



THE PARISHIONER

THE FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, WOODBRIDGE *since 1738*

An Open, Welcoming, and Affirming Church

Sunday Worship 10:00 a.m.

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December 2020 Pastor's Column

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

*“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”*

In telling the story of the life of Jesus, Luke places it within the historical, political and biblical context of the time. He draws for us the intricate web of imperial, regional and local rulers affecting the ministries of John and Jesus. All this takes place during a period of rising Jewish nationalism as the expectation of the imminent arrival of the Messiah was a source of great hope.

Luke tells us the word of God came to John and then quotes the prophet Isaiah (40:3-5):

*The voice of one crying out in the wilderness . . .
. . . and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.
(cont.)*



Certainly God could do these things: flatten mountains, fill valleys, make the crooked places straight and the rough ones smooth. Those who gathered to hear John knew this is what communities sought to do when the emperor or king was coming to town, much like building an interstate highway. John the Baptist is telling his audience a new ruler is on the way and in the following verses demands his listeners to make a choice - as we must do ourselves. Whom will we follow? Whose authority will we recognize? We must make a decision as to whom we give our allegiance. Will we serve the rulers of this world or our sovereign God?

Yale history professor, Skip Stout, wrote a book titled, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England*. His thesis is that Congregational preachers played a dominant role in the stirring up of revolutionary fervor in New England. For them the issue was not taxes, or tea, or representation, or being impressed into service by the British navy. For the New England clergy, the issue was of another sort. George III claimed he was sovereign over the colonies, while they gave their allegiance to the one Sovereign God. The question for these preachers was: Are you going to serve George III or God?

John's question stands before us today. Nations and leaders are always demanding our allegiance. Communities and families demand allegiance. Car makers and stores offer incentives for our loyalty. Do we owe our allegiance to certain traditions, to the way things have always been, to the way things are? Whom shall we serve: God or George?

John the Baptist, and those New England pastors, are calling us to give our allegiance to the one and only Sovereign God, who reigns over the Universe in the mighty power of love. As a people of faith, are we are striving to serve the God revealed to us in the scriptures and in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus? God's realm is marked by:

Compassion, not competition,
Joy and not jingoism,
Peace not patriotism,
Faith not futility,
Hope not hopelessness,
And the love of God, not money and prestige.

Now is the time of decision. Will we follow the God who made all there is, who freed Israel from Egyptian captivity and raised Jesus from the dead; or someone or something else that claims our allegiance? We must decide to whom we give our allegiance.

Entering into the season of Advent, we will hear again of "the hopes and fears of all the years". May we be blessed with a joyful expectation of the Messiah, who came into the world so long ago, whose realm of love and justice is on the way, and who is present with us right now. How wonderfully mysterious, that with the cry of a helpless baby, God freed us from sin and death and brings into the world eternal life.

In hopeful expectation of the coming realm of our Sovereign Jesus Christ,
Shepard



I will follow You wherever You may go.

-Luke 9:57



The Council met on the first Monday in November to receive reports from the respective church committees and to conduct church business. It was a regular meeting as usual, with one exception. The Reverend Shepard Parsons, after a seven year tenure with us as our leader and Pastor, submitted his resignation effective January 25, 2021. A formal acceptance of his resignation was made in a letter from me, as Moderator, dated November 7, 2020. Shepard's reasons for leaving are, I believe, varied, his alone, and based on what he stated in his email/letter of November 13th, to the members: "to follow what I believe to be God's call into a new day coming." His resignation comes at a time when, in our lives in 2020, everything seems to already be turned upside down and sideways as we cope with many changes in our daily lives. 'BUT'-----

As Shepard also stated in his letter: "It is also time for someone new, to lead and walk with you into God's future." While we will look for someone to do so----in the future, we should look at this time as an opportunity to continue the Renewal Process which was began about a year ago; we should work to heal wounds, new and old, which are present in our congregation; we should join in the repainting project for the sanctuary; we should reach out to and bring back those members who have not been active participating members for a long time; we should really work at attracting new members; we should, we should, we should! It can go on and on! What is "God's future" for First Church?

As I look at where we are at this moment in time----and not to be trite, please bear with me: We have been sitting in the back seat of a car with a driver. We have maintained our car with money and time to gas it up, insure it and keep it running. But now the car has sputtered to a crawl and needs repair. Also our driver has decided to leave his job and is getting out! What to do? Get a new driver? Leave the car and find a new one? Or should we find out what is wrong with this car and fix it before we hire a new permanent driver? If the car is our church at this time and place, what do you, old and new members, active and inactive members, vocal and silent members, wish to do?

It is interesting that we are faced with so many events and questions at this time----Christmas! Birth of our Savior. A time of Hope and Joy! A new beginning. What did those original founders of this church think back in 1738 when they decided that it was too difficult to go through the snow and too far to attend church in New Haven? They decided to build their own church which was easier to attend. A new beginning.

I've rambled on, maybe for too long. I hope you can see where I am going. We have a chance for a new beginning, and a healing process in 2021. To everyone who reads this: Our church needs your time, ideas, and suggestions about what you want and need for your church. And Heaven knows, many of you have suggestions, as I learned in my short term as Moderator! Please consider becoming more active in church activities, events, and committees. Share your ideas and suggestions regarding how our church can serve you and our community and what you'd like our church to be. I'm looking for a few volunteers, who are not now active in any committee, to form an ad hoc "IS" Committee (Ideas and Suggestions Committee) with a half-life of two months to present a report to the January 2021 Congregational Meeting. I ask all of us to begin sharing ideas and suggestions with me or others who you know are active on the Church Council, Boards or Special Committees. They in turn will share this information with the "IS" Committee. Once the "IS" Committee is formed, your suggestions can be shared directly with them. I really hope and pray that we can do this, together, in the next two months.

We are ready at the First Church of Christ Woodbridge for a New Beginning. Please, every one of you, join together to do this. Enjoy this Holiday Season. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Richard A. Prescott, Moderator

Richard A. Prescott, Moderator

Website Update

Have you visited our website? You may be surprised at how many resources and information updates are available to you. Take a look and "link" yourself with church and community news!

www.uccw.org





A Message from the Music Committee

We are so pleased that Nenad has returned to us from his time back home. It took some time and effort to get him back into the country! Welcome back Nenad!!! As reported before, the church is blessed with the wonderful gift of a baby grand piano from the family of Gerhard Giebisch. It has found a home in our Sanctuary, where it is now set up and Nenad can be heard practicing on it. We cannot wait to have a concert with him playing, when our lives can open up again. The organ has been repaired and is ready for our live streaming church services. A special thanks to Faye Chen for her piano playing all during our shut down. She is such a blessing to our church.



SANCTUARY REPAINTING UPDATE:

An application to the State Historic Preservation Office/DECD for a \$100,000.00 Historic Restoration Fund Grant has been submitted for plaster repair and repainting of the Meetinghouse sanctuary. It is a matching grant that requires the First Church of Christ, Woodbridge congregation raise a similar amount of capital funds in the near future. This project will not be funded by church operational or invested funds. Gifts can be made to the FCCW designated "Sanctuary Fund".

Because of the high costs of such quality restoration, the work will be done in two stages. Phase One will include repairing the damaged plaster and repainting with a traditional grisaille/trompe l'oeil décor on the ceiling, the cornices, and the front facing wall. The apse, other walls, balcony, wainscoting, doors and windows of the sanctuary will not be included in Phase One work.

Because the Pre-development work went out to bid in 2019, and because we chose John Canning and Company to provide us their recommendations and a projected budget in a written report (February 14, 2020), the SHPO has allowed us to use them to do the restoration work without needing to go out to bid once again.

David Riccio, VP and decorative arts expert at John Canning, came to the church on November 16 to discuss the Phase One scope of work and the costs. A contract between the church and John Canning cannot be made until the SHPO approve our application (possibly early January, 2021). The SHPO also have to approve the contract.

David plans to use the greys and whites of the 1886 grisaille décor found behind the organ as his inspiration for the color scheme. Color and touches of gold will be used sparingly throughout the room and the center ceiling ocular will remain some shade of blue. The geometric boxes and rectangles on the ceiling will remain, but the acanthus leaves and floral design will be of better quality. The remaining trompe l'oeil decoration on the walls will possibly reflect 18th and 19th century Woodbridge crops (tobacco flowers/vine, flax, grasses, apples (blossom), maize, corn and wheat). The plaster medallion that was historically found in the center of the ceiling above the chandelier will be re-installed.



Joyce Simpson



2020

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST
STOCKING PROJECT



In Coordination with The New Haven Police Department, Newhallville Area

The Stocking Project has been a beloved tradition for many years here at First Church. As this year has been particularly difficult for many families, the need for the project is greater than the challenges it imposes by way of implementing the process safely and effectively.

There Is Still Time To Sponsor a Stocking!

Can't bear the thought of shopping this year? This opportunity is for you!

“Sponser a Bag”, and let our Christian Education families fill it for you! Parents will work together with their children to choose and purchase gifts befitting a select bag. In this way, not only is the bag filled for you, but you, as sponsor, will have given the kids an opportunity to think of others as they shop for those less fortunate.

Your donation will not only support the Stocking project, but will play a direct role in the Christian Education of our kids.

*To sponsor a bag, please return the form below with a check for \$100, made out to “The First Church of Christ”, to the Parish House. You may also place your order by email.

As a special thanks, donators and sponsors will receive a small poinsettia plant for each bag filled. **Poinsettias will be given out at the “Drive-In”, on December 12th.

Questions? Please email JoAnna Rubino at growfirstchurch@gmail.com.

Yes! I Would Like To Sponsor a Stocking Bag to be brought to the church by a representative from Christian Education, on December 12th at 5:00 PM as part of the “Holiday Drive-In” event.

NAME _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

QUANTITY _____

The cost is \$100 per bag.

The **full amount** will be spent on clothing and gifts to fill the bag.

*Please mail this form to the church along with a check made out to “The First Church of Christ”.

First Church of Christ
5 Meetinghouse Lane
Woodbridge, CT 06525

Saturday December 12, 2020 at 5:00 PM



Tree Lighting

The big tree on the green can be viewed from your spots out on the green, or from inside your cars (parked in spaces) along the road.



Music

Live holiday music from inside the church will be live streamed. Watch and listen on your phone from inside your cars, or simply enjoy the sounds from your spots on the green.



Stocking Project

All filled stocking bags will be brought to the tree lighting. Each child will bring a bag to the tree, give thanks to the donor, and gift them with a small poinsettia for their generosity and participation. *See "Stocking Project" email for more info.



If Only a Little Singing...

If ample space is available to distance ourselves on the green, we may be able to join our voices to sing 3 Christmas carols together. Those in cars can even roll down their windows to sing along!

More details to follow. Please email any questions to JoAnna Rubino at growfirstchurch@gmail.com

"Cash & Carry" Poinsettias will be available at the event. Quantity is limited.

Church Communications and Live Streaming

Your Board of Trustees has brought the church's internet capability up to date. WiFi has been installed in the sanctuary to support live streaming of Sunday Services and events. A ZOOM hosting account has been established to use for Sunday services and leader meetings. Live streaming capability on YouTube has begun using an existing camera and computer. The church audio system has been repaired with provisions for additional microphones. Live streaming of Pastor Shepard's worship service in the sanctuary is up and running! A link is provided via email to view the 10:00 a.m. service on our website. You are always welcome to continue joining in the ZOOM service. ZOOM invitations are also sent out by email.



Weekly Bible Study

All are welcome to visit our Weekly Bible Study that takes place every Wednesday morning from 11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Meetings are currently being held inside the Parish Hall or outside in good weather. All safety regulations must be followed when on the church grounds. Copies of our safety regulations are available in the Parish Hall foyer.

Please visit the Bible Study page on our website for more information and a list of weekly readings.

<https://www.uccw.org/bible-study>

Sunday Services are currently LIVE STREAMED ON OUR WEBSITE

every Sunday morning at 10 a.m.

The recording is also available for viewing on our website video player for the entire week following the service.

Please visit the 'Sunday Service' page on our website.

www.uccw.org/sunday_service



Happy 100th Birthday!

On behalf of everyone here at the First Church of Christ, Woodbridge, we would like to wish a very happy birthday and many blessings to long time church member Griff Bedworth. On November 17, 2020, Griff celebrated his 100th birthday!

Hear, hear, and good cheer!

Worship Schedule for Advent and Christmas Eve 2020

First Sunday of Advent: November 29th at 10:00 a.m.
Second Sunday of Advent: December 6th at 10:00 a.m.
Third Sunday of Advent: December 13th at 10:00 a.m.
Fourth Sunday of Advent: December 20th at 10:00 a.m.

Christmas Eve

Thursday, December 24th at 7:00 p.m.

All Worship Services for Advent and Christmas Eve will be live streamed on our website and on our YouTube channel. All Services are recorded and are available for viewing on our website, our YouTube channel, and on Facebook.

Please look to your email for invitations and links to these resources.
We will continue to use Zoom for all our Worship Services.



*If you are having trouble with any of these church provided services, please email JoAnna at growfirstchurch@gmail.com



Office Hours

The office is currently open for essential business, by appointment only, Tuesday through Friday, from 10:00 a.m. - 12 :00 p.m. Email JoAnna at office@uccw.org to request an appointment.

Lay Readers for Worship

We are in need of volunteers to read, via Zoom, for Sunday Worship. Anyone, including youth, who would like to participate, is encouraged to email JoAnna at office@uccw.org.

Marking Life's Passages

(N/A)

The Parishioner

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NEXT PARISHIONER DEADLINE IS WEDNESDAY, December 16, 2020 (a firm date).