children's Ministry News



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 Thursday. If you are not receiving the emails contact ccole@fccsimsbury.org.

Valentines Party/Parents Night Out

Save the date: Sat, Feb 11, 2017 in Palmer Hall, 5pm-8:30pm
Please sign up and fill out the registration form on the 3rd floor bulletin board



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

Group Activities: Valentine Bingo, Valentine tag, Chocolate heart hunt

Movie: VeggieTales: *Lettuce Love One Another*

Stations: Play dough, doll house, Legos, water beads, and ice towers

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

Cost: Free will offering

Dinner: Mac & Cheese, Chicken nuggets, decorate your own cupcakes

Church Wide Financial Meeting Childcare:

Sun, Feb 12, 2017 in Palmer Hall at 11:15

There will be activities for the kids in Palmer Hall during the meeting. Please pick up your child from Palmer Hall after the meeting.

Silver Lake Summer Camp

Silver Lake Conference Center:
Silver Lake is a UCC overnight camp for kids in the fourth through twelve grade. Registration is open now: go to www.silverlake.org. Click on "Silver Lake Registration."



Save the Date: Vacation Bible School

At Hero Central, the kids will discover their strength in God! Do good! Seek peace and go after it!

Dates: June 19-23 (or extended school due to snow dates June 25-30). Monday-Friday, 9-noon.

Location: First Church of Christ, Simsbury

Ages: Age 4 (by May 31st) to entering the 6th grade in the fall.

Take kids on awesome adventures alongside some of their favorite Bible heroes and discover the qualities that make us truly heroic in God. VBS Hero Central uses epic music, spectacular science, crafty crafts, heroic recreation, and fantastic Bible stories to help kids (and leaders) discover their strength in God



Are you Spring Cleaning?

Save your items in a box to donate to the **Church School Tag sale on April 30, 2017.**

Items can be dropped off at church on April 27 and 28.



Up coming events for your Calendar

Feb 2: Kids attend worship

Feb 11: Valentine Party/Party Night Out

Feb 12: Kids activities in Palmer Hall during the Financial meeting

Church School Mission Projects

The church school will be collecting **toilet paper (individually wrapped rolls) and cans of fruit**, two of the most requested items at the Gifts of Love and Simsbury Food Bank.



Pre-confirmation Class

The Pre-confirmation class is a two year program that enables the students to learn about the major stories of the Old Testament in one year and the New Testament in the next. The students hear and connect with the stories through activities to learn about living their daily lives as people of God.

We are in the process of rewriting the curriculum to include the well loved short videos about each Bible story character, but to add some active games to be played in Palmer Hall, crafts or cooking activities, and will eliminate the workbook activities. Our goal is to make the class time more hands on and create a better transition from our rotation program to the confirmation program that the students will participate in during their 8th grade year.

Youth and Young Adults

Junior Fellowship (JF) is our youth group for 7th and 8th graders. JF gathers approximately once a month, from 2:10-4:30 pm. At JF, we enjoy a snack, play games, participate in service projects, and in faith-based discussions. For Henry James students, the church bus will pick you up from school. The bus will be parked in the back lot (the bus parking lot). Simply walk out the back doors of Henry James, take a right past the gym and tennis courts, look to your left, and you'll see the church bus parked next to the field. You can't miss it. For students who attend schools other than Henry James, please join us by meeting us at the church at 2:30pm.

Friday, February 10th: 2:10-4:30 pm Regular Friday Gathering
 Topic: Exploring the value of being a person of integrity with our words, actions and heart.

Confirmation at First Church is an intentional time of exploring what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We do this in large and small groups through fellowship, conversation, study, mission work, worship, and more.

Sunday, February 26th: 5-7 pm Host Homes Small Group Meetings (Ministry)

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.

Sunday, February 5th: Small Group Visits with Homebound
Sunday, February 12th: 7-9pm Youth Room Regular Gathering
Sunday, February 19th: No PF—SHS Winter Break
Sunday, February 26th: 7-9pm Youth Room Regular Gathering

are you ready for mission pilgrimage 2017?

immerse ↔ restore ↔ assist ↔ connect

destination: back bay mission ↔ biloxi, ms

july 23—29 2017





learn more about back bay mission by visiting their website

don't wait! register today!

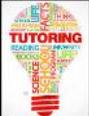
- ↔ visit the first church website under 2017 Youth Pilgrimage to register online
- ↔ total trip cost: \$888.00*; a deposit of \$150.00 is due at sign up; remaining balance is due by June 16, 2017

* if finances would prevent you from attending, please speak with Rev. Kevin directly for a confidential discussion about scholarships available

Tutoring Tuesdays

Tutoring is intergenerational; high school students through senior citizens are invited to participate! If you are interested, please visit our [webpage](#) to find out how to meet the Church Bus and what Forms Need to be Completed to join in!

If you have any questions please contact Rev. Kevin at kweikel@fccsimsbury.org or 860-651-3593.



[Click Here to Register!](#)

[Visit the Youth and Young Adult Pages on our Website for Current, Up-to-Date Information!](#)

Save the Date!

Note your calendar for these upcoming important dates:

Sunday, January 29th	Boy Scout Sunday Newcomers, Visitors, and Friends Luncheon
Saturday, February 11th	Parents Night Out Babysitting Event
Sunday February 12th	Annual Financial Meeting New Member Sunday
Monday, February 13th	All Boards Meetings
Tuesday, February 14th	Retired Men's Luncheon
Friday, February 17th	Film and Discussion Series
Monday, February 20th	Church office Closed
Wednesday, March 1st	Ash Wednesday
Friday, March 10th	Film and Discussion Series
Monday, March 13th	All Boards Meetings
Tuesday, March 14th	Retired Men's Luncheon

SAVE
the
DATE

Fellowship Hosts



Upcoming Fellowship Hour Schedule:

February 5th:	Memorial Garden Committee
February 12th:	No Fellowship Hour
February 19th:	Committee of Deacons
February 26th:	Boy Scouts
March 5th:	Women's Praise Choir
March 12th:	Nominating Committee and Welcoming Church Ministry
March 19th:	Board of Finance
March 26th:	Chancel and Men's Choirs

For a Complete Copy of our Monthly Calendar:

Please go to our [website and click on Church Calendar](#) to get the most current information.

If you would prefer a printed copy, please call the church office, we will be happy to print one and send it to you!

Volunteers Needed:

The Church Office is looking for volunteers to help count the offering on Monday mornings. You will be asked to commit to one turn each month. We are also in need of substitutes to fill in occasionally. The counting generally takes about two hours to complete. We will provide training! If you have an interest please contact the church office.

Thank you in advance for helping with this important task.

Ladies, Save the Date !!

The Women's Retreat: March 3rd-5th
Cost: \$140.00
Topic: "Prayer"

Please contact Rebecca Warner
(boomtree@sbcglobal.net) or
Rebecca Glenn (rglenn@travelers.com)
for more information.

Please also stop down to Fellowship
Hour on January 29th and speak
with members of the committee.

February Cornerstone Submission Deadline:

Tuesday, January 17th!



Welcome

You're Invited to a Reception for Newcomers, Visitors and Friends!

Sunday, January 29th, 11:30 a.m. in the Parsons' Study

Join First Church Simsbury ministers and lay leaders for a light lunch and conversation following worship. Take this opportunity to get to know church leaders, ask questions, and learn about the church.

For those who would like to explore membership, a second session will be held on Sunday, February 5th. This session will provide additional information about First Church, the United Church of Christ, and the meaning of membership.

New Members will be welcomed into First Church on Sunday, February 12th.

Childcare will be provided for both sessions.

Please RSVP to the Church Office, 860-651-3593.

We would love for you to join us!

First Church of Christ

689 Hopmeadow St
Simsbury CT 06070
(860) 651-3593
Fax (860) 408-9229
Kitchen (860) 658-9043
www.fccsimsbury.org
[Donate Online](#)

STAFF

Rev. George M. Harris
Senior Minister
gharris@fccsimsbury.org

Rev. Kevin Weikel
Associate Minister for
Youth and Young Adults
kweikel@fccsimsbury.org

Mark Mercier
Director of Music Ministries
mmercier@fccsimsbury.org

Cindy Cole
Director of Children's Ministries
ccole@fccsimsbury.org

Shannon Lindsay
Church Administrator
slindsay@fccsimsbury.org

Valerie Aldrich
Administrative Assistant
admin@fccsimsbury.org

Catherine Behrens
Membership Coordinator
cbehrens@fccsimsbury.org

Lisa Reed
Financial Assistant
lreed@fccsimsbury.org

Joe Martinez
Facilities Manager
jmartinez@fccsimsbury.org

2017 Stewardship Campaign

So far, 248 individuals and families have responded to Jesus' call to "Go and do the same!" pledging \$675,348.58 toward our goal of \$724,000.

Our two stewardship goals for 2017 are to increase participation and increase the total amount pledged by 10%.

We are well on our way! If you have not yet done so, please complete your pledge.
If you should have any questions, please contact the church office.

Update on Refugee Resettlement

Members of the JustFaith study group decided in March that we wanted to live our faith by helping to welcome a refugee family to Connecticut. We started exploring how we might do that and decided that we would like to partner with IRIS (Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services) in New Haven. Several of us have had training with this agency in order to learn the many different aspects and challenges of co-sponsoring a family. We have put together a broad coalition including members of First Church, Simsbury United Methodist Church, First Church of Granby, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, and members of a group in West Hartford called Welcoming our Neighbors. We have formed committees to work on issues of housing, employment, education, benefits, and transportation. We are hoping to be ready to welcome a family to West Hartford in February and partner with them as they work hard to establish themselves in a new culture far from home. We are pleased to be able to do our small part to help people who have been displaced by war and oppression.

We have a strong and motivated group, but could still use more help. So, contact Frank Gould (fgould@wesleyan.edu) if you are interested in being a part of the team or in knowing more about the plan. This effort will also require financial support. We have received generous support from our Mission Board and the other groups involved, but we encourage you to contribute to the effort. Checks can be made to First Church of Christ, Simsbury, with "Refugee Resettlement" on the memo line. We will need to subsidize housing for the family for six months to a year and help the family with many other expenses.

A committee is hard at work locating housing and employment for the adults. Even though they will probably not be able to speak English, they must find employment relatively fast after their arrival. You may know of a company, a store, a restaurant, or some type of business that might be willing to hire them. Translators will be available to help in their initial stages of employment. Volunteers will be working at a furious pace helping them to learn English but employment is a necessity. Please call Genie Wilmarth (860-658-0675) or Mary Hendrickson (860-651-9167) if you have any suggestions or contacts.

~Sara Batchelder and Frank Gould

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

First Church of Christ

689 Hopmeadow Street
Simsbury, CT 06070