

December 20, 2009

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.”

Praise God for Sleep!

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, I want to share a joy with you. I’ve talked in person to many of you about this and spoke about it from the pulpit on the Second Sunday of Advent. So that everyone is equally informed, I am also writing about it here.

For the past two years or so, I have been struggling with chronic fatigue and lack of energy. I was working with various doctors to find treatment options that could help me feel better and be more productive. Results were limited at best. In late May, my primary doctor suggested that I undergo a “sleep study” so that we could rule out sleep apnea as a cause of my fatigue. Unfortunately, there was a long waiting period, and the sleep study could not be scheduled until mid-October. The sleep study showed a diagnosis of sleep apnea (my breathing was stopping and I was partially waking up on an average of 25 times per hour). At the end of October, I was prescribed, and began using, a CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) machine to treat the condition.

The results from this were extremely positive and almost immediate. The CPAP machine has allowed me to breathe normally during sleep, and thus get a good night’s rest. Though I did not know it, I had basically been chronically sleep-deprived for *years*. In

the month I have been using the CPAP machine, I have felt much more energetic—like a new man! This treatment has been like a miracle for me, and I believe it will lead to improved performance in all areas of my life. And as this has been a very recent development, I only expect things to improve more in the next few months as I repay a massive “sleep debt.”



I share this news for two reasons. First, I want to thank God for this improvement in my health and share that joy with you. Second, because I know that my energy problems have affected my work as your pastor. It is my aim to address this vigorously in the coming year.

God is good! Christ is born! See you in church!

Mike Bennett
Senior Pastor

Moderator's Message

Delivered by Carlo Centeno on December 6



A good number of you have expressed to me concerns about how Mike's been feeling since his return from his leave this past spring. It appears that the leave may have improved his energy level, but not to the level that some in the congregation had hoped.

So, why am I here instead of Mike addressing the broader question of, "Where's Mike's energy and enthusiasm and engagement?" As the moderator part of my role is to mediate, arbitrate and preside over not just meetings, but concerns and points of view and perceptions from the congregation, our lay leaders and the ministers. And of late, I've managed to hear, and read, a lot of commentary, questions and concerns from members of First Church.

Mike has sleep apnea, which means that he doesn't get the proper type or amount of sleep each night. And a good night's sleep can do wonders to your energy level and likely other areas of your being. I think most of us can identify with that. For Mike having a night's sleep interrupted at the rate of 25x an hour can not be healthy. I won't go into the details of his treatment, but it is accurate to say that Mike is responding for the better.

So in spite of his leave earlier this year, whatever rest he sought was short-lived as the sleep apnea treatments did not start until this fall. And in the time that's come to pass, we have lost some momentum as a church. Many lay leaders from the board of mission, the board of deacons, the trustees, the church-school ministry and others outside of committees, have been pro-active in keeping this congregation aligned with our Christian compass. There have been small meetings, larger meetings, prayer meetings, a community breakfast, various walks to help area causes, novel ways to address constraints, retreat planning, fund-raising for youth trips, the Haiti trip and more.

If we are to do "more," then we must improve our internal communications, not the least of which is collecting appropriate input and feedback from you and the lay leaders to share with our senior minister. To that end, work is underway to help Mike become more engaged with his ministry here at First Church and beyond these storied walls. Let me point out that the process that has brought us to this very point in time has not been perfect for the trustees, church council or Mike. And yet whatever discomfort has been born of this imperfection, the intentions have all been well meaning.

I am tasked to create a Minister's Advisory Panel (or MAP), to help not just Mike, but all of us improve our interpersonal communications as a Church. Bruce Keator, chair of the trustees had championed this not too long ago and others have chimed in to help jump start this concept. The five individuals who will make up MAP will act as a sounding board for Mike, even a catalyst, to assist engagement and creation in an action plan that moves this Church forward.

And you will help. The first thing each of us needs to do is recall the key lesson in Ephesians: arriving at unity among Christians takes a lot of hard work, faith and patience. The second thing is for you to embrace that sense of unity and see how you can change one part of you that won't get your nose too bent out of shape AND help move the Church forward.

Lastly, once MAP is in place and coordinating work details with Mike, please support them, pray for them and understand that individually and corporately, ministers and staff, we ARE and always will be, the First Church of Christ in Longmeadow.

Happy Customers at the Christmas Fair

According to Christmas Fair Chair Pedge Daniels, over 850 happy customers visited the *Christmas...on the Green* Christmas Fair on December 6. They were treated to an assortment of shopping areas. The lower level attracted customers with Vintage Home Goods, specialty Gift



Gifts from Afar was a great spot to find unusual gifts.



Homemade cookies enticed folks with a sweet tooth.



Competition was fierce for items in the Silent Auction.

Baskets, Gifts from Afar, Attic Treasures, the Silent Auction, Homemade Candy, Spices and Cheese, Cookies in a Can, Grandma's Kitchen and the Book Nook. The main floor held the Children's Corner, visits with Santa, Personalized Ornaments, Jewelry, and the Christmas

Shoppe. Shoppers in Bailey Hall were also treated to live music on the piano as well as a string quartet.

All proceeds from the fair are donated to local charities, and are expected to match or surpass last year's record.



Specialty gift baskets were very popular.



Customers found great buys in Attic Treasures.



The jewelry table was adorned with bits of glitz for everyone.

Visit to Haiti Sees Much Progress

by Mark Pohlman, Co-Chair, Haiti Committee

No one touches my heart like you,” sang the students in English, giving thanks to First Church for the scholarship money, which has allowed 115 students to attend school. Numerous other songs, skits, and dances, along with a large banquet, provided a wonderful climax to the recent weeklong visit with our CONASPEH partners in Haiti.

There are now 665 students attending the CONASPEH school. It is gaining a good reputation in Port-au-Prince as the students have a very high pass rate on the state exams. It is unusual for a school for the very poor to have computers as well as classes in home economics, other cultures, library studies, and basketball. Power to the building is now more reliable because of the improved electrical lines, which allow the city power at night to recharge the two banks of 18 batteries. We have never seen the school so crowded and busy.

The 6 acres of land next to the school have now been purchased although \$12,000 to pay the taxes, legal fees, licenses, etc. still needs to be raised. Use of the land will start soon. A 3000 gallon in-ground storage tank, pump, and three 350 gallon water tanks on the top floor will be built soon, providing running water for the first time. Future plans call for housing for the seminary students, a conference area, and recreational areas.

The students in the nursing school’s first graduating class have all found jobs according to Patrick Villier,

President of CONASPEH. Although the school is not yet accredited, he feels with the new Nursing Director and some additional financing that it will eventually be accredited. They did not take any new students for one year as they looked for a new director. More nursing books are a high priority.



The seminary continues to be very active. Additional classes are now given in two satellite locations north and west of Port-Au-Prince. We all had a chance to do some teaching for them, as well as high school seniors and nursing students, trying to coordinate our lectures with their regular curriculum. Wanona Dobbs gave two lectures on the four journeys of Paul. Dr. Matt Friedman talked on depression and stress. Pauline Bassett talked on conflict resolution and

listening techniques. David Entin (who along with Pauline are from First Churches in Northampton) conducted classes on new ways to learn through small groups with open discussion as well as a class on different learning styles. Copies of the book “Where There is no Doctor”, written in Creole, were given to seminary students from rural areas for the first time. Mark Pohlman, with help from Mary Friedman, showed the seminary and nursing students the basics on using the book. Learning by reading and open discussion rather than by lectures is new for most of the students. Mark also talked to nursing students about hip and elbow dislocations in children. Nancy Marshall talked to the nursing students about basic rehabilitation concepts and then visited a nearby rehab center with them, laying the foundation for a clinical rotation there in the future. Nancy also provided a cross-cultural treat by playing her bagpipes at church and in the classrooms.

Len Bertelli again worked with students and upgraded 10 computers with wireless cards. Much work remains for the school to be truly part of the digital age, but everyone seems to think it is a worthwhile goal. Having a computer club at school may be one way to make progress.

Mary Friedman worked for two days on a student art mural project. With a 5x12’ canvas and paints, she worked with 6th grade students painting representative Haitian objects. The mural was brought back and will be displayed in

First Church. In February, our Sunday school classes will paint a similar mural showing Longmeadow life, which will then be given to the CONASPEH school. This is an exciting way to get students to share and think globally. Pauline also worked with individual letter and picture exchanges between 4th grade students in Haiti and Springfield.

About 10 suitcases of donated goods were delivered. Included were the nursing kits, school and art supplies collected at Glenbrook and Northampton schools, medicines, basketballs, backboard and rim, soccer balls, a basic chemistry set, and French science books.

We took advantage of the two extra days to visit two schools and a church in Citie Sole, visit the newly opened school at northern Pont Sonde (funded largely by the Wisconsin churches) and enjoy the newly paved road up there, swim in the ocean, visit the museum and churches in Port-au-Prince, buy Creole bibles for seminary students, visit an orphanage, and talk with missionaries Kim and Patrick Bentrrott (and baby Solomon) on numerous occasions.

The increased enrollment, the purchase and use of the land, the ability of the nurses to find work, the new building, new roads, and a heightened sense of enthusiasm and purpose among the students, were all visible signs of progress. As before, we all returned feeling blessed and enriched by the experience and thankful to our congregations for their continued interest and their moral and financial support.

“Home for the Holidays” - Habitat House Dedicated Dec. 6



Advent is a time of joyful anticipation -- a perfect season to celebrate our long-awaited Habitat house at 75 Pomona Street in Springfield!

Started in spring 2008, the house was finally dedicated on December 6, 2009, with a crowd of about 50 joyful people.

“It’s a dream come true,” said homeowner Kim Rivera, who was tearful as she thanked Habitat and all the volunteers who participated in the project.

Also in attendance were Rivera’s family members, representatives from Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity, and members of the 10 “Circle of Faith” congregations who provided much of the project’s labor, materials, and financing: Holy Name (Springfield), Trinity United Methodist (Springfield), St. Patrick’s (Springfield), First Church of Christ (Longmeadow), Mittineague (West Springfield), St. Michael’s (East Longmeadow), Holy Cross (Springfield), St. Mary’s (Springfield), Jewish Community Center Don’t Just Sit There Youth Group (Springfield), and Faith United Church (Springfield).

Rivera moved into her new home on Monday, December 7, equipped with several presents from the Circle, including a tool kit and gift cards for Home Depot. She was most excited about decorating the basement, where she plans to arrange trophies and awards as a “shrine” to honor her children.

First Church’s contributions to the Circle of Faith project included countless hours of Saturday site work by about 50 members, a dozen or more crew snacks and lunches, and more than \$23,000. A lovely home now stands where there was once a blighted lot — a Christmas miracle for Rivera and the community she now calls home.



First Church members Candy Heaphy, Jane Jakobek, Steve Gelling, Mary Friedman and Anne Keyser attended the dedication along with Pastors Beth and Mike.

Children's Ministries

Mitten Tree Reminder

Thank you to everyone who took a gift tag off of the Mitten's & More giving tree. Please make sure to return the wrapped gifts no later than Sunday, December 20. Nicole Lussier, director of the Teen Living Center, will be here that morning to accept the gifts and to speak to our Pre-Confirmation and Confirmation classes about the center. The 7th and 8th grade students will then be travelling to the center to join in their Christmas Party.

Loaves & Fishes

The Board of Children's Ministries is responsible for cooking and serving lunch at the Loaves & Fishes soup kitchen on Sunday, January 10. This is a wonderful opportunity to teach our children about mission work. If you would like help cook and/or serve, please contact Director of Children's Ministries Nancy Yesu (567-6287/nyesu@firstchurchlongmeadow.org).

Church School Thank You

Thank you to the following people who helped out during the "Christmas Around the World" study rotation: Lisa Kelly, Diane Peluso, Denine Northrup, Margaret Barsalou, Julie Yesu, Haley Northrup and Mona Balicki. A special thanks to Wanona Dobbs and Pete MacElhiney for helping out with our 7th grade pre-Confirmation class.

Preschool Room Update and Thank You

Jen Wright, our lead PreK/K room teacher, has been out on maternity leave. We are happy to announce that she will be returning to the classroom on Sunday, January 3. A huge thank you goes out to Lisa Bell who has been the substitute teacher while Jen has been away.



Senior YES (Grade 9-12)

Sunday, December 20, 7:00 p.m.

Christmas Party with college kids (following Carol sing on the Green)

Sunday, January 3, 6:30 p.m.

Regular meeting, youth lounge.

Sunday, January 10, 6:30 p.m.

Regular meeting, youth lounge.

Sunday, January 24, 10:00 a.m.

Youth Sunday. Details to follow.

Sunday, January 31 11:15 a.m.

Pancake brunch fundraiser. Details to follow.

Middle YES (Grade 6-8)

Monday, January 11, 6:30 p.m.

Regular meeting, youth lounge.

Confirmation Class

December 20

11:30 a.m. Class to participate in Christmas Party at the Teen Living Center in Springfield with pre-Confirmation class

January 10

11:30 a.m. "The Bible II"

January 24

11:30 a.m. "God"

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

December 20 - January

Sunday	Mon.	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Satur.
20 10 a.m. Worship *+ 11:30 a.m. Confirmation Class 6:00 p.m. Carol Sing on the Green	21	22 10:00 a.m. Women's Benevolent 7 p.m. Deacons	23 4:00 p.m. Joyful Noyse	24 CHRISTMAS EVE 4:00 p.m. Family Worship Joyful Noyse Sings 8:00 p.m. Worship 11:00 p.m. Worship	25 CHRISTMAS DAY Office Closed	26
27 10 a.m. Worship * Joyful Noyse Sings	28	29	30 NO kids choir	31 8:45 a.m. Men's DCF 11:00 a.m. Bible Study 4:30 p.m. Praying the Scriptures	Jan. 1 Church Office Closed	2
3 10 a.m. Worship *+ ** 6:30 p.m. Senior YES!	4	5 7 p.m. Mission 7:30 p.m. Nominating	6 4:00 p.m. Joyful Noyse	7 8:45 a.m. Men's DCF 11:00 a.m. Bible Study 4:30 p.m. Praying the Scriptures	8	9
10 10 a.m. Worship *+ Joyful Noyse Sings 11:30 a.m. Confirmation Class 12:00 Children's Ministries serves Loaves & Fishes 6:30 p.m. Senior YES!	11 6:30 p.m. Middle YES!	12	13 4:00 p.m. Joyful Noyse	14 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	15	16

* 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
United Church of Christ
763 Longmeadow Street
Longmeadow, MA 01106

Contact Us

413-567-6287

admin@firstchurchlongmeadow.org

www.firstchurchlongmeadow.org

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: December 31

Community Carol Sing

Sunday, December 20

Our own John Gerry-Karajanes has worked together with the music directors from St. Andrew's Episcopal Church and St. Mary's to coordinate a Community Carol Sing near the Christmas tree on the Longmeadow Green. This free event will be held Sunday, December 20 beginning at 6:00 p.m. and is open to all members of the community. We hope to include a large number of First Church members and friends among the carollers. Bring your own candle (or small flashlight) to add to the atmosphere. Lyric books will be provided. Hot chocolate and cookies will be available on the front steps of First Church. Come out and sing!!

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Making Connections

2010 Women's Retreat

December 20 is the deadline to get in your registration for the Women's Retreat, which will be held March 5-7, 2010 at the Silver Lake Conference Center in Sharon, CT. The total cost for the retreat is \$125. A \$70 deposit is due with your registration information. Don't miss it! Call the church office (567-6287) today to reserve your spot. Contact any member of the retreat planning committee with questions: Bridget Keator, Cindy Hibert, Mary Randall, Wanona Dobbs and Mary Friedman.

Milestones

In memoriam

Judith S. Bridge, November 21, 2009