



The December 2009 Landmark

The First Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
Guilford, Connecticut

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Vol. 56, Number 11

Miracles, Faith and God's Choosing in Christmas

Between bookshelves, windows and doors, there's not a lot of spare wall space in my Spencer House office. But still a few treasures hang, including three religious images: Salvador Dali's portrait of Christ between death and resurrection, my favorite image of the great 16th century Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, and a small frame of Joan of Arc. Though this is not nearly as planned as it might seem, I suppose it is not coincidental either. They are certainly defining figures of my life. And now it's Advent and, from one of those bookshelves, I am drawing some of Luther's reflections on Christ's entrance into the world.

How, I wonder, would Luther be heard to modern ears? I suppose he would be taken as diversely as the Christmas gospel narrative itself. Some believe in the heralding angels and the spectacular star. Some reject it as an unbelievable legend. Others return to it each year with loving nostalgia, while still others seek after it in yearning for such belief.

Much of the modern struggle with the gospel record of Christ's birth is bound up in reconciling miracles and contemporary science. But Luther was not primarily interested in miracles. It was the human, not the miraculous, dimensions of the Christmas story that engaged him. In describing what Mary lacked in the stable, Luther drew detailed portraits of childbirth in a German home. His narratives were infused with deep human emotion – Mary's perplexity, Joseph's dilemma, the shepherd's fear, Herod's scheming. Above all, it was their faith that gripped Luther. The virgin birth appeared an insignificant miracle compared with her faith. He marveled that Joseph was able to recognize God's word, that the shepherds could believe it, that the Wise Men could follow it.

Faith did not come lightly to Luther and he knew that it could not come easily to any of us precisely because God's choosing in Christ's birth was, indeed, inexplicable: Why should the God of all the universe care so much for us to lie down in a feeding trough under the shadow of Herod's terror? That God would do such a thing, that God would come to us in our own flesh – compared to that, no other miracle really mattered. Here there can only be awe. And in that awe, we moderns join Luther and all those who have ever heard this truth and grace revealed.

This Advent may that awe be yours.

Advent blessings, Susan

DECEMBER WORSHIP SCHEDULE**Sunday, Dec. 6:** *Lisa preaching*

Second Sunday in Advent

8:30 AM Worship- Chapel

9:00 AM Bible Study – Griswold Hall

10:00 AM Worship, Nursery care

11:15 AM Harvest Mini-Fair – Fellowship Hall

5:00 PM Advent Family Supper- Fellowship Hall

6:00 PM Contemporary Worship Service-Sanctuary

Sunday, Dec. 13: *Kendrick preaching*

Third Sunday in Advent

8:30 AM Worship- Chapel

9:00 AM Bible Study – Griswold Hall

10:00 AM Worship, Nursery Care, Church School

5:00 PM Service of Lessons & Carols – Sanctuary

6:00 PM Soup & Bread Supper –Fellowship Hall

Wednesday, Dec. 16:

7:00 PM Service of Prayer and Healing-Sanctuary

Sunday, Dec 20: *Susan preaching*

Fourth Sunday in Advent

8:30 AM Worship-Chapel

9:00 AM Bible Study – Griswold Hall

9:00 AM Church School Breakfast gr. 4-6 families

10:00 AM Festival Service/Nursery/Children's Pgm

Thursday, Dec. 24 Christmas Eve

5:00 PM Pageant

10:00 PM Candlelight Communion Service,

*Kendrick preaching***Sunday, Dec. 27:** *David Colton preaching*

10:00 AM Worship, Nursery Care

ANNUAL REPORT REMINDER:

Annual Reports need to be submitted by each of the Boards and Committees for inclusion in the Book of Reports prepared for our Annual Meeting on Sunday, February 7th. To insure the Book of Reports is ready by January 24 for all members and friends to review before the meeting, **please submit your reports to the Church Office by Monday, January 11th**. If you can submit them early, by all means do so!

Reports may be submitted in different ways. the easiest for me is to receive it as an attachment via email to office@firstchurchguilford.org. - I use Microsoft Word. You may also submit a hard copy that is "copy-ready." Of course, if you do not have access to a computer, I am happy to key your report into the computer – just submit it as early as possible, please. Check last year's Book of Reports if you need guidance in preparing this year's report. If you have any questions, please call 203-453-5249.

Thank you! Penelope

DEATHS

Robert W. Elmore

November 29, 1942—October 20, 2009

Helen E. Downing

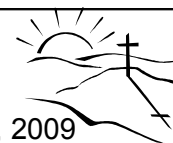
April 7, 1930—October 22, 2009

Marjorie Elizabeth Williams

May 21, 1924—October 23, 2009

Elizabeth Nettleton Theiss

February 13, 1910 - November 16, 2009

**DEACONESS OF THE MONTH**

Deaconess for December is Peggy Russell (203-458-0660.) Please notify her of births, adoptions, or anyone who may need a note of sympathy or encouragement. For information on the Deaconesses' **Prayer Shawl Ministry**, or if you know of someone who would welcome a Prayer Shawl as a tangible sign of First Church's prayers, please call Pam Welch at 203-458-2340. New hands are always welcome to knit or crochet shawls; materials are provided. **CDs** of Sunday services are available to sign out in Spencer House kitchen. **Need a Ride to Worship?** The Board of Deaconesses will find drivers for those needing rides to any service: Sunday morning, the Contemporary Service, Service of Prayer and Healing, etc. Please call Mary Jo Puchini, coordinator (203-458-6522).

MINEAR LIBRARY

Wally Lamb's Couldn't Keep It to Myself takes the reader inside York Correctional Institute in Niantic where one of our members is chaplain and three others are mentors. This "up close and personal" view has the potential to change your response to our prison ministry.

Marjorie Colton

ALPHA CLUB DECEMBER MEETING

The Alpha Club meets next on Tuesday, December, 15, 2009 at 7:00 PM at the home of Carin Small, 52 Church St., for our annual Christmas Party. Mitre Kish's presentation will be "Christmas in Iran." Members should bring an unwrapped toy for Christian Community Action and socks for homeless men and women. All are welcome!

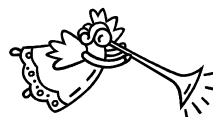
Thanks to Office Angels for November:

Charlene Benton, Cindy Caligan,

Liza Catino, Catherine Gilbert,

Dianne Hughes, Susan Leete,

Suzanne McGriff, Beth Milliron,



Alice Mitchell, Jane Rowen and Daphne Stitt

CHURCH COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

November 10, 2009

Council's theme this month was the "Joys and Concerns" of each committee and board. After Kendrick's opening prayer, representatives from committees and boards presented a three-minute overview of their group's focus. Just some of the highlights were:

Business Committee was excited that the Sanctuary's new roofing project was being started, and church member Bruce Sale donated all of the roofing materials. (An amazing blessing!!)

The joy of Pilgrim Fellowship was having about ninety kids involved in the program and having a full committee.

Martin Ewing, reporting as the church's webmaster, was grateful for the Deaconesses assistance to pay for a new computer. We have two bloggers – Lisa Horst and Bill Speed.

Martin also reported on behalf of Board of Finance, which is spending time looking at the church's cash flow.

Debbie Peluse was excited to have Susan Leete as her new assistant treasurer, and Karolyn Dunn as our bookkeeper.

Peggy Russell for Deaconesses shared that they are in need of volunteers to help with the delivery of Christmas poinsettias, as her committee is down several members. Men are encouraged to volunteer as some of the male homebound would enjoy male company.

Lyla Johnson expressed the needs of Nominating in filling positions on her committee as well as all of the other committees.

Bill Speed was happy that the Burt family has given a \$5,000 grant to the Myrtha Licht Fund, which will be used to host a jazz master class in spring 2010.

Betsy Work of CE reports that each board member has been assigned a Christian Ed class to provide support to the teachers.

Tom Grant speaking for Human Resources expressed concern that they are a volunteer-based group handling huge responsibilities staying on top of the federal and state laws.

Tom Pugh reported that the Memorial Committee has received an overwhelming response in memorials from Betty Allen's family and friends.

At Alpha Club, Vin Adinolfi will be speaking at next month's meeting about prison ministry.

Community & World Concerns is happy that they have a full board and are getting out the word of their ministry.

Shannon Clarkson was happy that the prison ministry has David Colton teaching a bible class at Manson Correctional Institute.

Lisa Horst shared her joy about the children's Chapel program, which teaches about communion and service.

Russ Campaigne updated Council on the sale of the Melita property. It was agreed by the committee to drop the price to \$549,000 and we anticipate some activity as a result. Council reviewed the congregational vote from the November 30, 2008, meeting, which stated:

1. The congregation agreed to authorize the sale of 245 Boston Street.
2. The congregation authorized Church Council to approve the terms of a sale after recommendations from the Melita House Sale Committee.
3. The congregation agreed to authorize the Chair of Church Council, on behalf of First Congregational Church of Guilford, Inc., to sign any and all documents related to the sale of the property under terms approved by Church Council.

Council then felt that an informational meeting of the congregation should be called for November 22, 2009, to refresh the congregation's memory of this and also report of any offer(s) we may have received as a result of the price reduction. Due to the need for confidentiality of the potential offer(s), no details will be discussed at the congregational meeting, however, Council will meet immediately afterwards to discuss in depth and provide direction.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:05 PM.

LAST CALL FOR LESSONS & CAROLS

The choir has been rehearsing Christmas music for a month, but there's still time to catch up if you'd like to sing for First Church Christmas services. Call Bill Speed (458-9701).

SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Sunday, November 22, 11:00 AM

Dear Friends,

In case you are unable to make our Special Congregational Meeting on November 22nd about 245 Boston Street (Melita House), I wanted you to be aware of its basic content.

1. Russ Campaigne will give an overview from the Melita Sale Committee, explaining that the new listing price is now \$549,900 and why we have taken this step. At this asking price we anticipate offers.
2. The congregation will be reminded of their 11/30/08 vote, which stated:
 - a. The congregation agreed to authorize the sale of 245 Boston Street.
 - b. The congregation authorized Church Council to approve the terms of a sale after recommendations from the Melita House Sale Committee.
 - c. The congregation agreed to authorize the Chair of Church Council, on behalf of First Congregational Church of Guilford, Inc., to sign any and all documents related to the sale of the property under terms approved by Church Council.
3. This method is meant to get the best sales price for the church and is not meant to close out anyone from the process. Questions will be taken from the congregation.

Kendrick

O CHRISTMAS TREE

We are looking for a live tree to cut that will become First Church's "Hat and Mitten" Tree in the Sanctuary during December. If you have one to donate, please call Kendrick at 203-453-5249.



CHRISTMAS "MITTEN" TREE

Our traditional "mitten, gloves, hat and scarf tree" will include socks and underwear once again this year as Columbus House continues to have an urgent need for new socks and underwear - especially over-sized underwear - for the homeless population they serve. Place your mittens, gloves, hats and scarves on the tree; socks and underwear beneath the tree. Gloves, mittens, hats and scarves will be distributed to Christian Community Action, Covenant to Care, and Columbus House. Socks and underwear will go to Columbus House. Any questions, call Linda Cantley @ 458-2569. *Community and World Concerns*

MUSIC MINISTRIES

Can you imagine Christmas without singing? Even the local pharmacies are already playing muzak versions of carols. Don't worry. Our Senior and Junior Choirs have been practicing music for Christmas since late October. Even at this late date, newcomers are always welcome to join our Senior Choir for rehearsals at 7:15 on Nov. 20, Dec. 4 & 11 in preparation for our carol service. You'll have some catching up to do, but your Christmas season will have added meaning when you've spent time with the traditional melodies and texts.

The Service of Lessons and Carols on Dec. 13th at 5:00pm, is a beautiful tradition at First Church featuring readings from Scripture, carols sung by all and special music offered by our Senior Choir, Junior Choir, instrumentalists, soloists, handbells and organ. Fellowship will continue downstairs with a **Soup & Bread Supper**. Arrive early, because the sanctuary is filled, and bring friends: this is a great outreach opportunity to introduce people to First Church at a time of the year when many people are in need of comfort and joy.

Other worship opportunities during Advent, in addition to our Sunday morning services, include the **Service of Prayer and Healing**, held on Dec. 16th at 7:00pm. Come join us for a time of music, prayer, story and quiet. For those who wish, there will be laying on of hands and anointing with oil. Come for yourself and/or others to offer prayers for healing and wholeness.

In a very different way, our **Contemporary Worship Service** on Dec. 6 will usher in Christmas a little early. At 6:00pm the sanctuary will be rocking some traditional carols in some non-traditional ways, and our talented band will add some great contemporary songs proclaiming the message of Christ's birth. If you haven't heard the band play "Go Tell It on the Mountain", come just for that!

As we draw near to Christmas, First Church has several celebratory services. The **Christmas Festival Service** is at 10:00am on Sunday Dec. 20. This service turns the church from Advent's hope to Christmas joy through music and word. Christmas Eve begins with the children of the church enacting the **Christmas Pageant** at 5:00pm. Come back at 10:00pm for a **Candlelight Communion Service**, with the Senior Choir once again singing beautiful music as we gather around the manger seeking the Messiah. All are welcome!

Bill

**VIBRANT & THRIVING:
CELEBRATE THE TREASURES OF
FIRST CHURCH**

This is the theme of our stewardship time this year. Enjoy the reflections from fellow church members on this topic, as they have shared with us.

Wendy North:

"First Church is woven into the fabric of my life. I've been a member since I was a little girl. As an adult this church is my faith anchor: a place where I come weekly to learn, to worship God, and pray on how to serve the outside world with a Christian mindset."

Michael Garvey & Bryan Larrow:

"First Congregational Church provides our family with a welcoming and compassionate community to worship with. It also provides an exceptional Church School program for our children to learn about Christianity and build valuable relationships with the teachers and the children of the Church."

Edith B. Nettleton:

"For me, religion/faith was taught through family attitudes, behavior and daily living. This was emphasized by all of us going to church, attending Sunday School, Christian Endeavor, and engaging in the work of the church. I joined First Congregational Church in 1924 – my faith strengthened and will be with me always. I give thanks to those ancestors whose faith left us this beautiful building to cherish. It is always a joy to be there."

Rich and Yvette Howard:

"At this stage of our life's journey, we seek to improve this world, our country, our community and our family. This is best accomplished in cooperation with those who exhibit empathy for others' problems, a tolerance of differing beliefs/lifestyles and commitment to the core values of Christian/Judaic/Islamic traditions. We are grateful that First Church has welcomed us, nourished us with thought-provoking sermons, and continues to support us as we pursue our goals."

Marjorie Colton:

"Nearly 20 years ago I participated in Rev. Peg Stearn's 5-week series called "Visions and Images of God". It sparked Friends in Faith, a monthly gathering in homes for a meal and focused conversation. More recently Mary Morreale offered her Music and Transformation curriculum. These special times nurtured deeper relationship to ourselves, one another, and our God. Personal interaction that takes place in small, intentional, inclusive groups strengthens authentic understanding of who we are, manifesting itself in how we share time, talent and resources. Offering small groups for spiritual growth at First Church is extremely important to me."

Chris Gottschalk:

"I thought I knew why First Church is so valuable to me, just from the joy I get each week from the time taken for children in each service and what the Cherubs give us in return, or the phenomenal musical moments, or the challenging and inspiring sermons given by Kendrick and Susan-- then my wife became gravely ill, and then my daughter as well, and I came to understand the immeasurable value of having a community with whom to share my burden. All through Julie's illness, church members provided food and flowers, knitted shawls to comfort her, called us to check on our progress, always offering to do more if we allowed it. And now as I mourn her death, I am overwhelmed with the outpouring of support in the form of cards offering even more support. One of the most powerful lessons for me has been learning that being a member of First Congregational Church means being surrounded by people who want absolutely to care for and help each other, as well as the world outside our community, and are sincerely grateful for any opportunity to do so. I am moved more than ever to help support the many missions of this church."

Pamela Dear:

"Since I graduated from college, I have always been a member of the senior choir, and during most of the time I have been blessed to sing with my husband beside me. The music reaches a place within me that nothing else can. It is a prayer that lifts and inspires, soothes and consoles.

There is something special about hearing Ave Maria or O Holy Night at the height of the Christmas Eve service, or singing Silent Night in the dark followed by Joy to the World in the light. Brass accompaniment on Christmas and Easter can give me shivers and put smiles of pure joy and excitement on my face. The epitome of worshipful music has to be the God-inspired genius of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus. After I hear or sing it, it feels like the holiday can officially begin. God is with us.

The church community is my extended family and I love working, worshipping, and serving with this community. I love the words, messages and prayers that surround this community and keep us all connected, but it is the music that ties it all together for me and brings me closer to God."

Barbara Johnson:

"Some of us are more vibrant than others, some are more meditative. Some of us need more nurturing than others to thrive, some less. Some celebrate inwardly, some outwardly. Some of our treasures are easily recognized, some are more hidden. All of us can find love at First Church. Hooray!"

Michael Smith:

"After being approached by Kurt Linske and Doug Scales to provide my testimonial for the Stewardship campaign, two words quickly came to mind: faith and investment. I began to think how those two words have helped shape my experience here and what the First Congregational Church of Guilford means to me. In order to do so, I must provide you with some context about who I am, and where my journey in life has taken me. My wife, Carolyn, and I were raised in families that valued religion. We also came to this Church in order to provide our children, Molly and Maggie, with a sense of spiritual direction.

I readily admit that when I initially came to First Church in the early 1990's, I was very much in a faithless void. You see, for the past twenty years I have worked for the Department of Children and Families, investigating child abuse throughout the State of Connecticut. For three years in those early 1990's I worked nights and weekends, on call for 65 hours at a time. I have spent more time in Emergency Rooms than I care to remember. I have seen children experiencing the horrors that many of us cannot imagine. Physical abuse; sexual abuse; and on several instances, death. Those deaths came at the hands of the very people who were supposed to provide those children with the nurturing and sustenance they needed. You can only imagine what continued exposure to such negativity might do to your outlook and thoughts about the presence of loving and benevolent God. With each exposure, the void of faithlessness became wider and wider. How could this God allow her children to experience such pain, such despair, such hopelessness? My own faith journey was on a dead end street.

But journeys usually involve other people. I believe that in life there are no coincidences, and that things happen for a reason, that people cross our paths when we don't realize how much we truly need them. Daphne Stitt asked if I would watch the children in the nursery. After a period of time, she asked me if I would teach Church School. The commitment, the investment if you will, would only be once a month... okay, maybe twice a month... and teacher meetings..... and Children's Sunday, too... I began to learn about the very things I was teaching, while at the same time, perhaps being that intervener that might help someone on their own faith journey. The ministries of this Church frequently call on us to help others, some known to us, some unknown to us, and many less fortunate than ourselves. Those interventions can be a financial investment, but more often than not, are spiritual ones. Sermons, messages, and interactions with the people of this congregation allowed me to be more introspective about my own faith, my own beliefs, and my own place in this world.

In all this, I came to believe that my job investigating child abuse was not really a job, but a calling, in some ways a vocation. Although children will continue to experience abuse and neglect, I came to believe that I could be their intervener, that I could do God's work for them when they so desperately need someone to be there, to advocate for them, and to protect them.

I am grateful that First Church has helped me experience God in a way that I didn't think would be possible. Furthermore, my children have experienced the presence of their own interveners who have guided them as they start their own faith journey: Karen Owen; Liza Catino; John and Barbara Eismeier; Stuart Wilkie; Greg Cacopardo; Susan Murtha; Kendrick Norris. This list could go on and on. The price tag of the Church's investment in my children is one that cannot be measured in monetary terms, for if it were, I couldn't afford to be here. As a result of their being members of this congregation of faith, Molly and Maggie know that no matter where people are on life's journey, they are to be welcomed. What parent wouldn't want their children to understand and live that message?

On Sundays, much to Molly and Maggie's chagrin, I park near Page's Hardware. Winter, spring, summer and fall, I walk the quarter-mile across the Green, and no matter the season, the simple beauty, yet majesty of our Church is very much visible. More importantly, I know that when I enter these doors, I am part of a congregation that journeys with me and I with them. This is the essence of what First Church means to me.

By the way, faith and investment, I believe, might be interchangeable terms. Commitment with a view to minimize risk while earning a return. Faith and investment in First Church has yielded a remarkable return for me. I hope the same for you."

Liza Catino:

"My parents were faithful church musicians. On Sunday mornings we were the first ones at church and the last ones to leave. I knew from an early age that St. Augustine got it right, "When we sing, we pray twice." The fiery organ postludes, the hand bells joyfully ringing, the Cherubs & Jr. Choirs singing and clapping, the Sr. Choir's acapella benediction responses - all of these special offerings are for the Glory of God. But for me, there is also music in the silent prayers, in Susan's and Kendrick's thought-provoking sermons, in the laughter Charlie Church mouse elicits from the children, in our joy and caring for one another. I find the treasures at First Church to be soothing to my spirit and good for my soul. How can I keep from singing? And Joe and I will keep pledging to this vibrant church, so that God's melody will continue in our community and our world."

John and Barbara Eismeier:

"For our family, First Church has been our spiritual home for the past 40 years. We all know this is a very special place because each and every Sunday, in worship or in fellowship, God's presence is known to us in staff and laity alike. To be part of this life changing experience is not a one-way commitment. In our statement of faith, we learned that part of our call means we must recognize our responsibility to participate in the stewardship part of the membership equation. We are grateful that we are able to welcome Stewardship Sunday with our small gift, which together with all the others great and small, helps to make this church family the vital and dynamic Christian community it is now and ever shall be."

THE GIVING TREE

Most of us at First Church have the means to provide Christmas presents for our families and loved ones. However, there are many families in this town who do not have this ability. For those families just providing food and basic clothing is a challenge. The Giving Tree is our opportunity to help **Guilford Families** have a Merry Christmas.



For the last several years First Church has helped to provide a Merry Christmas for 5 families registered with Guilford Social Services. Social Services asks each family member for 3 needed items and 1 "most wished for" item. This information is then given to us, and we get the fun of shopping and giving. Remember that these families do live in Guilford, the children attend Guilford schools, and we are in an age of technology, so some items may be expensive. For more expensive items join with another family or 2 to share the cost.

The tree will be in the narthex November 29th, December 6th & 13th. Choose a gift and take the gift tag. Return the wrapped gift, **with the tag firmly attached to the package, on DECEMBER 20.** Call Jeanie Cacopardo (203-453-6981) with any questions.

UPDATE FROM THE WOMEN AT YORK

Martha Maguire, yoga instructor at York sent in her report to our Prison Meeting Nova, 11th: "I am still teaching at York and just graduated 6 women from a 'Yoga Peer Mentor' program that certifies the women to teach yoga practices within existing programs. Almost all of them have already had opportunities to teach. Each woman chose a different title for the aspect of yoga she feels drawn towards and wants to share:

Living Yoga, Big Breath Yoga, Sivasana (relaxation) Yoga, Recovery Yoga, Empowerment Yoga, and Freedom Yoga. Their choices in names give a sampling of the benefits yoga brings to the lives of long term inmates. These women all share the gift of compassion and I'm delighted that they have this outlet for their talents within York."

FROM THE HARVEST FAIR COMMITTEE

This year's Harvest Fair was a terrific success, offering fellowship and raising approximately \$16,000 (including Next-Day Fair). On a gloriously sunny day, the shoppers streamed in to snap up quality items at great values, to view the beautiful Sanctuary Exhibit of quilts and prayer shawls and to dine on delicious home-made fare. Thanks to all the volunteers for their time, effort and creativity and to the shoppers as well. We're not done yet! Please mark your calendars for the **Harvest Mini-Fair, Sunday, December 6 at 11:15 AM** in Fellowship Hall. If you wish to help with, or have any brand-new items for the "Re-Gift It!" table, please contact Nancy Patton: 203-457-6947 or nancypatton@comcast.net.

DRIED FLOWERS

I would like to thank, from the bottom of my heart, all the Ladies of the Dried Flower Committee for your work, your dedication, your knowledge and your camaraderie.

Your creativity and your passion shown in the wonderful arrangements, cards, potpourri and wreaths were not to be outdone.

It was an emotional task for me to fill the shoes of my mentor, Betty Brown. Betty taught me the art of drying and arranging flowers. She also let me in on her secret spots (after midnight) for picking flowers. I love that woman.

Ladies, you are awesome and talented and I thank you. Looking forward to next year!

My very best to you and your families.

Tracy Warfield

BAKERY ROOM

Thank you to all the people who baked all the delicious food for the Harvest Fair Bakery Room. We appreciate your help in making the fair a success. Thank you too to those who made calls to remind people to bake and to those who worked in the room the day of the fair. A special thank you to Barbara Bishop for her dozens of jars of jam and baked beans, and to Peggy Benton for the many loaves of friendship bread plus jars of relishes and pickles.

Debbie Peluse & Karen Kalbfeld

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Christmas Pageant and Rehearsal

All children of the church are invited to participate in our Annual Christmas Pageant! It is a wonderful chance to be part of worship and for children to learn about the Christmas story. Children (and any parent helpers) are invited to the "one and only" rehearsal on Saturday, December 19th from 9:30-11:00am when we will assign parts and costumes. The pageant itself will take place at 5PM on Christmas Eve. A little shy? You should come! A big ham? You should come too! This is a fun chance for kids and youth of any age to explore the Christmas story!

Christian Education for Grades Pre-K through 4th

December 6th: God's plan for Mary
 December 13th: Jesus is Born
 December 20th: Festival Service/Opt. Children's Prg
 December 24th: Christmas Pageant 5PM
 December 27th Church School Vacation Week

Confirmation I Class

December 13: 1-2:30
 (Discussion Sections 1,2 & 4 Worship Reports Due)

Confirmation II Class

Dec 7: Jesus!
 Dec 14: Jesus!
 (Vacation)
 January 11: Confirmation Worship Prep
 If you have any questions about the Church School program or would just like to say hello, please feel free to contact Lisa Horst in the CE Office (203-453-3324) lisa@firstchurchguilford.org.

ADULT EDUCATION

SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

The Christmas Stories . . . teen, unwed pregnancy, early marriage, parenting, and coming of age. We don't tend to think of the Christmas story in light of many of the very real issues facing our society regarding sexuality, marriage, and parenting. What was it like to have this baby as a young, unwed mother in the face of religious, social, and even governmental pressure? How do we understand parenting as a surrogate for God? What can we learn from Jesus' childhood as we think about the lives of children in our congregation? Join Dr. Kate Ott for a discussion of the historical realities of Jesus' birth and childhood compared to those of contemporary society and together re-think the romantic and romanticized aspects of the Christmas story. Join us in Griswold Hall at 9:00am on Sundays, Dec 6, 13.& 20.

INTERGENERATIONAL ADVENT SUPPER:

"Our Family Nativity"

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 5:00 PM in FELLOWSHIP HALL,

All are invited to join us on December 6 for an Intergenerational Advent Supper.

We will be telling the story of Christmas through the nativity scene. We invite you to bring your family crèche or nativity scene to help decorate the tables and share your family traditions. Come hear the wonderful Cherub Choir and join us for fun and fellowship.

This is *not* a potluck, so put down the cookie-dough and come for a great evening of seasonal song and fun. All are invited to join us for the Contemporary Worship Service immediately following supper.

Questions? Lisa Horst (203-453-3324)
There will be a freewill offering.

BREAKFAST WITH SANTA

The Pilgrim Fellowship will host its annual Breakfast with Santa in the Fellowship Hall on Saturday, December 5th from 9:00-11:30 AM. Get your child's photo taken with Santa. The cost is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children, and \$5 for each photo with Santa. All proceeds benefit the annual Mission Trip.

**PILGRIM FELLOWSHIP
 DECEMBER NEWS**

Dec. 5th Santa Breakfast: 9—11:30 AM; pancake breakfast and picture with Santa
 Dec. 13th Soup and Bread Supper: 6—7:30pm; \$7 admission for a variety of homemade soups, bread, and dessert; \$5/quart take home soup
 Dec. 20th Cookie Walk: following the 10:00 AM church service
 Dec. 20th PF and Alumni Party: 5:00 PM

MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH GROUP

On Tuesday, Oct. 20, the middle school youth group went to see the movie "Where the Wild Things Are". If only Maurice Sendak himself could have been there to share the excitement! Here are a few short reviews from the young critics:

- "I liked it. It was sad and happy."
- "Everyone has someone inside them that needs to come out."
- "The wild things were scary right at first, but then I loved them! They were so funny!"
- "I liked Max. And I liked the end and how he wanted to go home."
- "I'd give it five stars except that it was kind of sad, so it gets four."
- "Totally awesome!!"

THE GIVING ALTERNATIVE

The giving of a gift is the greatest act of love that we can share with our Lord. As you plan Christmas remembrances for your family and friends, won't you consider the *Giving Alternative*?

In lieu of buying a gift for that friend or relative who "has everything," why not make a gift in that person's name to one of the following organizations? Acknowledgement cards can be mailed to you or directly to the recipient.

GUILFORD INTERFAITH MINISTRIES offers four separate services: **Meals on Wheels** – meals for Guilford Residents who are homebound; **Friendly Visiting** – visits for those who are homebound or lonely; **Food Bank** – food for Guilford people in need; and **Charlie's Closet** – medical equipment for those in need.

GUILFORD WELFARE FUND helps pay for utilities, food, medicine, clothing, and blankets for Guilford people in need.

THE COVE provides programs for helping children and families work through unresolved grief due to the death of someone significant in their lives.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY ACTION provides food, advocacy, and temporary shelter for homeless families in New Haven.

COLUMBUS HOUSE provides food, referrals, and evening health services for homeless people in New Haven.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES OF GREATER NEW HAVEN provides a 24-hour Hotline, counseling and advocacy, and a shelter for victims of domestic violence.

CHURCH WORLD SERVICE helps refugees who have fled their homeland, victims of natural disasters, and farmers who need support services.

HEIFER PROJECT INTERNATIONAL provides livestock and agricultural assistance to needy families all over the world.

To participate in **A GIVING ALTERNATIVE** send a check (or checks) made payable to each organization you have selected to: A Giving Alternative, c/o First Congregational Church, 122 Broad St., Guilford, CT 06437. Please have your check(s) arrive at the Church Office by Wednesday, Dec. 19th so we can make every effort to distribute your donations before Christmas. Thank you!



CHRISTMAS FLOWERS

It is time to place your order for Christmas poinsettias with the Flower Committee. These flowers, given in memory of your loved ones, decorate our Sanctuary for the holidays and are then distributed by the Deaconesses to those who are home-bound, reside in nursing homes, or any one who is in need of cheer.

The poinsettias will be ordered for \$12.00 per plant. **The deadline for ordering flowers is Monday, Dec. 7th.** Complete this form, enclose your check, and mail to:

First Congregational Church
122 Broad Street
Guilford, CT 06437

Please note "Poinsettias" on your check. If you have questions, please call Barbara Wells at 203-453-5949.

Please order _____ plant(s) @ \$12 each.

Total cost \$ _____

The poinsettias are given in loving memory of:

By: _____

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE
★★★ 10:00 PM ★★★

**First Congregational Church
The Giving Alternative**

Your Name _____

Telephone Number _____

Your Address _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please check one:

Send Acknowledgement cards to me to enclose with my holiday card.

Send acknowledgement cards to the recipients. I have listed the addresses below.

Organization Name	Amount	Gift in name of (recipient)	Recipient's address (for acknowledgement)

Please enclose a separate check **payable to each organization.**

Mail to: The Giving Alternative, c/o First Congregational Church, 122 Broad Street, Guilford, CT 06437. Please have your checks arrive at the church at least a week before the relevant holiday so that we can distribute the checks and send out the acknowledgement cards on time. Please contact Robert Harms, 453-4871, robert.harms@yale.edu if you have any questions.