

January 31, 2010

The Church on the Green

From The First Church of Christ in Longmeadow, United Church of Christ



“Embraced by the love of God in Christ, our mission is to love and serve our world. We seek to grow in Christ’s family through our journey—inward toward faith and knowledge, outward toward love and justice—always rooted and nurtured in worship.”

Remembering Our Friends in Haiti

When the news of the 7.0 earthquake in Haiti came to First Church, our thoughts immediately turned to our relationship with CONASPEH and the school we have been supporting for so many years. We worried about the Haitian missionaries Kim and Patrick Bentrrott, whose work we have been following through their internet blog, and about Patrick Villier, President of CONASPEH, as well as the students and staff at the school. As Mary Friedman of the Haiti committee stated, “We are heartbroken. We are so concerned for our friends there. It’s people, not just a country.” We clasped hands, we hugged, we prayed.

Thankfully, we learned relatively quickly that Kim and Patrick and their adopted Haitian son Solomon were safe, as well as Patrick Villier and his wife Françoise. That was where the good news, ended, however, as they told us that the CONASPEH school had been destroyed, with two classes of nursing students inside. We felt helpless to do anything but watch and wait. We tearfully read Kim Bentrrott’s blog account of what had happened: “Pulling up the drive to CONASPEH, we met familiar faces along the way, warning us of what we’d see, praying for our strength. When we arrived, three bodies awaited us under sheets, stiff and lifeless. Many others had already been claimed and removed by family. The 6 story building that had been our office, our school, our clinic, our headquarters, was nothing more than one story of rock and rubble. The basketball hoop lay cockeyed on the ground.”



The remains of the CONASPEH building.

That was when the spirit of First Church came to life with an amazing level of energy and activity as lay leaders and pastors alike worked to coordinate responses to this terrible disaster. A special service of Prayer and Communion was organized. According to Pastor Mike, it would provide us with a “Time to minister to one another, and to support each other during a time that is so hard, when we feel so helpless.” During the service, an offering would be taken to benefit the people of Haiti in their earthquake relief efforts. *(continued on page 2)*

The intimate prayer service was well attended by both First Church members and members of the community. We heard readings from eye witness accounts of the devastation interspersed with scripture and Haitian prayers. We sang hymns in both English and Creole. We gave thanks for those we know to have survived, and prayed for those who were lost, or are still searching for loved ones. But mostly we bonded together in our grief and our desire to do something to help.

As Kim Bentrrott writes, "Please pray for Haiti. In a minute's time, buildings crumbled and life was lost. So much life. And even with that said, I think the hardest times are still coming as people try to figure out how to put their lives together again. [...But I have hope that] Haiti will persevere, live, grow, rebuild, heal. Because that is what Haitians do."

You can follow Kim and Patrick's blog through the link on our homepage: www.firstchurchlongmeadow.org, where you can also find links to donate to the UCC earthquake relief as well as other news regarding Haiti.



Kim, Patrick and Baby Solomon - safe after the earthquake.

Hygiene Kits to be Delivered



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

Church World Service is delivering hygiene kits to the people of Haiti. In the face of such natural disasters, these Hygiene Kits can mean the difference between sickness and health for struggling families. Given the scope of the devastation in Haiti, they are sure to need many more than they have on hand. We are collecting items for the kits, which our Sunday school students will be assembling. Please bring in the supplies for one full kit, or multiples of one component (a box of Band-Aids, a pack of wash cloths, etc.) and leave them in the church office.

To assemble a Hygiene kit you will need:

- * One hand towel measuring approximately 16" x 28" (no fingertip or bath towels)
- * One washcloth
- * One wide-tooth comb
- * One nail clipper (no metal files or emery boards)
- * One bar of soap
- * One toothbrush (in original package)
- * Six Band-Aids

The Virtue of Patience



The apostle Paul says love is patient, and I would like to suggest that in this life patience is something like a girder of love. Just as a girder gives a building inner strength against the weights and winds and possible earthquakes that it must bear, so patience is a kind of strengthening or adversity-resisting factor that makes love possible when it is difficult. You need patience with all the objects of Christian love: God, your neighbor, and yourself.

—Robert C. Robert *The Strengths of a Christian*

Surveying our church as we enter a new year, I would say that we are in a time of ferment. There is a yeasty feeling as lots of ideas, concerns, hopes, and plans seem to be bubbling up all at once. A new urgency has developed around financial concerns. Giving over the past two years has decreased while costs have continued to rise. Difficult budget choices have been the result. There have been concern about the church’s direction and, more specifically, about my energy and leadership. Though our concerns are by no means unique—many churches are in similar situations—they are pressing and have produced some anxiety.

A time of ferment is a time of opportunity. New things are possible. But it is also a time for prudent caution. As any baker knows, too much yeast can lead to a messy kitchen! The task of leadership in this time is one of regulating the energy—keeping things bubbling, but not so much that they bubble over. Excellent steps have been taken by your church leadership to help us navigate through this time. A “MAP” (Minister’s Advisory Panel) has been formed to address the concerns that have been raised and to help us work together to move forward in a positive way. I am fully committed to working with the MAP to revitalize my ministry in this place.

To do this difficult work with both diligence and Christian love is going to take some time. Careful conversations need to happen. Multiple groups will need to coordinate their work. Results may not be immediately visible. The virtue of patience will be an asset as our congregation takes this next leg of our journey. Using patience as the “girder of love” will, I believe, benefit all of us.

See you in church!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Bennett'.

Mike Bennett
Senior Pastor

Moderator’s Musings

by Carlo Centeno, Moderator

I’ve often referred to “our spiritual energy” and some, I’m sure, have wondered what that means. I think the simplest understanding of the concept is that the likes of the Holy Spirit is within us, energizing our sense of purpose and moral good in terms of what Christ would have us do. If you are what you eat, then you’re certainly *who you are* when you pray and if you pray often, you are that much closer to Christ and our fellow brothers and sisters.

The disaster that is Haiti and how we have responded—and continue to respond—demonstrates our spiritual energy. The sadness we feel and the hope we carry for them is palpable. Similarly, how we deal with our growth and changes as a congregation can demonstrate how Christ-like we can be. Yes, progress is being made but it’s not at the speed of “run-this-church-like-a-business.” Our cadence is guided, in part, by our faith.

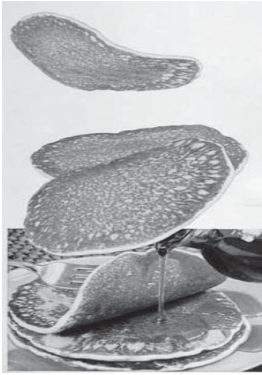
The Minister’s Advisory Panel [MAP] is now in place. Gerry Overstreet, Bruce Keator, Nola Kulig, Don Murphy and Carole Mazzarino have stepped up to help us support our minister and each other. I and many others have some idea of what they can offer and how they can help in key areas of membership, financial growth among others. Remember, they are not the solution but a critical soundboard and fount of critical thinking that can help bridge gaps of understanding and expectation between our minister, our congregation and each other.

Let’s continue the dialogue and do so with our spiritual best.

Can You Join Us, YES! Will You Join Us?

With so much to offer here at First Church, we want to share the gift of membership, also! Anyone recently visiting or coming in the past and ready to decide to join us can do so. We will be sending out notes about membership and will be ready to plan meetings to have conversations about joining the church. Contact the church office (567-6287/admin@firstchurchlongmeadow.org) if you are interested. We look forward to being in touch!

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner

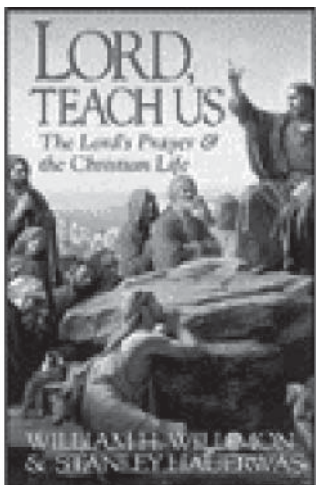


The Board of Children's Ministries is sponsoring a family-friendly pancake dinner on Tuesday, February 16 at 6:00 p.m. in Bailey Hall. Shrove Tuesday, also known as Mardi Gras, was originally a day when Christians prepared for the season of Lent. It always happens 47 days before Easter. Mardi Gras was celebrated the day before Ash Wednesday because in early history, Christians were not allowed to use fat during Lent. So any fat in the house, like butter, oil, or fat found in meat, was used up on "Fat Tuesday." Wear your Mardi Gras colors of purple (justice), green (faith), and gold (power) and join us for a fun evening of pancakes followed by after dinner activities.

Lenten Dinner Schedule

Mark your calendars! The Board of Deacons invite you to share five Lenten meals and activities which will focus on "Gratitude." The evening meals will be held at 6:00 p.m. in Bailey Hall. Some of the meals will be followed by activities. All members and friends are welcome to attend any and all of these meals which will be held on Wednesday February 24, March 3, 10, 17, and 24. More detailed information on the dinners will appear in the next issue of Church on the Green.

Lenten Adult Study



Five Sunday Mornings

In the Buxton Room (1st floor) from 11:15 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.

February 21, 28 and March 7, 14, 24

Led by Senior Pastor Mike Bennett

A Discussion of the book:

Lord, Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer and the Christian Life

by William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas

Our discussion will be based on very readable sections of the text (fewer than 20 pages a week!) that will help us to see the relationship between the familiar Lord's Prayer and the totality of the Christian life. This will be a great opportunity to deepen your faith and strengthen your understanding of a prayer that we frequently pray but seldom consider deeply. No previous study or knowledge is required! Books are available in the church office for \$12.

Friday Evening Fellowship to Meet February 5

Come take an English canal cruise!

Last summer Pat Hildreth, Shirley Fassell and Sabrina went on a most unusual cruise in England, which members and friends of Friday Evening Fellowship will want to learn about on February 5. The three of them spent two weeks on a 53-foot narrowboat on a four-county canal ring covering 110 miles with 100 manually operated locks!

Why did they do it, and how did they arrange it? Did they survive? Would they do it again?

Peter and Ellie Santos will host this wonderful evening at their home at 797 Longmeadow Street. Join them, bring your friends, and enjoy this slide-illustrated program complete with answers to the above questions.

The program will begin at 7:30 p.m. Please bring a food item to share.

Women's Benevolent Society to Meet February 5

All women and their guests are invited to the February 5th meeting of The Women's Benevolent Society. It will be held at 11:45 a.m. in Bailey Hall. We will begin with a short business meeting, followed by a luncheon. A program entitled "Bits and Pieces" will then be presented by our own Carolyn Snyder! She will tell us about her journey in the quilting world. She will tell us how she got interested in quilting and how quilts are made. Carolyn will also bring many of the quilts she has made. Attendees are asked to bring a favorite salad or dessert to share, or pay \$5.00 if preferred. Please save the date and come join us.

Sacred Circles: New Circle to Start Meeting

Sacred Circles are groups of women who meet regularly with the goal to nurture themselves spiritually. Basic principles are: council / circle sharing, listening without an agenda, shared ownership / leadership, confidentiality, taking responsibility for one's own needs, self-reflection, focus on spiritual development, and commitment. A new Circle is forming and will be meeting monthly on Sunday evenings. If you would like to join this Circle or are interested in finding out more about Sacred Circles, contact Cindy Hibert (413-567-8544/cwhibert@comcast.net).

A Note of Thanks

I would like to thank you all for your prayers during my recent eye surgery and recovery. I'd also like to thank those who sent cards and emails with words of encouragement - they were very much appreciated. Following my Drs' orders to stay positioned on my left side for a week was extremely difficult, but it was made easier thanks to the generosity of those who sent food and provided rides for my kids. And the prayer shawl is still keeping my shoulders warm at night! I feel lucky to be part of such a caring faith community.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Deb Garrity

Children's Ministries

Mitten Tree Thank You



This year, over 70 gifts were donated to our Mittens and More Giving Tree. All of the gifts were delivered by the Confirmation class to the Teen Living Center in Springfield (see photos on back cover). We received the following thank you from Nicole Lussier, Director of the Teen Living Center, as

well as thank yous from the teen mothers themselves. The mittens, scarves and hats that were placed on the tree will be donated to a nearby shelter. The Board of Children's Ministries would like to thank everyone who participated in this mission project.

Dear First Church,

On behalf of the Open Pantry Teen Living Program, I would like to thank you so much for your generosity and kindness. You made the lives of the families here much brighter during the holiday season. Without you caring so much about our families in need, it would have been a very difficult time for everyone.

Please know your generosity was seen and heard from huge smiles and laughter from both the children and teen mothers that you so generously helped. It brought tears of joy to my eyes.

Your gifts were filled with love, care, and kindness, and it was all felt by each and every single person who opened one.

With much love,

*Nicole P. Lussier, Director
Open Pantry Teen Living Center*

Youth
Encountering the
Spirit



Senior YES (Grade 9-12)

Sunday, January 31, 11:15 a.m.

Pancake brunch fundraiser.

Sunday, February 7, 6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Regular Meeting. Youth Lounge.

Friday, February 26-27

"30-hour" Famine.

YES! NOTE: Pastor Beth is still collecting clean, empty cans for a YES! project. So keep sending them in (until February 26).

Middle YES (Grade 6-8)

Sunday, February 7, 2:30 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.

Ice Skating at CYR Arena in Forest Park.

Monday, February 22, 6:30 p.m.

Regular meeting, Youth Lounge.

Confirmation Class

February 7

11:30 a.m. "Jesus"

February 28

11:30 a.m. "The Holy Spirit"

Questions? Contact Associate Pastor Beth Boisvert (567-6287 or beth@firstchurchlongmeadow.org) for more information on any of the above youth activities.

January 31 - February 27

Sunday	Mon.	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sat.
31 10 a.m. Worship *+ 11:15 a.m. Senior YES! Pancake Breakfast	Feb. 1	2 7:00 p.m. Mission	3 4:00 p.m. Joyful Noyse	4 8:45 a.m. Men's DCF 11:00 a.m. Bible Study 4:30 p.m. Praying the Scriptures 6:00 p.m. Bell Choir 7:30 p.m. Chancel	5 11:15 a.m. Women's Benev. Luncheon 7:30 p.m. Friday Evening Fellowship	6
7 10 a.m. Worship * ** Family Communion 11:15 a.m. Conf. Class 2:30 p.m. Middle YES! Ice Skating at CYR 6:30 p.m. Senior YES!	8	9	10 4:00 p.m. Joyful Noyse	11 8:45 a.m. Men's DCF 11:00 a.m. Bible Study 4:30 p.m. Praying the Scriptures 6:00 p.m. Bell Choir 7:30 p.m. Chancel	12	13
14 10 a.m. Worship *+ 11:00 a.m. Annual Meeting	15	16 6:00 p.m. Fat Tuesday Pancake Dinner	17 ASH WEDNESDAY NO Joyful Noyse (School vac.) 7:00 p.m. Trustees 7:00 p.m. Worship	18 8:45 a.m. Men's DCF 11:00 a.m. Bible Study 4:30 p.m. Praying the Scriptures 6:00 p.m. Bell Choir 7:30 p.m. Chancel	19	20
21 10 a.m. Worship *+ 6:30 p.m. Middle YES	22	23 10:00 a.m. Women's Benevolent Board 7:00 pm. Deacons	24 4 p.m. Joyful Noyse 6:00 Lenten Potluck 7:15 p.m. Adult Ed 7:15 p.m. Church Council	25 8:45 a.m. Men's DCF 11:00 a.m. Bible Study 4:30 p.m. Praying the Scriptures 6:00 p.m. Bell Choir 7:30 p.m. Chancel	26 Senior YES! 30-hour famine lock-in	27

* with Childcare for Infants & Toddlers + Faith First Church School 1-7

** Communion Sunday - bring a canned or packaged food for Open Pantry

The First Church of Christ in Longmeadow
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Longmeadow, MA 01106

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Contact Us

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www.firstchurchlongmeadow.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Staff

Senior Pastor The Reverend Michael Bennett
Associate Pastor Beth Boisvert
Director of Music John Gerry-Karajanes
Director of Children's Ministries Nancy Yesu
Assistant Director of Children's Ministries Deb Garrity
Program Director Gay Wesson
Administrator Maura Stevens
Director of Communication Deb Garrity

Next deadline: February 4

Delivering Our Gifts

On December 20, the Confirmation class paid a visit to the Teen Living Center in Springfield to deliver the 70+ gifts that were donated through the Mittens and More Giving Tree. They handed out gifts to the children and their mothers, and then joined in singing some Christmas carols and sharing cookies and hot chocolate. It was a very spirited afternoon, and the class enjoyed watching the little ones open and play with their new toys. Thank you to everyone who took an ornament off the tree and returned the wrapped gift. They were greatly appreciated! The Confirmation Class would also like to thank the adults who donated the cookies for the party, and those who drove them to the center: Peter and Susan MacElhiney, Sara McKeown, Candace Rutz, Janice Patel, Nancy Yesu, Wanona Dobbs and Mark Garrity.

