

THE CORNERSTONE

First Church is an Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Please join us in January for worship!

January 5th

Epiphany
Star Gift Sunday
8:30 a.m. in the Chapel
10:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Star Gift Stories shared by
Peter Wildman,
Susan Babcock White,
and Karyn Cordner
with Holy Communion



January 12th

8:30 a.m. in the Chapel
10:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Rev. Kevin Weikel, preaching

January 19th

8:30 a.m. in the Chapel
10:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Rev. George Harris, preaching

January 26th

8:30 a.m. in the Chapel
10:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Rev. George Harris, preaching

February 2nd

8:30 a.m. in the Chapel
10:00 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Rev. George Harris, preaching
with Holy Communion



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Rev. George Harris
Senior Minister

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Out of Office Tuesdays

Pastor Pondering

A year-old editorial on the *Baptist News Global* website recently recirculated on social media. In, "3 Words for the Church in 2019: 'We Were Wrong,'" Baptist Pastor Mark Wingfield begins:

As we look toward new year's resolutions, my hope is that the Christian church might be able to utter just three simple words in 2019. These are words that would change the course of history, foster civil dialogue and perhaps even bring skeptics back into the church. But they are hard words to say: "We were wrong."

Wingfield goes on to name specific wrongs he believes should be acknowledged and remedied, including perspectives on race, women, sexual orientation and gender identity, sexual misconduct, and politics.

Indeed, each January presents all of us with an opportunity, not only to make resolutions for the coming year, but to acknowledge mistakes in the year just ended. This annual exercise is especially timely for me, as I began my tenure as your Senior Minister four years ago on January 4, 2016.

Now, confessing all my failures in 2019, personal and professional, would make for a very long (and likely disturbing) column indeed. So instead, let me acknowledge and affirm one particular way I have continued to learn, evolve, and grow in the year just ended.

Last year, a couple met with me to offer a critique of my preaching. While they encouraged me to act upon my strongly held beliefs about social justice (they used the example of protesting on the capitol steps), this couple was of the opinion that I should not share such beliefs from the pulpit. Social justice sermons, they said, divide the church; instead, they suggested that my sermons should speak to the personal, pastoral concerns of the gathered faithful. Though my initial response was to debate the issue with them (What about Moses confronting Pharaoh? What about John the Baptist demanding repentance? What about Jesus challenging the Pharisees?), I promised to ponder their perspective. And I have.

And while I have not exactly concluded that "I was wrong," my approach to preaching has continued to evolve. I would never promise to exclude social justice from a sermon. Such issues are integral to our faith. Jesus critiqued the power of empire and its impact upon the most vulnerable, including the poor, ethnic and religious minorities, and immigrants, and I will do the same. That said, I recognize that sermons that simply draw a line in the sand, leave no room for conversation, and make it more difficult to acknowledge wrong and grow in faith.

I also recognize that every Sunday morning, when I step into the pulpit, I am addressing a church full of hurting people. Especially in these challenging times, you are all seeking a hopeful, encouraging, healing word to help make your lives better. A too-simple assertion of right and wrong is unhelpful.

In 2019, eighty-five church members came out to support the founding of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA), a grassroots social justice organization, and I preached sermons on this widely applauded initiative. But each and every Sunday, when I step into the pulpit, I have also sought to preach sermons born out of my love and concern for you, and the challenges we face together.

In the coming year, I will continue to challenge myself to acknowledge when I am wrong, and invite you to do the same.

Happy New Year!

A Message from Rev. Kevin Weikel

It's 2020, can you believe it!? A new year and a new decade. While it's 2020 for all of us, each of us enters into this new time from a different place. Some of us would re-live the 2010's in a heartbeat, while others are glad to see them go. For most of us, I imagine, our feelings are mixed.

For my wife Kelley and I, the 2010s was the decade of the kiddos. Our oldest daughter Sadie was born in 2010, our son Asher was born in 2013, and our youngest daughter Ella was born in 2017. While we will cherish the decade of the 2010s for that reason (among others), we are glad to be done with the baby, toddler, and little person stages.

We are looking forward to watching our kiddos grow throughout the next decade.

One thing I've learned about parenting in the 2010s is that I will make mistakes. In a situation that calls for calm, I will, on occasion, show frustration. When listening is in order, I will sometimes share advice. In a moment that requires my full attention, I will, on occasion, be distracted. I will always try my best, but I will, quite often, fail.

Of course, failing isn't just a part of parenting. It's a part of life. Whether it's parenting, work, a relationship, church, advocating for a cause, being a good friend, we will always make mistakes as we do our best. When we fail, however, we would do well to remember the words of author James Sherman who wrote, "You can't go back and make a new start, but you can start right now and make a brand new ending."

And so, for this next year (let's start with next year because a decade is a looong time), my wish for you is that whatever awaits you, you step into it with confidence and courage. And when you mess up, because you will, at times, mess up, may you always find a way to make a brand new ending. In 2020 and beyond, may you encounter God doing a new thing in your life, and making a way in the wilderness.

All Best,

Kevin



Photo by Tiffany K.

Rev. Kevin Weikel

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Out of Office Tuesdays

Musical Notes

Happy New Year!

So....Christmas is over. Christ is born. The shepherds and wise men are gone; the lights are put back in the attic, the tree is down, the thank-you notes are written, and we now settle down for a long winter's nap. Looking back, though - what an amazing season it was! So much activity, so much preparation, so much hope and trepidation - all for the celebration of a single day - maybe two. And then...it's over. Just like that. No more carols, no more Black Fridays/Cyber Mondays/Giving Tuesdays/Wobbly Wednesdays....for a long while. Some are relieved; some are kind of crashing on the lack of activity - a little reality shock, as it were. But here's the thing:

The journey is the destination. Getting ready. Choosing music; planning; rehearsing; thinking about; dreaming; being with each other; getting inspired - that is all the stuff of living. The final arrival is important, yes, but we are never "done". We are so lucky to have lived the last few months with lives of intentionality. With purpose. With dreams. To have lived in that world - that is the most wonderful thing. But Christmas does not begin on Dec. 24th and end on the 25th - it begins when we practice our first carol, buy our first present, and it does not end when we take the tree down - it becomes a transition that you carry with you onward to more things. You stand on that platform that has been created, and look up the ladder to higher things. And then you realize that to climb that ladder - well, that's the greatest part. And we are lucky to live and have the opportunity to put one foot in front of the other. To be seekers, and be inspired by what we experience. And when the next Christmas season comes around - not the same Christmas, but a new Christmas - we have a whole round of experiences to bring to the table - a year's worth. And we will love Christmas for what we have done and been all year long. We have arrived to our journey. And living our journey is our destination.

I do want to take time to thank several people and organizations that I have been lucky to have worked with: All our choirs for the amount of time and work and giving they have done - doing this with each other has been so fulfilling. Our ministers and all the members our staff - what terrific people with whom to work! All those members of the congregation that took this trip with us this season - those that have taken part and those that supported. Some fantastic musicians within the church and in the surrounding churches and community: what an assembly of talent we have around us!

We have a marvelous community to journey with! And we will continue to walk with each other: to the mountain, the lakeshore; to the cross, the tomb and through the Resurrection. And then once again to the stable. We must walk with as much conscious intentionality as we can muster. The goal serves to bring us together. But what we carry, what we experience, and with whom we walk on our road - these are the most important parts. In the words of the late, great Ram Dass: "Be Here. Now." What great advice!

Merry Christmas! Happy New Year! — Mark

"Not I, nor anyone else can travel that road for you.

You must travel it by yourself.

It is not far. It is within reach.

Perhaps you have been on it since you were born, and did not know.

Perhaps it is everywhere — on water and land."

— Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass



Mark Mercier

**Director of Music
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Out of Office Tuesdays

A Message from Jessica Wolanin

The days are long but the years are short... This saying couldn't be more accurate when it comes to raising children. And yet here we are at the end of a year, the end of a decade. The 2000's were quite the decade for my family and I. Andrew and I reconnected in 2010, I graduated college in 2011, and we bought our house and got married in 2012. Grayson was born and I graduated from grad school in 2015, we moved to Simsbury in 2016, and finally Jack and Emalyn made their debut in 2018. With all of those big "events" in our lives happening in the 2000's, it's bittersweet to have this decade come to a close. However, there is much to look forward to, much to anticipate in the coming years for our family.

As this year comes to an end, it's hard to believe that I have now been at First Church for a complete year. As with any career change it was a bumpy ride but this change has been such a positive one for myself and my family. I came into a position that had just been vacated by a beloved member of our church and as you can understand, attempting to fill her shoes is a task that no one can accomplish. But along this journey, everyone has been so warm and receptive as I tiptoe through this position and all it entails in my own shoes. During this past year we have implemented some changes while still keeping the heart of the program the same. The curriculum has continued to support our children in learning the stories in the Bible, the Kid's Nights Out have enabled parents and caregivers to enjoy "time-out," VBS shared God's love beyond our walls, and our annual events have continued to bring joy to all who attend. One big change that was made over this past year is the amount of time that children remain in worship. I hope that you will all agree that this has been a positive experience and helped to bridge the gap between Church School and the general congregation. This year I am looking forward to seeing friendships develop and engagement rise in the game and activity room for kindergarten through fifth grade, continuing to build a relationship between SUMC, St. Alban's and FCC through Vacation Bible School, as well as implementing all I'm learning in the Faith Formation Certification courses I'm currently enrolled in.

I cannot stress enough how grateful I am for all of the guidance, support, encouragement, and endless grace that has been shown to me and my family over the past year. To the ministers and staff, I am incredibly grateful to you for always lending an ear, a shoulder, and encouragement. Thank you to the Board of Christian Education for believing in me and my ideas, helping to forge a path ahead and always supporting my family and me. To the Church School teachers and shepherds, thank you for being the best there is - being the pillars of Christian Ed and sharing the stories in the Bible and God's love with all of the children at First Church. To the VBS committee and volunteers, thank you for trudging through and being open to the ideas that I had. To the congregation and friends of First Church, thank you for your wisdom, support, encouragement, and love that you have shown to my family and me. Thank you all.

Many blessings to you for a wonderful 2020,

Jessica



Jessica Wolanin

**Director of Children's
Ministries**

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CAPITAL CAMPAIGN HAPPENINGS!!!

"Bricks and Mortals: Building to Serve God and Neighbor"

The planning for our capital campaign began immediately following our congregational vote on November 17th. The campaign will take place from **January 5 – February 16, 2020**. Maryann Doyle, our consultant, will have an office at the church and be available Sunday -Thursday, beginning January 5th.

I am deeply grateful and happy to announce that the following people agreed to serve as the Campaign Steering Committee:

Senior Minister	The Rev. George Harris
Leadership Gifts Chairpersons	Sara Burrows and Jim Trimble
General Gifts Chairperson	Steve Osborn
Communications Chairperson	Carol Pollack
Telephone Chairpersons	Francesca Caponetti and Heather Czuchta
Hospitality Chairpersons	Marlene Powell and Nancy Yannopoulos
Office Coordinators	Joyce Breland and Sue Trimble
Administrators	Shannon Lindsay and Megan Strouse
Consultant	Maryann Doyle

We met with campaign leaders on December 9th and are beginning to recruit a total of 75 visitors to visit 325 households. Visits are a wonderful opportunity to build community, as we make new friends and strengthen long-time relationships.

In addition to making visits, there are several different opportunities to assist the campaign: making phone calls to call for reservations for our February 2nd Campaign Kick Off Brunch; preparing food for campaign volunteers; and performing administrative tasks to support large mailings.

Please be on the lookout for calls from church members. Maryann Doyle advises us that the campaign's success correlates directly to the number of volunteers. Please prayerfully consider your participation, and say **"YES!"** when a friend from the church asks for your help. The campaign period is short and we need everyone to participate.

Save the date: Sunday, February 2nd at 11:15 am. As noted above, we will officially launch our campaign with a festive brunch. Members and friends will be invited and children are welcome. We will mail invitations in early January, and then our volunteers will call for reservations.

Questions regarding the campaign may be directed to me, Mario Chiappetti (860-558-3934), Maryann Doyle (860-416-4781), or Pastor George (860-561-3593). We ask that you keep this important endeavor in your prayers.

With many thanks,

Mario Chiappetti

Campaign Chair



CAPITAL CAMPAIGN PROJECTS!!!

"Bricks and Mortals: Building to Serve God and Neighbor"

The Building Committee has worked to determine the relative priority of projects that will be included in the capital campaign, with an emphasis on safety and building preservation, and meet goals that include: welcome and accessibility; energy conservation; communication & technology; and outreach. The list of projects is largely influenced by what we can raise financially.

The Building Committee and the church officers have taken into consideration the feedback resulting from meetings with members, and will present the final recommendation and associated costs to the Executive Council for approval on January 6th.

On **Sunday, January 12th following worship**, the Building Committee and officers will present the list of campaign projects to members and answer questions. The list will also be posted on the church website and included in campaign materials.

FIRST CHURCH

WE NEED HELP

WE ARE LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS TO HELP WITH FRIDAY NIGHT SUPPERS. SIGN UP FOR ONCE A MONTH OR ONCE A YEAR.

CALL OR TEXT SARA OR PENNY
860-655-4810 OR 860-655-5048
OR EMAIL PENNY:
52ROSKIN@COMCAST.NET



You can also sign up to volunteer at the Friday Night Suppers by scanning the QR code below!



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!

A New Way to Join First Church!

Are you interested in joining First Church?

Becoming a Member is simple: all you need to do is meet with Pastor George or Rev. Kevin about your interest in joining the church. They would love to get to know you!

To schedule your meeting, please call the church office at (860) 651-3593, or email the church office at admin@fccsimsbury.org.

Once you've had a meeting with one of the pastors, you are asked to fill out a simple form and then you are ready to be officially welcomed into the church on a third or fourth Sunday of the month!

We look forward to hearing from you!



Photographing Opportunity!

Do you enjoy taking pictures during church, or already have photos of you and others engaged in church activities?



If so, we encourage you email them to admin@fccsimsbury.org so we can keep the NEW church website relevant with up-to-date photos! Thank you!

A Message from the Mission and Outreach Board:

Summer sun and fun??!! It is hard to think about summer camp already but Silver Lake Conference Center is hard at work getting everything perfect for the conferences next year. Sign up time will be here before you know it.

Thanks to the Congregation's generosity, this year the Mission and Outreach Board has donated \$1,500 to Silver Lake to help prepare for events for all ages.



The Friendship Center at St. Elizabeth House

Breakfast Volunteers Still Needed!

Thank you to the congregation for supporting our Mission work at St Elizabeth's. Hats, gloves and 100 pairs of socks were donated because of your generous donations, along with a warm nutritious meal.

Please join us as we prepare and serve breakfast on the third Tuesday, each month, from 7-9 a.m. at The Friendship Center at St. Elizabeth House.

The Friendship Center at St. Elizabeth House is a shelter and facility that supports homeless people and those at risk for homelessness in downtown Hartford.

Scan the QR code below to sign up!





FRIDAY NIGHT SUPPER

**FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST
689 HOPMEADOW STREET
SIMSBURY, CT**

FRIDAY
January 17
4:30 - 6:30 PM

COME & GO ANY TIME

FREE MEAL!
OPEN TO THE
COMMUNITY

DONATIONS
ACCEPTED WILL
BENEFIT A
PROMISE
TO JORDAN



First Church Youth and Young Adults

No matter where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!

Led by Rev. Kevin Weikel, Associate Minister for Youth and Young Adults

Visit the [Youth and Young Adult Pages](#) on our Website for Current, Up-to-Date Information!

Junior Fellowship (JF) is youth group for 7th and 8th graders. JF gathers approximately one Friday per month from 2:10-4:30 p.m., with additional special events scheduled from time to time. At a typical JF meeting our youth enjoy a snack, play games, participate in service projects and faith-based discussions.

- ✓ **Friday, January 3, 2020**, Junior Fellowship
- ✓ **Friday, January 24, 2020**, Junior Fellowship

Confirmation at First Church is an intentional time of exploring what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The goal is for each student to grow in the knowledge that he or she is a magnificent creation of the Divine and deeply loved by God, and for each student to understand that God's love extends to all creation and all people.

- ✓ **Sunday, January 5, 2020 5-7 p.m.**, Large Group Meeting (Baptism & Communion) in Parson's Study
- ✓ **Sunday, January 26, 2020 5-7 p.m.**, Small Group Meeting (Saints) at host homes

Pilgrim Fellowship (PF) is for all 9th through 12th graders no matter their religious background, or ideas about God. Everyone is welcome. PF is a place to play, discuss, worship, grow, serve, and love. PF is a place for teenagers to journey together in faith. PF meets for fellowship, retreats, mission opportunities, and more.

- ✓ **Sunday, January 5, 2019, 7-9 p.m.** New Year's Celebration! In the Youth Room
- ✓ **Sunday, January 12, 2020**, Town-Wide Dodgeball Tournament! More details coming soon!
- ✓ **Sunday, January 19, 2020**, PF Song Night!
- ✓ **Sunday, January 26, 2020**, Daring Greatly, cont.



First Church Tutoring **at Wish Elementary School in Hartford**

An Intergenerational Service Opportunity!

January tutoring dates: **Monday Jan. 13th** and **Jan. 27th**

Simsbury High School Students: catch the bus at 2:10 p.m. after school in the SHS parking lot. We'll ride to the Dunkin' Donuts on the north end of town for an after school snack before heading to Hartford!

Adults and Private School Students: Meet the church bus at Dunkin Donuts around 2:45 p.m. (arrive a little earlier if you'd like a snack), before heading to Hartford.

Finish back at Dunkin' at 5:30 p.m. or 6 p.m. Pick up is at Dunkin Donuts (the newest one at the North End of town).

Save the Dates!

2020 National Youth Event —July 21st—26th

A four-day event bringing 4,000 youth participants together from our denomination! It is centered on faith, leadership, service, and social justice!

2020 Mission Trip: Amen St. Louis

August 2nd—8th

An urban mission experience unlike any other!





Children's Ministry News Grow your heart at First Church



Register Now — Dad's Group Event!

Are you a dad? Do you like to eat breakfast?

If you do, please join our newly formed Dad's Group on **Wednesday, January 8th at 6:30 a.m. at Harvest Café** for a great breakfast and time to socialize with other dads.

Please sign up by scanning the QR code below!

If you have any questions, please email Andrew Wolanin at Andreww0506@gmail.com.



Save the Date—First Church Skates!

Sat., Jan 25th from 4:30-5:30 p.m.

Grab those skates and come join us at Simsbury Farms Ice Rink! We will have hot chocolate available!

This is a community event- we'd love it if you brought your friends and neighbors!

The more the merrier!

*Please bring a dozen cookies to share. They don't have to be homemade!



First Church of Christ

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Sunday Fellowship Hour Hosts

Upcoming Fellowship Hour Schedule:

1/5/2020	Star Gift Sunday	The Gould's
1/12/2020		Board of Worship
1/19/2020	MLK Sunday	Board of Mission & Outreach
1/26/2020	Mission & Outreach Sunday	Committee of Deacons
2/2/2020	Budget Hearing	Board of Worship
2/9/2020	Financial Meeting	No Fellowship Hour

2019 Pledge Fulfillment

As 2019 has drawn to a close, please see the below important information from the Office:



You still have time to fulfill your 2019 Pledge to First Church!

If you would like your donation to be recorded in 2019, all checks **must be dated by December 31, 2019**, and **received by the First Church Office no later than January 6, 2020**.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office.

Thank you for your donation!

All invoices, or expense reimbursement requests for 2019 must be received by the First Church Office no later than January 6, 2020. Please contact Judi Sedor (finance@fccsimsbury.org) if you need more information.

First Church of Christ

689 Hopmeadow Street
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~ Please notify the church office of any address changes. ~