

TIDINGS

First Church of Christ, Congregational

Founded 1652

Issue: June 2011

Schedule of Events June 2011

June 5

*Initiation to Adulthood. See
Second Hours, page 2, and
page 4.*

June 12

*Children's Sunday. See
page 9.*

June 19

*St. Vincent de Paul Meal.
See page 4.*

June 26

*Potluck Reception and
Farewell to John Hall. See
Second Hours, page 2.*



A Note from the Minister

June, 2011

When baptizing a baby, I prefer an abundance of water. You may have noticed this over the years. I immerse my whole hand in the font and try to scoop out enough water to get the child's head good and wet. To enter the Christian church is to begin a lifelong "bath" in a world of symbols, rituals, stories, music, and community life.

My enthusiasm for water is Biblical, but it also originates in my own life story. When I was two, I waded too far out from a sandy beach in northern Minnesota and found myself floating helplessly in a green underwater world. My father pulled me out in time, but I was terrified of the water for about six years after that. Learning to swim wasn't easy. By age twelve, I was free from my water phobia. I spent my summers around lakes and pools. Sailing, canoeing, body surfing, windsurfing, and kayaking have been passions soul restoring activities for me. Everyone has a deep and personal relationship with water, beaches, swimming, streams, rainstorms, floods, and so on.

Water, in addition to having this deep place in our psyches, conjures up innumerable Biblical stories. In creation, God's spirit brooded over the unformed waters of chaos. God tried to cleanse the world of sin with the flood. The Israelites escaped from bondage by the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea.

Jesus was baptized in the Jordan. Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well and said, "the water I give will be like an inner fountain, gushing up to eternal life." Finally, in his commission to the disciples, the risen Christ said "go into the world, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them ..."

A baby that is neat and dry at both ends is a comfort to behold. A baby visibly wet with baptismal water, being carried through a singing congregation, evokes a profound significance and joy. A wet face says that one has been immersed in a very different world of experience.

Over the years, my inner life has become deeply saturated in Christian images, symbols, stories, and ways of seeing life. I hope that is also true, or will be true someday, for all of you. I don't view this "Christian way" as a rigid formula or a set of mandatory beliefs. It is more like a journey through an ocean, sometimes on the surface feeling the wind, sometimes underwater where we view a bewildering array of life forms and relationships, variously colored and patterned, simple and complex.

Jesus' life and the traditions of the Church can take us on this journey. The Church will always have its struggles in the world, just as we do as individuals. We all have many reasons to be disappointed in the

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Church, as I explained in my sermon on May 8. (“The Church is a whore, but she is my mother.”) But if we choose to take that journey, or if we are dragged there kicking and screaming (figuratively speaking), we are sure to find it illuminating, empowering, and comforting beyond measure.

John

SECOND HOURS FOR JUNE

Meet in the Memorial Room following worship. Nursery care provided until 12:15 pm.

June 5th No 2nd Hour. The service this Sunday includes The Rite of Initiation to Adulthood.

June 12th Church School Picnic following “Children’s Day” in worship

June 19th **Roger Brewer** and his daughter **Nichole Brewer**, will tell us about their book and seminar titled *Withstanding The Lie*, that describes ways people can insulate themselves from prejudices based on age, race, weight, sex, and any other category about which people tell lies.

June 26th **Reception and Farewell** to John Hall. Bring a dish to share and commemorate John’s last day in ministry with us.



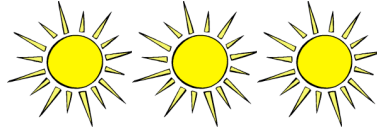
All-Church Picnic, Sunday June 12th, in the Parish Hall

All Church Picnic on Children’s Sunday. Please bring a salad or dessert to share.

Hotdogs and drinks will be provided by the RE committee. Come and join us! Fun for everyone!



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First Church - Minister Transition Update Interim Minister Search Committee Formed!

The search committee for the interim pastor has been formed. The members consist of Darcy Dickinson, Jen Jasenski, Ginny Houghtaling, John Shaw and Cyndi Sanders (Chair). We have met with our Conference Pastor who is working with us through this process.

The first step is to create a mini Church profile. (A more formal profile is usually done by the search committee for the settled Pastor.) The Conference Pastor will use the mini-profile to identify potential interim pastors for us to interview.

Interim pastors are ordained ministers who are specifically trained to work with Church's going through transition. They cannot be considered for the settled pastor position. In addition to regular pastoral duties, he or she will help in coming to terms with our history as we discover our new identity. They will provide leadership and a bridge to our settled Pastor.

The interim search committee is working toward interviewing candidates between mid-June and mid-July and would like to hire an interim pastor on August 1, 2011.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any member of the interim search committee.

Yours in Christ,
Cyndi Sanders, Chair



Church Office Update

In the interim between John's departure and the arrival of our Interim Minister, Lorel Czajka the Church Administrator will be fielding phone calls, emails and or communications to First Church. Please contact Lorel in the church office if you need information on anything church-related. If she can't answer your question she will connect you to someone who can. You may call the church office at 860/346-6657 x10 and leave a message or email firstchurchucc@sbcglobal.net

During the month of July, the First Church office will not be open. Lorel will be checking voice mail and email remotely, from June 27th - July 29th. The office will be open Mondays through Fridays starting August 1.



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Your Help Needed: St. Vincent de Paul Meal

On June 19th, our church will be responsible for the meal at St. Vincent de Paul Place.

Please help them out as you are able with the following needs:

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|--|---|
| 2 cooked turkeys, cut up | 5 pounds of chopped onions |
| 15 one-pound bags of frozen vegetables | 24 cans of turkey gravy |
| 2 5-pound bag of potatoes | 10 loaves of Italian bread |
| 6 tossed salads | 6 bottles of Italian dressing |
| 10 dozen brownies | 300 plastic utensils (150 each of forks and spoons) |
| 8 boxes of stuffing | 200 paper napkins |
| 2 tubs of margarine | 100 hot drink cups |
| 1 pound of stick margarine | |

Please contact the church office for more information or to sign up. 860.346.6657



New Group Forming

In the coming months, First Church will do a lot of internal "soul searching" as we go through the interim and search process.

This will be good for the church and it will be a valuable opportunity to think anew about what kind of church we want to be as we look forward to a new "era" in the life of the congregation..

However, we still have our long running budget issues and we can't look only internally for solutions. We are forming a group that will look outside for like thinking organizations we can partner with and share resources. We're not sure what we're looking for or what we'll find, but think it is important to try.

If you would like to work on this with us please give us a call.

Jim and Pam Miller, 860 347-5785



Initiation to Adulthood

Come and show support our youth and share in a potluck dinner at 6:00 p.m. and their Statements of Faith to follow.





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Attention Committee Chairs! All new and returning committee chairs please contact Lorel to update her committee chair list. Call 860/346-6657 x10 and leave a message or email firstchurchucc@sbcglobal.net Thank you!



Is Your "Will" Sanctified?

Planning a bequest to First Church in your will is a generous and joyful thing to do. It will connect you in a profound way to the spiritual lives of future generations. Our endowment policy insures our disciplined and restrained use of the endowment and enabled us to invest for capital appreciation rather than income. Only about 4% of the value is “harvested” each year, so that the size of the endowment will keep pace with inflation and retain its real value for future generations. We want to assure all who make bequests that their gifts will support the church *in perpetuity*.



Watch First Church Services on Comcast and DVD

Unable to attend on Sunday? Or maybe you want to listen to the sermon and the hymns again? Now you can partake of First Church Sunday services from home. Full length church services are available on DVD for church members through the Church Office. Edited 30 minute programs air on Comcast Channel 15 Friday nights at 7:30 pm.



First Church Annual Baseball Outings

These events seem to be so popular and family friendly that this year we've planned two! The first will be Saturday, June 25th, at 6:35pm against the Trenton Thunder (Yankees AA affiliate). The second will be Saturday, August 20th, at 7:05pm against the New Hampshire Fisher Cats (Blue Jays AA affiliate). Mark these dates on your calendar. More information will follow!



Can You Help With Our Recycling?

First Church has made a lot of progress toward being a “Green Church.” Our practice of recycling paper, cans, and plastic bottles was one of our earliest steps. Currently, we are also collecting “deposit” cans and bottles on the side porch. We need to find someone else to cash in the bottles or to recruit and coordinate others to do this on a rotating basis. If you would be willing to “head up” this effort, please speak with Lorel in the office.



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Jonah Center News

Family Bike Ride & Safety Tips

Saturday, June 4, 12- 2:30 p.m. on the Westlake Area Bike Path

Beth Emery will be our guide and teacher on this event, which includes a short hike on the Mattabeset River trail. This event is part of Connecticut Forest and Parks 2011 Trails Day Event. It will be an easy 10-mile ride over mostly level terrain. Beth is a League of American Bicyclists cycling instructor, and she will begin with a brief introduction to bicycling safety including the bicycle ABC quick check, a helmet fit and adjustment check, and a discussion of trail etiquette and riding safety. Participants need to bring their own bikes (in good working order with tires properly inflated) and helmets, plus water and sunscreen. Space is limited and **pre-registration is required by contacting Beth Emery at ctladcyclist@gmail.com or 860-346-7387.** Beth will also answer questions about rain cancellation, directions to the start site, and parking. Dogs not allowed.

River Paddle

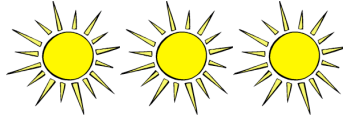
Lower Mattabeset and Coginchaug Rivers

Saturday, June 18, 2:30 p.m. leaving from Harbor Park Boathouse ramp



Bill Yule, Naturalist at the Connecticut River Museum in Essex, will be our “educator” on this paddle. We will stop for commentary and questions at Wilcox Island, the confluence of the Mattabeset and Coginchaug Rivers, the open water of the Boggy Meadows, the proposed site of Middletown’s kayak launch, and at a sandy on the Coginchaug. Bill spent many hours paddling and exploring this area as a child, so he has observed its character and changes over a number of

decades. Paddlers need to provide their own boats, life jackets, paddles, drinking water, and snacks. Advance registration is not necessary, and there is no charge for the event. You may call 860-398-3771 for more information or in case of possible cancellation due to weather.



Theology and Practice

On the Trinity

June 19 is “Trinity Sunday” on the Christian calendar and “Father’s Day” on the secular calendar, so a bit of reflection on the ancient doctrine of the Trinity seems fitting. What does the Trinity have to do with how Christians today might understand and experience God? And what does it have to do with parent-child relationships?

The idea of a Trinitarian God developed over several centuries as Christians reflected on the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth’s life. The first Christians were convinced that God had “become flesh” in Jesus. The notion that God *could* become flesh was not a totally new one, but it was a direct affront to Greek philosophy which held that the material world was inferior, unfortunate, and something to escape or rise above. “God in the flesh” was an affirmation of our physical existence, in spite of the problems and pain that come with it.

The second conviction of the early Christians was that Jesus had possessed the “shekinah”, the indwelling presence of God. Shekinah, a Hebrew idea, corresponded roughly to the Greek notion of “spirit.” The Spirit had descended upon Jesus and sent him into the world to perform his mission. This conviction was incorporated into the Christian narrative in the account of Jesus’ baptism, in which the spirit descended upon him like a dove, while a voice from heaven announced, “This is my beloved son.”

The “beloved son” concept leads to the third aspect of Jesus’ life that stood out in the minds of Jesus’ followers: that he prayed to “Abba” — an Aramaic word meaning “Father”. Here again, Jesus offered a radical departure from the ideas prevailing in the Greek-speaking world. For Jesus to address God as “Abba” was striking, since it cast the human-divine relationship not as one of landowner and slave, but as Father and Son — a relationship of intimacy and mutuality, with less emphasis on legal hierarchy.

Fourth, and perhaps most important: If God was in Jesus, and if Jesus died on the cross, then the prevailing understanding of God was contradicted in an even more radical way. Jesus’ crucifixion meant that God could suffer *with* humanity and *for* humanity, out of love. God was not above suffering, but God had entered into the depths of human suffering and even “become sin” (to use Paul’s language) to be in solidarity with humanity, even at our worst. In Jesus’ cry from the cross, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” we witness the pain of the Son losing the “Father”. In the darkness that covered the earth at the moment of Jesus’ death and in the tearing of the temple curtain, we see the pain of the Father giving up the Son, foreshadowed in the Biblical story by the pain of Abraham giving up his son Isaac. In the crucifixion, there is a tearing of God’s heart that reveals the depth of God’s love through God’s willingness to suffer for the life of the world.

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Finally, Abba raised Jesus from the dead, *bodily*. The scriptures make a special point of emphasizing that this was not a mere “spiritual” resurrection. Not just Jesus’ soul, but his body, his material life, was redeemed from the grave. The risen body was not a resurrected corpse, but a “changed body” that only his believers could recognize. Furthermore, Abba did not raise the Son as a special favor. Jesus’ resurrection is seen as a sign and promise of the general resurrection and the transfiguration of all human suffering — another powerful (and mysterious) affirmation of the material side of human life. After Jesus’ ascension, the church received the Spirit and became the risen body of Christ, completing the transfiguration (or transformation) of Jesus’ earthly, physical body.

The real purpose of all this — and the purpose of Jesus’ life and ministry — is not to spin abstract theories about God, but to offer a narrative that draws us in as participants. We are the children (sons and daughters) of “Abba” too. This was Paul’s great insight, stated so clearly in Romans 8:14 *“All who are led by the Spirit of God [like Jesus] are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry “Abba, Father” it is that very spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may be glorified with him”* (emphasis added).

The Trinity invites us to rethink God in a radical way. God is not an entity, but a community whose love creates and restores. God invites us into a non-hierarchical relationship with the Triune God and with each other. We are not slaves under a tyrant, fearing the law. In Christ we are free, invited into a parent-child relationship with a God who loves us and wants to be in relationship with us. This insight lies at the core of Jesus’ ministry. The Trinity invites us into the very same Abba-Son-Spirit relationship that Jesus experienced.

When I visited my father for the last time this past January, I experienced this mystery of God’s suffering love in a powerful way. This was only 3 weeks before my father died. He was ready to die, and we both knew that the end was near. Like many of you, I saw my father dying before my eyes — my father whose life, to a large extent, was lived and suffered for me. As it was with my mother’s death 13 years ago, I could see his living and dying as part of Christ’s living and dying. A father and son were losing each other, and I couldn’t help but make the connection between our experience and how God’s love had poured out in Jesus’ loss of Abba and Abba’s loss of Jesus. So the mystery of the Trinity and of God’s love appears in our human lives when we experience the loss of a parent or a child, or when painful change takes place in the life of any intimate community such as the church.

So, the dusty doctrine of the Trinity points and opens us to the beauty, richness, and love to be found in our sometimes agonizing human experience.

John



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Religious Education for June 2011

Children's Day-June 16

On our annual Children's Day Sunday, the Sunday School children will lead the service and deliver the message. Linda Heidorn and Julie Hulbert will lead the children in a sharing of bible stories they learned this year. Immediately following the service, there will be a **Family Picnic** at the church with games and activities for the children. Families are asked to bring a salad or dessert to share. Hotdogs and drinks will be provided by the RE committee.

A BigThank you goes out to the teachers and nursery workers who did such a great job this year! The children have been well taught and taken care of this year by Linda Heidorn, Julie Hulbert, Jeremy Floryan, Jane DiMauro and Susan Glass in the classroom, and by Susie Dutcher, Bethie, Katie and Robbie Wilcox-Smith, and Michael Cho in the nursery. Thank you for all your hard work, caring, and dedication!

And a special **Thank You** to Mary Gould for creating the teachers' gifts!



Music Schedule, June 2011

SUNDAY, JUNE 5, 2:00pm - MUSIC PARTY at Shari's



This month our **Green Envelope Giving** will benefit the Habitat for Humanity Re-store. The store, sponsored by Middlesex Habitat for Humanity, sells new and pre-owned building supplies, furniture, and appliances at rock-bottom prices. Shopping at Restore, 34 Shunpike Road in Cromwell, helps raise money for affordable housing and helps keep reusable materials out of landfills. Store hours are Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Restore is in the space formerly occupied by JoAnn Fabrics.) Information: 860-788-6483 or Habitatmiddlesex.org.

**Notices for Summer Tidings due Wednesday, June 15th by NOON
to Suzanna Barrett at stamminen@wesleyan.edu**

PLEASE NOTE: If you can help Lorel collate the newsletter, please let her know. She needs some people who would be willing and able to help her with this task each month.