

December 19, 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.”*

## Almost There!

Our Advent journey of waiting is almost over. We have just one Sunday in Advent left, then it is on to Christmas Eve and our big celebration of Christ’s birth. For many of us, it is one of the most favorite services of the years. With candles, carols, and beautiful music, our hearts are lifted up by the yearly reminder of God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ.

But for now, we wait. Waiting is not a natural strength for most of us. We don’t like waiting in lines at the post office, the registry of motor vehicles, or even at a sports event. We want things to *get started*. We want things to *happen*.

But waiting is an essential Christian skill. Since a big part of our Christian vocation involves listening for God’s guidance and discerning God’s will, we need to learn the virtue of patience in waiting. As the old prayer puts it, “God’s ways are not our ways and God’s thoughts are not our thoughts.” In the same way, God’s time is not our time.



We wait. We listen. And in God’s own time, the Word is made flesh.

See you in church!

Mike Bennett  
Senior Pastor

## Advent Services and Festivities

### Sunday, December 19 The Fourth Sunday of Advent

10:00 a.m. Service of Worship  
Lighting the Candle of Love  
Presenting our Gifts from the Mittens & More Tree  
5:00 p.m. Community Carol Sing on the Green

### Friday, December 24th Christmas Eve

4:00 p.m. Family Christmas Eve Service  
\* Nursery Care provided to age 5 \*  
8:00 p.m. Candlelight Service of the Word  
(including 3 choral arrangements)  
\* Nursery Care provided to age 5 \*  
11:00 p.m. Candlelight Service of  
Word and Sacrament

## Coming Attractions

**Sunday, December 19**

Community Carol Sing on the Green  
5:00 p.m.

**Tuesday, December 21**

Our Longest Night:  
A Service of Hope at Christmas Time  
7:00 p.m.

**Sunday, December 26**

“Pajama Day”  
Wear your PJs to the 10:00 a.m. Service

**Saturday, January 22**

One Day Women’s Retreat  
“Spa Day for the Soul”

Please see the complete calendar of events on  
our website:  
[www.firstchurchlongmeadow.org](http://www.firstchurchlongmeadow.org)

## Family Communion Sunday

The morning service on Sunday, December 5 was a very special one, which included a sermon based on Godly Play (bottom, left). Many children and youth participated in parts of the service, including ushering, reading (below), and helping to serve communion (bottom, right).



## Our Longest Night:

### A Service of Hope at Christmas Time

On the longest night of the year, December 21 at 7:00 p.m., First Church will offer a “Blue Christmas” service. Do you feel at odds with or estranged from the general feeling of joy and happiness typically associated with this time of year? Have you suffered a personal loss such death of a loved one, divorce, illness, or job loss which makes the holidays especially difficult? You are not alone. At this contemplative service we will recognize and honor these feelings by creating a space where everyone can come as they are and share a ritual of healing and hope. Light refreshments will be served in the Buxton Room following the service.

## Our Money, Our Values:

### A Book Discussion with Pastor Beth

It’s New Year’s Resolution time, and many focus on money. Bring a “bag supper” and join Pastor Beth for a three-part discussion of the concepts in the book *Our Money, Our Values* by Holley Hewitt Ulbrich and Catherine Mobley. Book synopsis: *Our Money, Our Values* explores three critical steps for churches, community leaders, and individuals to effectively and fundamentally transform their relationship with money into a positive tool for advocacy, building community and increasing social values.

The sessions will be held on January 10, 24 and 31 at 6:00 p.m. in the Buxton Room (1st floor). Each session will focus on one of the steps, but neither the ability to attend all three discussions nor reading the book is required. A few copies of the book will be available in the church office for \$15, and a copy will be purchased for the church library.

## MAP Update

The Minister's Advisory Panel (MAP) was formed at the beginning of 2010 to work with Senior Pastor, Mike Bennett, to strengthen the ministry function. The team's members are Bruce Keator, Nola Kulig, Carole Mazzarino, Don Murphy and Gerry Overstreet (chair). Much of this work has been "behind the scenes;" so what has MAP really been up to?

The group has met with Mike continuously throughout the year, sometimes as often as weekly. The first step was to understand the current workload of our ministers and how their daily work functions. We received input from many members of the congregation, and all comments were reviewed together with Mike and incorporated into the process. From this review process, the following areas emerged as key in strengthening ministry efforts going forward:

- Preaching and teaching
- Pastoral care and visitation
- Structure for feedback into the ministry function
- Strategic vision and plan for First Church

The first two issues were identified as ones that could be addressed immediately through efforts of the ministers and which were also priorities according to congregational input. Mike has put much effort into sermon content and delivery, which has resulted in positive feedback. Visitation and pastoral care ministries were the second area of focus, and this work is ongoing. A more detailed update is forthcoming focusing strictly on this important area of pastoral relations. In the area of feedback into the ministry function, MAP identified a need for greater structure to provide an ongoing dialogue between the minister and the church on how efforts are meeting church needs. These recommendations were made to the appropriate functional bodies of the church and will be incorporated in some form. This, as well as development of a strategic vision and plan for the church, are major agenda items for 2011, which you can expect to hear more about as well.

As these areas are addressed, goals achieved and other structures are made, MAP will eventually phase out of existence. Our role was conceived to meet a temporary need, and so the goal was to work ourselves out of a job. We feel we are well on our way toward meeting that goal. Until then, we would appreciate your continued support, input and prayers.

MAP is always interested in your feedback. If you see something that needs improvement, please bring that issue forward. If you notice any positive changes, we'd love to hear that, too! You can reach us by e-mail at [firstchurchmap@verizon.net](mailto:firstchurchmap@verizon.net) or by contacting one of the MAP members. We'd be happy to discuss things by phone or in person.

## Update from the Board of Trustees

At presstime, we have received \$404,599 of the \$441,381 that was pledged for this year, which leaves \$36,782 in outstanding pledges in order for us to meet our budget. Please remember to send in your final pledge payments by the end of the year.

What have the trustees been doing this year? The Church building has been painted and repairs have been completed. Several repairs were made to the Parsonage (Montessori) building. A new contract was signed with Longmeadow Montessori.

What is needed for next year? The Property Committee is looking for volunteers to work on church grounds and plantings for 2011. Contact Maura in the church office (567-6287) to join the group.

The First Church of Christ in Longmeadow  
*United Church of Christ*  
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## Contact Us

413-567-6287

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## Staff

*Senior Pastor* The Reverend Michael S. Bennett

*Associate Pastor* The Reverend Elizabeth A. C. Boisvert

*Director of Music* John Gerry-Karajanes

*Director of Children's Ministries* Nancy Yesu

*Children's Ministries Assistants* Jen Wright & Karen Glick

*Program Director* Gay Wesson

*Administrator* Maura Stevens

*Director of Communication* Deb Garrity

Next deadline: December 30

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## Christmas.. on the Green a Great Success

The annual Christmas Fair organized by the Women's Benevolent Society was held on December 4. Over 850 happy customers came through the doors to peruse the goodies, which ranged from art to Christmas themed items to jewelry and baked goods. At presstime, the fair had taken in just under \$12,000, all of which will be donated to local charities.

It was a massive effort and showed off the hospitality that can be found at First Church. These pictures are only some of the shots of the people that made the fair possible - there are more on our facebook page - search for First Church Longmeadow to view the album.

