

January/February 2014 Circuit Rider

*First Congregational Church of Lebanon, UCC
588 Exeter Road ~ P. O. Box 125
Lebanon, CT 06249*

“We seek to demonstrate God’s Spirit through worship, witness, and ministry to the needs of the people in the church and the community.”

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Our Prayer List

George Markow

Bill Jahoda

Judi Bergeron

Barbara Rodman

Barbara Pitcher

Dave Foley

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage. ~Matthew 2:1-2

Pastor's Letter

Dear Friends,

I want to thank everyone for your cards and gifts over the holidays. Jim and I had a wonderful holiday and enjoyed our family and I hope you did also.

Two weeks ago, Nancy and I met with Audra Holmes who has been the lead person on updating our website. We both were instructed as to how to post events, update news items and I was taught how to post my "Pastor's Blog." This is exciting because, as we were recently told by our regional minister, "the website is the front door to our church." Times have changed and many folks go immediately to a church website when church shopping. The website is also a natural way to keep church members and friends up to date on all activities.

I am happy to say that Derek Waldron, our church organist and pianist, has posted "Your Daily Dose of Derek" on our website. Derek has recorded many different pieces of music as he sits in our sanctuary and sings. You can go to our website and click on "Your Daily Dose of Derek" and it will take you to youtube.com and the recording.

I plan to post my Pastor's Blog weekly and will include random thoughts, book recommendations or scriptural passages for you to consider. You can also connect to our church's Facebook page and share. The church calendar and Circuit Rider are on our website and we hope to continually improve our information. If you have any suggestions please let me know.

It is hard for those of us who grew up without the internet to realize its importance as a communication tool in our culture today. When I was young, if you were looking for a church, you would ask your friends and visit different churches in town. Now it is the website for many and from there a decision is made as to which church you might visit.

I am so grateful to Audra for her expertise and commitment to our church and to helping us with our website. Please take a moment to visit our website at www.lebanonfirstcong.org.

*Love and joy,
Pastor Sharon*

From the Lofty Thoughts Archives

I had given up making New Year's Resolutions a long time ago. I couldn't keep them for more than a week or so – and it seemed fruitless. But there is one thing that seems important as we step into the year 2011. It's just three little words that can change a person's life. These words are, "I Love You;" and may be said to a friend, a parent, a child; someone who has come into your life and perhaps changed you in a positive way. Someone who has enhanced your life.

"Love" is what God is all about. But we have to be willing to receive it. We like receiving presents, why is it so hard to unwrap God's gift of LOVE? Does it sound too trite? With the radio and TV blasting the air waves with all kinds of love songs, do we "tune out" the Love? Love can be quiet...sharing silent moments with a friend; it can ring with laughter as we watch a comedy with the family; it can be felt in the touch of a hand held in empathy; it can be heard in a parents; "No, you can't" as they try to protect their child's safety.

"It was Said with Such Authority"

"I'll give the gist of what was said
It was about love and the sayer said it had nothing to do with receiving
He said love was all about giving plain and simple.
You could tell the guy walked the talk
He made it clear you must love yourself
Before you can begin to love another
This guy reminded me of that love from Galilee." (Gary E. McCormick)

It is a grave responsibility to share thoughts and words with an unseen audience. I consider myself another "traveler" on the journey to find the truth; to love myself, my God, and each of you.

Happy New Year!

Just a note,
Jean Souter

Board of Christian Education & Director of Christian Education Report

The Advent season was very busy as the Board of Christian Education helped our children and youth prepare for a joyous Christmas day. During the Sunday morning workshop services, the children searched the congregation to find the Advent symbols boxes. Each week, the children and their adult companions read examples from the boxes of Peace, Hope, Joy and Love. These weekly examples helped remind us all of ways we can share the Advent season with others.



The Give Squared Youth Group kicked off December with their movie night where they made their own waffles and customized them with the toppings of their choice. As you can imagine, most of them chose chocolate and cool whip so they returned home with a little more energy than they came with. They enjoyed watching The Nativity Story as it focused on telling the story of Jesus' birth from Mary and Joseph's perspective which helped them to see the more "human" side of Jesus and his family.

The Give Squared Youth Group also collected gifts for 20 local children and youth whose families needed some assistance in providing Christmas gifts this year. They send thanks out to the Church family for providing for this gifts collection.

The Advent season wrapped up with the annual Christmas Pageant followed by a Soup and Bread luncheon provided by The Board of Christian Education, our teachers, and Rev. Mary. During this year's pageant, the children and youth had the help of Santa to explain the true meaning of Christmas as well as the meanings and history behind some of the more common Christmas symbols.



We look forward to the coming year, starting with Epiphany Sunday where the children receive their "Gift Stars" to reflect on and remember the lessons of hope, peace, joy and love throughout the coming year. As we reflect on these lessons learned during the Advent season, the Give Squared Youth Group also kicks-off a new "Share the Warmth" mission project. We ask the help of our church family in collecting lightly used or new children's coats, ski pants, scarves, and mittens. The donations will be given to the new Lebanon Children's Clothing Wardrobe where Lebanon families can shop for their children for free.

UPDATE: CHURCH VISIONARY ACTIONS

Our church's Envisioning Report was approved by our church family on February 8, 2010. Since its adoption, the following actions have been taken:

- Director of Christian Education hired.
- Church Community Relations Committee formed.
- Mission Statement established.
- New sign installed on Exeter Road.
- New website launched.
- Weekly email updates are sent by Reverend Mary.
- Community meals provided.
- Controversial Issues Workshop presented.

With these successes in mind, the following Updated Envisioning Report Goals and Objectives are recommended. If you have questions or suggestions, please contact Phil Johnson or Ellen Bauwens by January 5, 2014.

II. Goals – **M I N E S**

- A. **Membership** - Attract new members.
- B. **Image** – Make our church more visible to the public and portray a positive image of a welcoming church.
- C. **Needs** - Serve the needs of church members and the community-at-large through missions or other means necessary.
- D. **Education** - Provide Christian education to children and adults.
- E. **Spirituality** - Assist all members in spiritual growth.

IV. Objectives

- 1) **Membership** – Attract new members with emphasis on families with children.
 - a) In conjunction with the Church Community Relations Committee, establish a process and strategy to:
 - i) Develop a plan to attract new members.
 - ii) Revitalize welcome package.
 - iii) Keep church website updated.
 - iv) Set up docents at every church service who will assist newcomers not familiar with protocol.
 - v) Provide “business cards” with the names and numbers of the docent, Head Deacon and Pastor to newcomers.
 - vi) Follow up with members who have not been active by expressing concern and offering assistance if needed.
 - vii) Arrange for special “bring a friend to church” Sunday services (either youth or adult).
 - viii) Utilize name tags for members.
 - ix) Have four sermons per year that focus on new members and sponsor special “open house” Sundays.
 - x) Revive the new member sponsor program.
- 2) **Image** – Make our church more visible to the public and portray a positive image of a welcoming church (in conjunction with the Church Community Relations Committee).
 - a) Install signage and/or banners outside of the church. Include an area where church events can be clearly and easily posted.
 - b) **Publicity** – provide press releases for every event that occurs at church and submit them to the following publications: Lebanon Life, The Chronicle, The Reminder, Norwich Bulletin and the Hartford Courant.
 - c) Incorporate current technology and communication techniques such as online social networking and text messaging.
 - d) Send group emails on events occurring at the church each week.
 - e) Open the church to more community events.

CHURCH VISIONARY ACTIONS CONT.

- 3) Needs - Serve the needs of church members and the community at large through mission projects or other means necessary.
 - a) Establish youth activities that are enjoyable to the children and inspire them to live a life full of God and service.
 - i) Age appropriate dances/socials.
 - ii) Incorporate age appropriate mission projects.
 - b) Establish programs to help single and stressed parents.
 - i) Date nights each month where parents drop their children off at the church from 5-8; dinner and wholesome child care activities provided for very small charge per child (maybe a teen youth group activity?).
 - ii) Older members mentor younger ones to help cope with issues that occur with growing families utilizing meetings and/or one-on-one.
 - c) Establish programs to help adults that no longer have children living with them.
 - i) Senior issues.
 - ii) Singles that still maintain their own homes.
 - iii) Empty nest issues; social networking.
 - d) Plan fun events where members can socialize and get to know each other better; encourage intergenerational contact.
 - e) Establish church-wide mission projects that can be local, state, national or international in nature.
 - f) Annually review church mission statement.
- 4) Education-Provide Christian education to children and to adults.
 - a) Support the Director of Christian Education.
 - b) Establish a mentor system to support middle and high school students.
 - c) Encourage youth to be more active in all levels of church life including leadership.
 - d) Establish a Christian education program for adults that have never had any formal religious upbringing and for those whose experiences are different than Congregationalism.
 - e) Establish a mentor program for adults that have never had religious background.
- 5) Spirituality – Assist all members in spiritual growth.
 - a) Have Board of Deacons and Pastor develop programs to help members with spirituality.
 - i) Re-evaluate the current church worship service.
 - ii) Bible Study.
 - iii) Prayer Sessions.
 - iv) Discussion Groups on current events and spirituality.
 - v) Expand Third Sunday Celebration.
 - vi) Have other religious leaders occasionally participate in regular church services.

Weekly Emails

Rev. Mary sends her weekly email to the Sunday school families and those in the congregation who are interested in receiving it. The emails include the schedule and the scripture for the upcoming week. If you would like to receive this email, please contact either Mary or the church office.

The flower committee invites anyone who would like to share flowers from their yard for our church's communion table on any Sunday to please do so. It never has to be for a specific occasion or event. If you feel inspired, and we hope that you will, just let Linda Wallace, Sylvia Ryan, or Stan Fuller know by Saturday each week or sign up on the calendar in the foyer. Thank you.

Bread feeds the body indeed, but flowers feed also the soul. - The Koran



Severe Weather Cancellations



In the event of severe weather, please check for cancellations of Sunday morning worship services and church activities on WFSB TV Channel 3, church website, or you may contact any deacon.

Daily Dose of Derek

*Ever feel like God is using music to speak to you? Sometimes all we need is a little music to get us through dark places and bring a smile to our face when we need it most. The messages behind the songs can lift us up and encourage us. Let **Your Daily Dose of Derek** give you that extra lift that you need today! You can get your daily dose by either going to the "ministries" section of the church website or going to youtube.com and search on **YourDailyDoseOfDerek**.*

CONFIRMATION SCHEDULE ~ January - June 2014

All Classes are from 5:00-6:30pm

January 19th ~ No Class

January 26th ~ Help with Community Dinner.

February 2nd ~ Class

February 9th ~ Class

February 16th ~ VISIT TO SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH in New London

February 23rd ~ Class

March 2nd ~ Class

March 5th ~ ATTEND ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE WITH MENTOR

March 9th ~ Class

March 16th ~ Surprise Activity

March 23rd ~ Class

March 30th ~ Class

April 6th ~ Class

April 13th ~ Palm Sunday Breakfast – Help Deacons Serve

April 14-18 ~ MISSION TRIP TO BOSTON?

April 20th ~ EASTER SUNDAY NO CLASS

April 27th ~ Class

May 4th ~ Class

May 11th ~ No Class Mother's Day

May 18th ~ Confirmation Test and Statement of Faith Papers Due

May 25th ~ No Class

May 29th ~ Dinner with deacons and Confirmation Sunday Rehearsal 4-7:30

June 1st ~ CONFIRMATION SUNDAY





Give Squared is our Lebanon CORPS of middle and high school youth *GIVING* back to our community in response to the *GIFTS* of God. Our name, "Give Squared," reflects the simple reality that faithful people have known for centuries: when we give, we also receive. We give our time and labor in the service of others, and in return we are blessed with gifts of gratitude, compassion, and wisdom.

Our gifts of hospitality multiply exponentially when we work together to heal the world!

The Give Squared Youth Group is open to all youth in the community in Grades 5-12. In addition to our Give Squared projects (see below), we meet the first Friday of each month from 6:00 to 9:00 and explore media looking for Christian themes and lessons, teaching us what it means to be a Christian and how to follow in Christ's example.

Upcoming 2013-2014 School Year Schedule of Events:

Friday, February 7th ~ 6-9 pm Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones

Friday, March 7th ~ 6-9 pm Star Wars III: Revenge of the Sith

Saturday, March 8th ~ Special Olympics swim meet

Friday, April 4th ~ 6-9 pm Star Wars IV: A New Hope

April 14-18th ~ Give Squared project in planning - more info to come

Friday, May 2nd ~ 6-9 pm Star Wars V: The Empire Strikes Back

Friday, June 6th ~ 6-9 pm Star Wars VI: Return of the Jedi

2013-2014 Give Squared Projects - starting local and then broadening our reach:

September to December - Lebanon (Peace Program, Fall Cleanup, Holiday Harvest Fair, Secret Santa)

January, February, & March - Windham Area (Mission Mittens, Special Olympics)

April to June - New England (Mission projects in planning - more info to come)



Bible Study

Bible study has resumed Wednesday mornings at 9:30 a.m. We are studying one of the great prophets of the Old Testament, Jeremiah. Please bring your Bible and join us in the Memorial Room.

Sunday, January 26th ~ 5-6:30 p.m. The Outreach Board will sponsor a Community Fellowship Dinner

A time for fellowship with each other and the community, a time for a warm meal of soup and bread. Bring the kids, bring a friend, bring someone who needs a hot meal.



See you there!

Annual Meeting Sunday, February 2nd

The Annual Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, February 2nd. A potluck luncheon will precede the meeting. Snow date is the following Sunday, February 9th.

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ~ Hebrews 13:1-2

“Get to Know Your Church”

The Deacons, Pastor Sharon, and Rev. Mary wish to invite you to an open discussion titled “Get to Know Your Church,” to be held on Sunday, February 23rd, beginning at 11:30 am in the Memorial Room.

If you are curious about how your church operates; perhaps feel called to serve your church family more formally, but aren't quite sure how; are curious what it means to serve on a board or committee; would like to know what Christian Ed programs are available; are considering membership, but aren't quite sure at the moment and have questions; or are simply curious and would like a forum to talk about our congregation, we hope you will plan to join us in the Memorial Room on February 23rd. Families are encouraged to bring their children, as this will be an informal, yet engaging time together.

If interested, please contact any deacon, Pastor Sharon, or the church secretary, so we can plan for our time together. Or, you can just drop in on Sunday, February 23rd!

Lenten Services

(All services are at 7:00 p.m. and are at our church unless otherwise noted.)

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| March 5th | Ash Wednesday Service |
| TBD | Joint Lenten Service following soup and bread dinner. |
| April 13th | Deacon's Palm Sunday Breakfast 8-9:30 a.m.
Palm Sunday Service ~ 10 a.m. |
| April 17th | Maundy Thursday Service |
| April 18th | Good Friday Service |
| April 20th | Easter Sunrise Service on the Green at approximately 6:00 a.m.
Breakfast following sunrise service in the Armstrong Fellowship Hall
Easter Service ~ 10:00 a.m. |

