Please join us for virtual worship this summer!

June 7th
**Annual Meeting**
10 a.m. via Facebook Live
Megan Strouse, preaching
with Holy Communion from Home (see pg. 12)

June 14th
**Graduate Sunday**
10 a.m. via Facebook Live
Rev. George Harris, preaching

June 21st
**Father’s Day**
10 a.m. via Facebook Live
Rev. Kevin Weikel, preaching

June 28th
10 a.m. via Facebook Live
Rev. George Harris, preaching

Sundays in July And August
9:30 a.m. via Facebook Live

August 30th
**Backpack Blessing Sunday**
9:30 a.m. via Facebook Live

September 6th
**Summer Sunday Schedule**
9:30 a.m. in the Sanctuary*
with Holy Communion

September 13th
**Summer Sunday Services Conclude**
**Rally Day Sunday**
10:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary*
with a Picnic to follow at 11:00 a.m.

*subject to change due to social distance safety measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19
Pastor Pondering

Nineteen sixty-five was a pivotal year in the life of First Church. This was the year that a fire, sparked by lightning, gutted our sanctuary. Though fifty-five years ago, anyone who lived in Simsbury at the time can tell you exactly where they were when the church burned. Over the years, dozens of people have told me they stood on the corner across the street and watched firemen fight the blaze (it must have been a crowded corner).

The fire marks a tragic milestone in our church’s history. But in its telling over the decades, the story of the fire has been transformed from tragic history to an inspiring parable of hope. First Church was rebuilt to preserve our history and traditions, while preparing us to serve future generations.

Today, we find ourselves at another historic juncture between death and new life. Half a century from now, people will be talking about the COVID pandemic of 2020. Instead of standing on a street corner, we will tell stories of worshiping online, attending Zoom meetings, and the selfless commitment of our Compassionate Response Team.

Nothing better illustrates this year’s efforts to preserve and reinterpret our history, while at once stepping boldly into a post-COVID future, than our successful capital campaign and our new-found commitment to virtual community and online worship. How ironic, that after successfully raising almost four million dollars to better equip our building for ministry in decades to come, responding to the pandemic required that we leave our building and find new ways to effectively minister to our congregation and community! As in 1965, tragedy has inspired us to rethink what it means to be the church today.

From the beginning, our capital campaign was about more than simply preserving our building. As the name suggests, *Bricks and Mortals: Building to Serve God and Neighbor*, the planned improvements will better prepare our church for ministry, making the building more accessible, hospitable, and welcoming, while enhancing our worship, and contributing to a more sustainable future for the earth.

Beyond its material success, the campaign energized our congregation in profound ways, strengthening relationships and building community. In hindsight, this relationship and community building better prepared us to respond to the coming pandemic. And respond we did.

The ever-changing face of the COVID-19 pandemic has required us to be innovative and flexible. And despite the limitations of the technology (no hugs), we quickly realized there are extraordinary, and unexpected benefits to these online ways of interacting. Within weeks, it became apparent that First Church should make a long-term commitment, not only to online worship, but to offering opportunities to participate in meetings remotely. Ironically, these were recommendations made by Agile Church in our HealthCheck last year!

Our Compassionate Response Team (CRT) has further demonstrated First Church’s bold response to the pandemic. Before most of us anticipated the impact of coming stay-at-home orders, our member, Dr. Rob Cushman offered to form and lead teams of church volunteers, both to regularly check in on the phone with our more vulnerable members, and to deliver groceries to their homes. The mission of this CRT soon expanded to serve, not only church members, but members of the Simsbury community as well. As of this writing, the CRT has made over 500 grocery deliveries!

continued on page 11
A Message from Rev. Kevin Weikel

As I mentioned in last month’s Cornerstone article, my family has been going on a lot of bike rides lately. We’re not the only ones. Like toilet paper, bikes are hard to come by.

I’ve observed that you can tell a lot about someone by the way they ride their bike. Our daughter Ella, who is three, is a pedal to the metal type. She rips and she roars through the neighborhood, with very little fear. She makes such sudden turns that she frequently falls, even with training wheels. When she does, she climbs right back on her bike and rides off again, with just as much gusto.

Our son Asher, who is six, is much more cautious. While he had been balancing on two wheels since the middle of last summer, it was only about a month ago that he let me remove his training wheels. He is so cautious that I still need only one hand to count the number of times he has fallen off his bike. When he does, it takes a lot of convincing for him to get back on and ride again.

Our daughter Sadie, who will be ten this month, does not ride a bike at all. She is perfectly content sitting in the pull-behind trailer attached to my bike, which I must admit is rather smart on her part. She simply enjoys the ride – worry free - taking off her shoes and socks as her hair blows in the wind, and laughing at her siblings as they ride by.

I’ve heard many parents share their amazement about how different their kids are. I am just as baffled. There is nothing Kelley and I have done different in raising our kids, and yet they are so unique. And as every parent knows, we love them all the same. Sure, we know they each have their growing edges, and their moments when they drive us up the wall, but our love for them is unwavering.

When it comes to this pandemic and the coming months, we will all make different choices when it comes to how far we will venture from our homes. Some of us will continue to stay home, going out only when it is absolutely necessary. Others of us already ventured out the moment the hairdresser, barber, and restaurants opened. And still some find ourselves somewhere in-between.

No matter how we approach this time — or how we ride our bikes — know this: God created you in all your uniqueness. Please follow all CDC protocols as a baseline, but beyond that, approach this time in the way you feel is right for you. Whether you choose to be more cautious or a little more adventurous – you are God’s child, and God is with you wherever you go.

God’s peace to you,

Kevin
Musical Notes

So here we are at the brink of summer – and at any other time, we would be planning vacations to the beach or the lake, getting our flabby winter bodies tuned up so that no one will suspect how inactive we’ve been all winter....

But these aren’t any other times. And this wasn’t the usual spring-summer transition. These are frustrating days. And being a musician isn’t what it was...making music in our boudoire isn’t quite the same as having the usual player/listener relationship. We can dine 6 feet away from someone, but attending a concert, going to as festival, even being next to each other in an audience or a choir involves a closeness that we just can’t have right now. I am confident, though, that we will figure it out. Our spirits will triumph – music is one of these things that we just have to have. I have heard from almost all of our choir members, and to a person, they can’t wait to get back together.

Usually this Cornerstone article would be a look back on a spring of making music, and a forward view of talented soloists for summer services, and plans for an active fall and following winter. (To let you know – I am planning music for next year and Christmas...you gotta be ready for anything you know...) We on the staff were talking about how it’s hard to write a Cornerstone article about what you’ve been doing when you haven’t been doing the usual stuff. But I am realizing exactly how active we’ve been. The Chancel Choir has been meeting weekly on Zoom. We have done one recording where each member submitted their part, and are working on another one. Women’s Praise – be forewarned – your time is coming soon. I am trying to figure out a way for the Choral Bells to do this – this is how we play anyway. Jim Martocchio, Abby Fabian, Tory Gilligan and Rachel Swenson have all helped with Sunday music, and I will be reaching out to others as well. If you would like to contribute, by the way, let me know.

We are exploring and becoming familiar with technology to help us bring music to everyone. I have to admit that in the not-too-distant past, if I had a choice between learning new software and chewing on tin foil, it would seriously have been a toss-up. But being forced to step into this world has been eye-opening, and jump-starting the ole brain has been more stimulating than I would have thought. And new ideas are flowing with each step we take – ways to have creative and moving Sunday services; for the members who make music to connect, to make music, to contribute... and ways where we can have the gratification that only making music can create. Maybe it’s not business as usual and we’re not back to doing what we did, but we are now in a world where we have to knock on and open new doors...and this isn’t necessarily a bad thing.

We will be back together. I know it. Right now, though, we have to be mindful and realize that every step we take is a triumph of the spirit and an acknowledgement of our absolute need to create and make music. And as we go into summer and begin to go out and gingerly dip our toes in the shark-infested waters of this pandemic, we know that, even though there may be stress, setbacks, and maddening frustrations, our spirits will prevail. We will make music. And, soon enough, we will make music together again.

Have a good summer, and may God be with you in the months ahead.

Mark
A Message from Jessica Wolanin

It is 10 o’clock in the morning and I am on yet another hike with our oldest son, Grayson. He turned five during the pandemic and so keeping him active is a priority right now. Each day we discover new places to have our “adventures” as he calls them. What he doesn’t realize is that it is when we are on these adventures that he seems to be most calm, most centered. It’s also where we have some of our best and deepest conversations. He asks me questions and tells me stories. Some of the stories are made up about his “buddies” which are his future police office friends because he wants to be a police officer but still, this is when we have a chance to talk without interruptions from well... life. We talk about nature. He asks questions. Lots of questions. Today after singing songs from last year’s VBS he asked me a question that remains with me still. He said, “Mommy, why do I have to wait until I get to Heaven to see God?” You see, we had just been talking about how God gave us nature. How God brought him and his siblings into my life. How God can do all things. So my response to my son was, “well, honey, you can ‘see’ God even now. God is here, with us on our hike. He is in the trees. He is in the wind. He is in the brook that we just crossed over. He is everywhere. God walks with us.”

Right now we are living in the middle of a pandemic. And yet, God is walking with us. He is walking with you. I know that at this point, this experience of living during a pandemic has probably become normal to most. Or the new normal as they are saying. It is my hope that even in this new normal you know that the Church, First Church Simsbury, and Children’s Ministries is here to support you. Our children are experiencing something we were unable to prepare them for. Parents and caretakers are experiencing something that we, too, were unable to prepare for. Perhaps you were able to stock up on food and other essentials when we first heard we would be entering a quarantine, but the concept of months of this was probably not something you were truly ready for. Still, here we are. Together but apart. We are not alone because God is walking with us in this journey.

Over the past two months we have had so many opportunities to bring our church into the digital age. We have made all church gatherings virtual! Who would have thought we would be having communion at home with our freshly baked bread and juice?! It brings me so much joy to see so many families gathered around their devices connecting together in prayer, whether it is through Virtual Church School or Virtual Worship, it doesn’t matter how you are connecting with God as long as you are allowing God to be present with you.

Throughout the summer, we will continue to join together via Zoom at 9 a.m. on Sunday mornings for Virtual Church School. We will continue to explore the stories in the Bible together, even when we are apart. We will show our strength as a community as we partner with church members and friends by spreading light and joy to those who need it within our church through our Light and Joy Project. We will continue to volunteer with the Compassionate Response Team as we help to those who need an extra hand during this time. If you find yourself among those who need anything during this time, even if it is just a phone call so you feel a little less alone — please do not hesitate to reach out. As this is unchartered waters for us all, if you have any ideas for how we can best meet the needs of the children within our congregation please reach out to me. Until we can be together again, know that you are not alone. We are with you.

Be safe, be well, be healthy. You are loved.

Jessica Wolanin
Director of Children’s Ministries

860-651-3593 x17
jwolanin@fccsimsbury.org
Dear Church School Families,

Children in prek-5th grade are invited to church school every Sunday at 9 am. Pre-Confirmation students (Grades 6 and 7) have been invited to participate in collaboration with 7th and 8th grade during their biweekly zoom JF meetings! During the summertime, Pre-Confirmation students will participate in the JF Zoom meetings at 6 p.m. on every other Sunday. With this model, Pre-Confirmation students will be gathering every Sunday at 6 p.m and it will alternate between Pre-Confirmation and JF.

It’s so hard to be together when we have to all be quarantined but it’s always nice to know that someone is thinking of you. If your family would like to spread kindness around the Farmington Valley here are some ideas:

- Chalk a neighbor or friend’s driveway!
- Drop off flowers from your garden at a neighbor or friend’s house!
- Color in this coloring page, write a nice note, and drop it off at the mailbox outside of the church! We will pass it along to church members or friends in need of a smile!
- Bake some goodies and drop them off at a friend’s house!

As always, your church family is here for you! If your family is in need of some cheer during this time, please reach out to me via email (jwolanin@fccsimsbury.org) and we will be sure to spread some love your way!

Blessings to you and yours,

Jessica

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**Vacation Bible School 2020**

Sadly due to the coronavirus, VBS has been cancelled for June 2020.

We hope all families have an amazing summer and enjoy spending time together!
Dear Youth Families (Confirmation, JF, and PF),

Our Youth Advisors and I are thinking about you. The Coronavirus and physical distancing must be taken seriously, but that doesn’t change the fact that pre-teenagers and teenagers are social beings, and this is hard. These are also uneasy times. If there is any consolation, it is that we are all feeling anxious together.

Since Sunday, March 22nd, we’ve been holding “virtual” JF, Confirmation and PF meetings. With everyone all cooped up and isolated, these meetings over Zoom feel extra special. It is nice to see each other in the uniqueness and comfort of our individual homes, to check in with one another about how we are holding up during this challenging time, and to consider God’s presence even in the midst of this dark time.

I asked our students if they would like to continue meeting virtually until the time comes for us to come together in person again, and responses were overwhelmingly, “Yes!” Please see below the revised JF, PF, and Confirmation schedules:

**JF (Junior Fellowship), for 7th and 8th graders**

- Meets on Zoom every other Sunday at 6 p.m. During the summer, these dates are June 14th and 28th; July 12th and 26th; and August 16th and 30th.

**PF (Pilgrim Fellowship), for 9th through 12th graders**

- Meets on Zoom every other Sunday at 7:30 p.m. During the summer, these dates are June 14th and 28th; July 12th and 26th; and August 16th and 30th.

**Confirmation**

- Wednesday September 16th and 30th, Soup Kitchens at South Park Inn. Students that were unable to service in the spring of 2020 will have the option to choose the date that works best for them.

- Saturday-Sunday, September 19-20th, Confirmation Retreat at Camp Jewell

- Sunday, October 18th, Confirmation Sunday (better late than never!)

- *Tune into worship on Sunday’s at 10 a.m. on Facebook Live and complete your five worship reflections in the back of your Confirmation Guidebooks.*

JF and PF meetings will include highs, lows and outs, as well as an icebreaker game (we’ve come across some creative ideas for this!). These meetings will also include a devotion and discussion, as well as a closing prayer.

We are not planning a hard stop time with our JF and PF meetings, though we imagine they will run approximately an hour and a half. Teens can feel free to hop off as needed or stay on for extended conversation at the end. Teens are welcome to share the link to JF and PF Zoom meetings liberally. If there is a friend that might enjoy and find meaning in JF or PF, please invite them to join us. Just like before, we will send weekly emails for each group every week, with the time, Zoom link, and an overview of the content (if you haven’t downloaded Zoom for your device, please do so; it’s free and it’s easy).

While these are anxious and troubled times, and we do not have the benefit of meeting in person, I do wonder if these trying days might provide us with an even greater connection with God and one another. These groups might be more critical, and maybe even more meaningful, now more than ever.

God Bless You,

Kevin
First Church of Christ has created a task force, a Community Compassionate Response Team ("CCRT"), organized by Dr. Rob Cushman, and composed of a wonderful team of First Church volunteers. The team is reaching out to contact and assist members of our church and wider community during this COVID-19 crisis.

In addition, the CCRT has created teams of folks who are poised to assist by eliminating the need to go out to the grocery store to obtain food. We have worked out an arrangement with Fitzgerald’s Foods, whereby we can take “grocery list” orders for our First Church members/family over the phone, submit them to Fitzgerald’s staff, who then fill the order and alert our team when the order is ready for pick-up & delivery to the community member’s home by our volunteers. **At this time, we are imploring our membership to use this valuable service, so you can stay safe and healthy!**

If you would like to use our CCRT Ordering and Delivery services, please fill out the form available on our website here, entering just your name and phone number, and a member of our CCRT will call you back promptly to take your grocery order. First Church will subsequently send you an invoice* for the cost of your grocery order. (*After receiving the invoice, checks should be made payable to First Church of Christ, with “Food Delivery” in the memo line. Be advised this payment is not tax deductible as you are receiving goods and services.)

If you need assistance of any other kind, or know someone who might benefit from our outreach and support initiatives, please do not hesitate to fill out this form or call the Church Office at (860) 651-3593. We will strive to help in any ways that we can!

Please join us for Virtual Worship via Facebook Live at 10 a.m., followed by our Virtual Coffee Hour at 11 a.m.! Pastor George is also offering Virtual Bible Study on Wednesday mornings at 10 a.m. via Zoom! Read more here.

Don’t have Facebook? No worries! You can watch many of our previously streamed worship services on YouTube, which is a free website designed for video streaming.

All of our previously recorded worship services can be found on the “Sermons to Go” page on our website here, which is updated every Monday!
Ready for summer?

Oars in the water? Boots hiking the trail? If you are heading out for any period of time and will be away from First Church, there is a way to continue the work we do via auto-giving.

For many First Church members and friends, worship attendance — even if it is virtual — is more sporadic during the summer as we take well-deserved time to be with family, friends, and engage in activities that take us away from our regular routines and schedules. As you prepare for your summer, consider adding in an auto-giving sign up to First Church as part of your check-list. Contributing via credit card or auto-payment from your bank or checking account is an easy way to make sure that your gifts to First Church continue even when you are away from First Church.

Did you know that if you contribute via auto-giving — the same way as so many of us use for our water, electricity, cable and other payments — your First Church contribution can be just as conveniently added in via credit card (so you get those miles or other benefit) or via auto-withdrawal from your bank?

With auto-pay you can head out for the summer secure in knowing that our ministries continue to receive the necessary support in the summer while you can enjoy your vacation – literally with your toes in the sand!

How do you do this? Call or email the church office for more details. Shannon Lindsay can be reached at either slindsay@fccsimsbury.org or 860-651-3593. You can also visit the First Church website at (www.fccsimsbury.org) and look for “Give” in the top menu, and “Online Giving Center” in the drop down menu.

Thank you all for your continued support and hope you all have a wonderful summer!

The Stewardship Committee

Don’t Forget:
First Church is an Amazon Smile Charitable Organization!

How to Benefit First Church as an Amazon Smile Charitable Organization:

Go to Amazon Smile (smile.amazon.com), you will be prompted to select a charitable organization. Note: You can change your selection at any time. Search for “First Church Simsbury” and select “First Church, Simsbury, CT” as your Smile Charitable Organization.

If you already use Amazon Smile; to change your charitable organization:

Sign in to smile.amazon.com. From your desktop, go to Your Account from the navigation at the top, and then select the option to Change your Charity. Or, from your mobile browser, select Change your Charity from the options at the bottom of the page. Search for “First Church Simsbury” and select “First Church, Simsbury, CT” as your Smile Charitable Organization. Be sure to shop from smile.amazon.com!

Board of Trustees Email

If you have a work order request or a suggestion for the Board of Trustees, you may now email them directly at trustees@fccsimsbury.org. Please include your work order or suggestion, name, and contact info. Thank you!
**Capital Campaign Payments**

When writing a check towards the Capital Campaign, please clearly mark in the memo line “Capital Campaign.”

If you choose to have your payments made via your bank web bill pay, it is important the check makes mention of the Capital Campaign. Failure to do so, may lead to donations being posted toward an incorrect fund.

If you have further questions, please contact Shannon Lindsay in the office at (860) 651-3593 or email slindsay@fccsimsbury.org.

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**First Church Memorial Garden**

_We have many new members_ of our church who may not be aware that we have a lovely and peaceful Memorial Garden located on the upper level near to the parlor entrance next to the church school wing of the church. It was created in the mid-1990s and currently holds the cremains of 76 persons. It was designed by Jim Block, a landscape architect who was a long-time member of First Church, who passed away recently. His cremains are in the Garden. It was designed to be peaceful and beautiful with flowers and trees and a fountain. There is a quiet sitting area with a wall, brickwork path and benches.

_Present and former members of First Church_ and their families and friends of First Church may use it for the interment of ashes of their loved ones. Ashes are buried directly in the ground in a biodegradable container. The Memorial Garden Ministry takes care of all plantings and maintenance of the garden and individuals must get approval from them for adding anything additional. When families desire to use the garden for the interment of cremains of a loved one, they must arrange that through the church office. A plaque for each person buried there is created containing the name and dates of the person once that information is given in writing by the family to the church office.

_A Book of Remembrance_ is kept in the church parlor entrance area. There is a page for a photograph and newspaper article or obituary or written memorial of the deceased. These items are furnished by the family. Another copy is kept in a secure part of the church.

_The fee for using the garden for members of First Church and their families is $700_ to be paid at the time of interment includes the cost of obtaining the brass plaque. The _fee for friends of First Church who are not members is $900_ including the cost of the plaque.

_Gifts for the Memorial Garden_ are welcome at any time and they will be used to help to maintain the garden now and in the future. _All Gifts and Fees should be made payable to First Church of Christ and designated on the check for the Memorial Garden Fund_. There is also an Endowment Fund established for the maintenance of the Garden. Any amount is welcome.

_The Memorial Garden Ministry now consists of nine members_ with the senior minister as an ex-officio member. The committee _works closely with the Board of Trustees_ and it has a line-item in the Trustees budget for the use of the Garden Ministry. The Garden is maintained by a professional landscape company.

Our Memorial Garden is here for our members and friends to use at a time when grief and sadness make decisions difficult. The time to consider using the Garden as an alternative for the loss of a loved one is before it is needed. Brochures containing all the information that you may need are available in the church office.

_The Memorial Garden Ministry: Marge Brown, Terry Carlson, Ted Christensen, Donna Hopkins, J. John, Joyce Kalika, Wally Musick (Chair), Lee Ora and Dick Wilde_
First Church Building Committee News

**Pastor Pondering** (continued from page 2)

I can't help but think that the can-do attitude of First Church has been aided by the enthusiasm and relationships nurtured by the capital campaign.

In fifty years, members of First Church will tell coffee hour stories (in person and online) recalling the pandemic of 2020. Surely, these stories will recall the hardships and loss experienced during this time, but they will also be filled with love and gratitude for the way the church responded, within the building and beyond our walls, to transform the church to better serve God and neighbor in our changing world.

Thank you for all you do to make First Church what it is, today and into the future.

In Christ,

Pastor George

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**ACTION PLAN**

March 13: Bids from 4 Construction Management firms are received

April 3: Additional information due from 4 Construction Management Firms

April: Building Committee Interviews Construction Management Firms

May: Contract executed with selected Construction Management Firm

April-July: Architect completes design plans and specifications for all proposed projects

August-September: Construction Management company to solicit competitive bids based on specifications provided by architect and provide us with a guaranteed maximum price for proposed projects

October: Building Committee to review and prioritize project list. With Church leadership, the final capital campaign project list is developed and presented and voted on by the congregation. The Construction Manager for next phase of project is hired.

**There will be some exterior projects that do not require the design plans to be completed that we plan to start on this summer**

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**CAPITAL CAMPAIGN PROJECTS**

**WHAT IS NEW?**

The building committee has been hard at work remotely moving the projects along. We have started the tree planned tree removal project and will continue with landscaping those areas. We have also completed the much needed office phone system update. We will continue to meet virtually until it is safe to reconvene in person.

Please contact any member of the building committee with any questions.

Kris Barnett and Kathy Wildman Co Chairs
trustees@fccsimsbury.org

Pastor George Harris  Rev. Kevin Weikel
Mark Scully  Carol Pollak
Dave Woods  Steve Osborn
Randy Cole  Bill Cordner
Ryan Beach  John Ritson

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Holy Communion from Home. On the first Sunday of each month, we will share Communion in our Virtual Worship on Facebook Live.

Before the 10 o’clock worship time, you will want to prepare some bread, a slice or a small loaf of any kind of bread. Those who feel adventurous can have fun with this, using your favorite breakfast treat (a donut or pastry, maybe). Prepare a cup or cups of juice — perhaps grape, cranberry, or orange — or wine, with or without alcohol.

Set these elements in the living room or kitchen where you will participate in worship on your phone or computer. Perhaps you will want to put them on an attractive cloth or fabric that reminds you of a special time or a person. Perhaps you will light a candle or place a flower or plant or the photograph of someone you wish to bring into the circle of faith beside the bread and the cup. Find a way to make your communion setting special for you.

Then, Pastors George and Kevin will bring us together around one (virtual) table to share the Bread of Life and the Cup of Blessing.