



The Clapboardtree Spire

News From First Parish of Westwood, United Church
340 Clapboardtree St., Westwood, MA 02090

DECEMBER, 2008

Advent & Christmas at First Parish

ADVENT ADULT EDUCATION

"Living the Questions of Advent"
12/2, 12/9, 12/16 & 12/23
7:30 PM in the Vogel Room

OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

Alternative Gifts
12/7, 12/14 & 12/21
Catalogues and gift cards available during Coffee Hours

Christmas Family Outreach
Ornaments: Sundays, 12/7, 12/14
Wrapping Party: Sunday, Dec. 21st 5:30-6:30 PM

LIVING NATIVITY

Sunday, Dec. 21st at 5PM
At the crèche outside the Parish Hall
(sheep arrive at 10AM on Dec. 6th)

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

5:00 PM
Interactive Service of Celebration
9:00 PM
Service of Lessons & Carols with Synergy Brass Ensemble

REV. DAVID STRYKER'S LAST SUNDAY

Sunday, Dec. 28th
Join us for 10AM worship and reception.

Closure Service for Rev. Stryker

The time has come for First Parish to bid a fond goodbye to Rev. David Stryker, whose 2 1/2 year Interim Ministry among us will end with the arrival of Rev. Christopher Dodge on January 1st.

David's last Sunday is Dec. 28th, and 10AM worship on that Sunday will include a litany of closure to formally signal the end of his ministry here.

David's ministry has been a blessing to us. We hope that as many members of the congregation as possible will be present in the Meetinghouse on the 28th to thank David for his thoughtful work among us.

The service will be intergenerational, and a reception will follow in the Parish Hall.

Synergy Brass Quintet Is Back!

At 9PM on Christmas Eve the Synergy Brass Quintet will play at our candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols. Synergy has performed at First Parish a number of times over the years and their performances are always memorable.

On Christmas Eve especially their music is an incredible enhancement to an already wonderful and moving service.

If you would like to help offset the cost of this performance, donations to our Music Fund are always welcome and

help make performances by such wonderful groups possible. Checks, with "Synergy" on the memo line, may be left in the offering plate or given to the church office at any time.

The Worship Ministry



Birthdays

- December 1 Ian Bailey, Jimmy Cutler
Christopher Martin,
Heidi Ullmann, Matthew Wagner
- December 2 Lois Breese, Matthew Powers
- December 3 Kristian Peters
- December 4 Elese Gaydos, Heather Poreda
- December 5 Chapin Atwood
- December 6 Peter Anderson,
Jenny Germano
- December 7 Don Friedl
- December 8 Ruth Very
- December 10 Carol Mather
- December 11 Skyler Beach, Ivar Johnson
Richard Osenton
- December 12 Kara Belinsky
- December 14 David Friedl
- December 15 Kate McMurray, Valerie Vancura
- December 16 Jaclyn Germano,
Christopher Rogers,
Lindsay Tisdale
- December 17 Mark Hichar, Sarah Werth
- December 18 Sophie Ostrander, Kitty Reiland
- December 20 Karen Robertson
- December 24 Drew Walker
- December 27 Connor Murray, Marilyn Nelson
Janice Russell
- December 28 Christine Andrus
- December 30 Bobby Gorman, Jan Hooker
- December 31 Thelma Bruno, Colin Kelly
Paul Robinson,
Jesse Weatherbee

Anniversaries

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| David & Lynne Liebrock | December 9 |
| Peter & Carol Neyland | December 10 |
| David & Bonnie Blomquist | December 27 |
| Marilyn & Jim Chetwynd | December 27 |
| Todd & Madeline Anderson | December 30 |
| Tom & Kerry Lake | December 30 |
| Bruce & Marj Higgins | December 31 |

Lifetimes

Born:

- On Nov. 20th, *Hayden Patrick Davis*, son of Chris & Christine Davis, and 5th grandchild of Kathy & Chuck Davis.
- On Nov. 21st, *Madelyn Mary Blaney*, daughter of Jared & Meghan Blaney, and first grandchild of Janice & Sheldon Blaney.

Moved:

- *Fred & Toni Lea*: New Pond Village #B20, 180 Main St., Walpole 02081, 508-734-5386

Email Changes:

- *Susan Linehan*: susanlinehan@verizon.net
- *Leslie Condon*: leslie.condon@comcast.net
- *Josh Gray*: revgray5@gmail.com

The Clapboardtree Spire

The Clapboardtree Spire is published monthly, September - June by and for The First Parish of Westwood, United Church. Material should be submitted to the church office by the third Friday of the prior month. Available monthly at www.firstparishwestwood.org, via email, and through the mail (by request only).

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|-----------------|--|
| Interim Pastor: | Rev. Dr. David Stryker |
| Phone: | 781-326-0135 |
| Email: | revstryker@firstparishwestwood.org |
| Moderator: | Doug Hyde |
| CE Admin.: | Donna Bertazzoni |
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| Phone: | 781-326-5344 |
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| Cottage: | 781-326-3997 |

From Our Pastor



I would like to say a BIG THANK YOU, as I have appreciated your graciousness and support these past two and a half years. Since I arrived, I have sensed a warmth and cooperative spirit as you have a wonderful church here at First Parish. It has truly been a "labor of love" working along side the church staff and the various ministries to witness firsthand how they work tirelessly without any complaints but, instead, stay focused on our mission and specifically on our members and friends.

We tip our hats to the past year's diligent work of the search committee and roll up our sleeves to the future as Chris Dodge arrives at a very healthy church. He is very fortunate to have a church which is so faithful and giving of their time, talents and treasures. You will be in my thoughts

and prayers, as I will be officially leaving on December 28th, the last Sunday of the month, my work complete as your called Interim Minister. See you in church!

With peace and blessings to you and your families,
Pastor David

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I think the phrase "time of transition" is an appropriate one to describe the last few months. Nature around us has been transitioning from summer fullness to its winter framework. Our nation spoke on Election Day and now begins the smooth and orderly transition of power from one administration to the next. Rev. David Stryker will transition from his role at First Parish into a new interim position. And I have been very busy preparing my transition from Union Church in Hopedale to First Parish.

When you think about it, most of what we read in the Bible is about God's people in a time of transition. And a considerable amount of space in the Bible is given to telling about the times of transition rather than just the destination. Our ancestors in the faith were constantly called to new ventures – redeemed; guided; emboldened; nurtured; comforted and so much more. For the God who calls us is also the God who travels with us.

The seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany are about Immanuel – "God with us" These are the seasons that will carry us through the next two months. Before my arrival there will be

time to offer thanks for people who have shared the journey, whether it be your last 2 years in Westwood or my last 10 years in Hopedale. There will be words of farewell but also of mutual hopes for continued growth and success.

There will be feelings of loss but also excitement and wonder. Upon my arrival there will be words of welcome and a time of adjustment for all of us. The good news is that God will be with us this whole time and beyond. Acknowledging God through prayer and praise will help make the transition a blessed time.

I look forward to my arrival in January and hope to see many of you my first Sunday, January 4th in worship. It will be a new year and a new chapter in so many wonderful ways.

Until then, may you have a blessed, peace-filled Advent and Christmas!

Pastor Chris Dodge



Christmas at First Parish Means Reaching Out To Others

Christmas Family Outreach

Again this year, the Ministry of Mission and Service will sponsor outreach to local families who are in need of a little extra help this holiday season.

On December 7th and 14th, family gift ornaments will be available on the Christmas tree in the Parish Hall. Each ornament will have the name, age and Christmas gift wish of a child or parent. Choose an ornament, buy the item, and bring it to the Parish Hall (wrapped or unwrapped), *with the ornament attached* by Sunday, December 21st.

- If you are unable to shop for a gift and would like to make a monetary donation, you are more than welcome to

leave the money with the church office. A First Parish Elf will do the shopping for you.

- If you are interested in being a shopping Elf this year, please contact Tish Verzino at 781-320-8217.

On Sunday, December 21st, all are invited to the Parish Hall from 5:30 -6:30 PM to help wrap the presents and put the finishing touches on them for delivery to the families.

The Ministry of Mission and Service thanks you in advance for bringing joy into the lives of so many who are having trouble making ends meet this year!

Alternative Gifts

The Ministry of Mission and Service will offer ALTERNATIVE GIFTS on December 7, 14 and 21. This year, as last, we will offer gifts from the Heifer and Church World Service Catalogs.

Here is your chance to give a gift that will help the hungry, sick and those living in abject poverty in the US and across the world.

All of us have relatives, friends or co-workers we would like to honor at the holidays, but many want no more stuff or you do not know what to buy. Instead select a project from the catalog and chose a card, and you will receive a slip describing the project to enclose.

Questions? Contact Martha Crawford at 781-326-0710

What is the Harris Fund?

The Harris Fund was started a number of years ago when the Outreach Committee (now the Ministry of Mission and Service) was looking for a way to keep families from becoming homeless. Beth Lovett suggested a fund administered by the social workers at SNARC (South Norfolk County Arc) to help families with one time emergencies, such as a major car repair,

that could snowball into more serious problems, such as the loss of a job. The fund was named after a beloved First Parish Pastor Pearson Harris.

At the end of each year the Ministry receives a confidential report of how the money was dispersed.

**“The World of the Generous Gets Larger and Larger”
2009 Stewardship Campaign Update**

We celebrated Stewardship Sunday on Nov. 23rd, and have begun tallying our pledges for the upcoming year. We want to thank all who have responded, by increasing their pledges, by committing to maintain their pledge or by letting us know that this is a tough year for them and perhaps they will need to focus their giving to the Church in other ways.

However, there are many from whom we haven't yet heard. We know what a busy time of the year this is. It seems we haven't even finished the turkey and the Advent Calendar is already up on the wall! It is busy for Church Council too, as it needs to determine the budget to be proposed at Annual Meeting next month.

Without your pledge card, it will be even busier for the Stewardship Committee, as we need to make follow up phone calls to determine the status of missing pledges. So please, however you can support First Parish next year, send your pledge card in to the Office this week or drop it in the offering plate on Dec. 7.

Barb Delisle
Stewardship Chairperson

This Old House Episode 2

Work continues on the Parsonage. The biggest outstanding items are the new windows, which are on order, the refinishing of the floors, which has been scheduled, and the completion of the interior painting. There are also lots of smaller projects in various stages of completion.

While the priority is to have the Parsonage complete in time for Rev. Dodge's arrival on January 2nd, we are hoping that the timing will allow for an Open House prior to the move, so the congregation can see how great it looks. If we are able to do this, we will announce it via the *This Week at First Parish* Friday email and in announcements in the Sunday bulletin.

First Parish Unsung Heroes

As the hectic pace of the holiday season threatens to overwhelm us, it is helpful to stop for a moment and count our blessings. Among First Parish's greatest blessings are the unsung heroes of the congregation who work tirelessly in the background, making sure things happen for the church. This month's unsung heroes are **Pam Kane, Dave Blomquist, Stuart Maynard and Jim Ritchey.**

Pam Kane is well known not only for faithful participation in the choir, but also for coordinating both our annual Fair and Yard Sale – huge jobs which bring in much needed income for our annual budget. But Pam's contributions don't stop there. She tirelessly puts out signs for events and concerts, organizes pot luck suppers, and is frequently one of the first to reach out quietly to someone in need – AND she has a family and a job! For these and all the other, undiscovered things you do, Pam, we thank you!

Dave Blomquist is dear to our hearts for a similar litany of reasons. His hard work every year on the Silent Auction brings in over half of the Fair's annual income – and as Chairperson of the Ministry of Spiritual Life and Fellowship he tirelessly oversees the stocking and staffing of all our Coffee Hours and is always first in line to lug tables and support all our fellowship events. He is one of First Parish's most treasured and overworked “go-to guys” and First Parish would not be the wonderful place it is without him. Bless you, Dave!

Stuart Maynard and **Jim Ritchey** earned their most

(Continued on page 6)

The Year of the Messiah

No, this article is not a prediction about the Second Coming. It is about the oratorio called Messiah, composed by George Frederick Handel in the mid 18th century, and perhaps the most famous work in Western music today. We are fortunate to live close to Boston where there are frequent complete performances of this beloved work, presented by both professional and amateur groups. This year First Parish joins them: we present the complete Messiah. - with a twist.

We are performing the entire oratorio this year- not as a single concert, but during several individual worship services. After all, this brilliant collection of Biblical texts is really the story of faith- not merely a Christmas story, but THE story that weaves throughout our entire church year and our entire faith journey. Neither is this simply the musical telling of a life story, like the oratorios Joshua or Solomon. Instead it is a profound reflection on what Christ's life, death and resurrection mean for each

of us. In fact, Handel's now-beloved work faced some opposition in his own day, as church leaders were appalled that he had set such a sacred topic to music!

You may not have noticed, but this project has already begun. In our celebration of World Communion Sunday on October 5th, the choir sang "Their Sound is Gone Out Into All Lands." Later in that worship, Joanna sang "Why Do the Nations So Furiously Rage Together?" These two lesser-known movements, from Part II of Messiah, were supportive of the readings and message that morning. Look for bits of Messiah to enrich our worship all through the year: Good Shepherd Sunday. Ascension Sunday. Perhaps even during an installation service (if Rev. Dodge agrees!) So much of Messiah is liturgically appropriate throughout the year; we don't need to spend it all on one Sunday in December!

Of course, there will be large sections in traditional spots on the calendar: The opening section will be

sung during Advent with strings and guest soloists. The Christmas portions will be sung and played on Christmas Eve with the Synergy Brass Quintet. Our traditional Maundy Thursday service will include somber Part II choruses and solos, and Easter will ring with trumpets and the celebration from Part III, including, of course, the Hallelujah Chorus.

Handel and his librettist Charles Jennens knew their Bible well. Rather than simply telling a chronological story, they carefully selected and wove together texts from different books and chapters- even different testaments- of the Bible. They did what we attempt to do on Sundays: hear readings that shed light on one another to nurture and deepen our faith.

I am very excited about this project! Messiah: not as a huge concert, but as a journey through the Bible with music as our engine.

Josh Nannestad
Music Director

Unsung Heroes

(Continued from page 5)

recent haloes by selflessly volunteering to help sexton Denis Wholey set up the sheep pen the day after Thanksgiving, on a horrible, sleety morning when most of us were home

sleeping off all that turkey! Jim and Stuart, thank you so much for stepping forward to help our injured sexton complete one of his more arduous annual tasks. He couldn't have done it with out you!

So, the next time you see Pam, Dave, Stuart or Jim

- or anyone else who you know is working selflessly behind the scenes - take a moment to thank them for their loving participation in our church community - and remember to count them among the blessings in your life.

Advent & Christmas at First Parish

The Worship Ministry has been busy planning the Advent and Christmas services at First Parish for this holiday season, and we invite all to attend *and* participate in this most happy and joyous of seasons as we prepare for the birth of the Christ Child.

- The season kicked off with our annual and increasingly popular “Hanging of the Greens” service on Sunday November 30. This is an intergenerational service where young and old help decorate our sanctuary for the Christmas Season.
- Our December 7th service will be highlighted by special music when the Advent portion of Handel’s Messiah will be performed as part of the worship service. A string quartet will also perform and accompany the First Parish choir and there will be a special Advent themed Communion hymn.
- Starting on Dec. 2nd, explore The Questions of Advent in an adult faith formation series which looks at surprisingly contemporary questions about living in hope, finding a home, the wonder of being sought, and wrestling with mystery through the eyes of characters in the Biblical stories we read at this time of year. The group will meet in the Vogel Room on Tuesdays at 7:30 PM through Dec. 23rd.
- Christmas Sunday is December 21 and as always will feature Christmas music and carols as well as a festive coffee hour for all with a Christmas cake, Christmas cookies, cider and other seasonal delights for the whole family to enjoy. At 5PM the Living Nativity re-creating the Nativity Story will be will take place in front of the Parish Hall complete with live sheep.
- On Christmas Eve we will have two services starting with a 5PM intergenerational service geared to families with children that includes Christmas carols, and at 9PM our traditional and always popular candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols. Back by popular demand for the 9PM service will be the Synergy Brass Quintet, which will play for an extended time before and after the service. In addition they will be performing, along with our choir, the Christmas portion of the Messiah. You are encouraged to come early to hear and enjoy their wonderful music.
- Finally on December 28 we will celebrate the gift of the birth of Jesus with Christmas music and scripture, and will also celebrate Reverend David Stryker’s ministry with us.

Throughout Advent and continuing through Christmas Eve we will be lighting the Advent candles on the Advent wreath at each service. If you and your family would like to be Advent candle lighters at one of the Advent services please contact Reverend Stryker or any member of the Worship Ministry.

Jim McKenzie
Chairperson, Ministry of Worship





Christmas Offering 2008

This year the Mission portion of the Christmas Offering will be divided between the *Westwood Community Chest* and *The Christmas Fund* for retired clergy. In this difficult year both organizations merit our support.

It's That Time Again!

If you would like to remember a loved one by placing a poinsettia in the chancel at Christmas - or by making a donation to the Special Music Fund or the Decoration Fund, please complete the form below and return it to the church office by Monday, Dec. 15th.

The Westwood Community Chest provides up to \$500 a year to assist Westwood residents in financial need pay essential bills such as food, clothing, and utilities. The application process is confidential and the money is not given to the individual rather the bill or bills are paid on their behalf.

The Christmas Fund of the United Church of Christ (formerly the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross), provides assistance for low income retired clergy and their widows to supplement their pensions and help pay health insurance and provides emergency assistance to the families of clergy and lay employees.

Watch your mail for your Christmas Offering letter and giving envelope. Donations may be placed in the offering plate on Christmas Eve, or sent to the church office.

2008 Christmas Memorial Gifts

To honor the memory of loved ones, I would like to: (*check the appropriate spaces*)

_____ Place _____ POINSETTIA PLANT(S) in the Meeting House (Dec. 21-25)

(Plants are \$13 each and will be ordered by the church on December 15th.)

_____ I will pick up my plant after the last service on Christmas Eve or during the following week.

_____ Please deliver my plant to a hospital patient, nursing home resident or shut-in.

_____ Make a gift of \$_____ for CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS in the Meeting House

_____ Make a gift of \$_____ to be used for SPECIAL MUSIC PROGRAMS.

All gifts will be listed in the bulletin on Sunday, December 21st and on Christmas Eve.

I would like the bulletin to read: (*Please PRINT clearly*)

IN MEMORY OF

GIVEN BY

Enclosed is a check for \$_____ to cover the above gifts. (*Please make it payable to THE FIRST PARISH OF WESTWOOD and send or bring it with this order form to the church office, 340 Clapboardtree St., Westwood, MA 02090 by Monday, December 15th*).

Date: _____

Signature: _____



Donna Bertazzoni
Church School
Administrator

THE VOTES ARE IN

If you missed the big reveal on November 9, the church school children voted overwhelmingly to support the World Wildlife Fund with their Sunday School offerings. As of this writing we have already sent for our first three endangered animals 'adoptions'! Watch the bulletin board in the Parish Hall to see which animals we adopt and celebrate what our children are doing to care for God's world. More animals will be adopted for each \$25 we receive. Children's offering envelopes are available in the Meetinghouse on the hospitality table and in the pew racks. Offerings are collected as children exit the Meetinghouse on their way to class.

CHALLENGE!

When Rev. Dodge was here in September as a candidate, he shared a rhyme he learned as a boy, suggesting that our children might want to learn it too. Now is our chance, boys and girls! He will join us officially on Sunday, January 4; Learn the names of the 12 Apostles to welcome Pastor Chris Dodge!

12 Apostles Rhyme

*Jesus called them one by one:
Peter, Andrew, James and John.
Then came Philip, Thomas too,
Matthew and Bartholomew,
James the one they called the least,
Simon, also Thaddeus.
The twelfth apostle Judas made,
Jesus was by him betrayed.*

7th & 8th GRADE STUDENTS and PARENTS

We need your ideas! A predicament is brewing for our 7th & 8th grade class. To address the need for additional teachers and the nature of the class for the rest of the year it, STUDENTS and PARENTS are requested to attend a meeting after worship on December 7th in the Cottage. Please come prepared to think creatively.

CHRISTMAS GIFT

The following story was sent to me some time ago; I do not know its author. I share it in the faithful anticipation that is so much a part of the season.

Merry Christmas,
Donna Bertazzoni

The "W" in Christmas

Each December, I vowed to make Christmas a calm and peaceful experience. I had cut back on nonessential obligations - extensive card writing, endless baking, decorating, and even overspending. Yet still, I found myself exhausted, unable to appreciate the precious family moments, and of course, the true meaning of Christmas.

My son, Nicholas, was in kindergarten that year. It was an exciting season for a six-year old. For weeks, he'd been memorizing songs for his school's "Winter Pageant." I didn't have the heart to tell him I'd be working the night of the production. Unwilling to miss his shining moment, I spoke with his teacher. She assured me there'd be a dress rehearsal the morning of the presentation. All parents unable to attend that evening were welcome to come then. Fortunately, Nicholas seemed happy with the compromise. So, the morning of the dress rehearsal, I filed in ten minutes early, found a spot on the cafeteria floor and sat down. Around the room, I saw several other parents quietly scampering to their seats.

(Continued on page 10)

As I waited, the students were led into the room. Each class, accompanied by their teacher, sat cross-legged on the floor. Then, each group, one by one, rose to perform their song.

Because the public school system had long stopped referring to the holiday as "Christmas," I didn't expect anything other than fun, commercial entertainment - songs of reindeer, Santa Claus, snowflakes and good cheer. So, when my son's class rose to sing, "Christmas Love," I was slightly taken aback by its bold title. Nicholas was aglow, as were all of his classmates, adorned in fuzzy mittens, red sweaters, and bright snowcaps upon their heads.

Those in the front row- center stage - held up large letters, one by one, to spell out the title of the song. As the class would sing "C is for Christmas," a child would hold up the letter C. Then, "H is for Happy," and on and on, until each child holding up his portion had presented the complete message, "CHRISTMAS LOVE". The performance was going smoothly, until suddenly, we noticed her; a small, quiet, girl in the front row holding the letter "M" upside down - totally unaware her letter "M" appeared as a "W".

The audience of 1st through 6th graders snickered at this little one's mistake. But she had no idea they were laughing at her, so she stood tall, proudly holding her "W". Although many teachers tried to shush the children, the laughter continued until the last letter was raised, and we all saw it together.

A hush came over the audience and eyes began to widen.

In that instant, we understood the reason we were there, why we celebrated the holiday in the first place, why even in the chaos, there was a purpose for our festivities. For when the last letter was held high, the message read loud and clear:

"CHRISTWAS LOVE"

And, I believe, He still is.

Questions of Faith: An Advent Discussion

Advent is about preparing ourselves to give attention to God's great gift, Jesus Christ. What could we possibly see or hear that we have not seen and heard before?

Join Christian Education Director Donna Bertazzoni

this Advent to explore the story from some perspectives you may not have considered.

We will look at the questions of people in the Christmas stories and at some Bible passages you may not have previously connected

with this time of year.

Tuesdays at 7:30 PM
December 2, 9, 16 and 23

Please contact Donna ahead of time if you think you would like child care for this event.

Living Nativity

Save Sunday, Dec. 21st for a favorite First Parish tradition – the Living Nativity! Come to the crèche outside the Parish hall at 5PM to experience a live re-enactment of

the nativity story, complete with live sheep! It's a great way for the entire family to experience "the reason for the season".

Members of SHYF are

reminded that help will be needed that evening. Please check with Sharon Hobbs to see how you can help.

Church School Update

Saturday, Dec. 6th:

- **10AM - The sheep arrive!** All are invited to greet our woolly guests, learn how to keep them comfortable during their stay, and sign up to be a 2009 Shepherd! Questions? See Gail Bean.

Sunday, Dec. 7: 2nd Sunday in Advent

- 10AM Communion worship & church school – special music Sunday; Handel's Messiah
- 11:00 AM – collect your gift ornament from the Giving Tree in the Parish Hall
- 11:30 AM 7th & 8th Grade parents meeting, in the Cottage

Sunday, Dec. 14th: 3rd Sunday in Advent

- 10AM worship & church school
- 11:00 AM – it's not too late for gift ornaments!
- 11:30 AM – Ministry of Education meeting, in the Cottage

Sunday, Dec. 21st: 4th Sunday in Advent

- 10AM worship & church school (Bring in your Christmas Family Outreach gift!)
- 5 PM Living Nativity in front of the Parish Hall
- 5:30 PM Outreach Wrapping party in the Parish Hall

Wednesday, Dec. 24th: Christmas Eve

- 5PM interactive Service of Celebration
- 9PM Service of Lessons & Carols, with Synergy Brass Ensemble

Sunday, Dec. 28th: Rev. David Stryker's last Sunday

- 10AM intergenerational worship & closure service
- 11:30 AM Christmas celebration and reception for Rev. Stryker in the Parish Hall

Altar Flowers

Sunday, Dec. 7:

Given by Louise Donovan and family, in memory of John Donovan.

Sunday, Dec. 14:

Given by Jim & Ruth Aldinger, in memory of loved ones.

Sunday, Dec. 21:

Given by Don & Judy Friedl, in memory of loved ones.

Christmas Eve: Poinsettias are placed in the chancel by members & friends in honor and memory of loved ones, and by the Endowed Memorial Flower Fund.

Sunday, Dec. 28:

Given by John & Judy Danforth, in memory of loved ones.

Senior Moments

The Senior Moments Fellowship Group will meet on Thursday, Dec. 4th at 11:30 AM in the Parish Hall. All seniors are invited to bring a bag lunch – coffee and dessert are provided.

This is a great opportunity to gather together, just because it's fun! The group meets on the first Thursday of every month in the Parish Hall, unless otherwise noted. If you did not receive a postcard with the yearly schedule, please contact the church office and one will be mailed to you.



As we come into the Advent season and Christmastide, I want to share some thoughts about the Bible that were shared with me by a dear friend. Hopefully it will remind us to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas during this busy time.

Cell phone vs. Bible

Ever wonder what would happen if we treated our Bible like we treat our cell phone?

This is something to make you go...hmm...where is my Bible?

- What if we carried it around in our purses or pockets?
- What if we flipped through it several time a day?
- What if we turned back to go get it if we forgot it?
- What if we used it to receive messages from the text?
- What if we treated it like we couldn't live without it?
- What if we gave it to kids as gifts?
- What if we used it when we traveled?
- What if we used it in case of emergency?

Oh, and one more thing. Unlike our cell phone, we don't have to worry about our Bible being disconnected because Jesus already paid the bill.

Makes you stop and think, where are my priorities? And no dropped calls!

Trust in the Lord and *ASAP (Always Say A Prayer)
Have a blessed and wonderful day!

Merry Christmas, everyone,
Margery Eramo, RN, FCN

PS:
"Knock, Knock:
I knocked at heaven 's door this morning. God asked me... ' My child, what can I do for you? ' And I said, 'Father, please protect and bless the person reading this message. ' God smiled and answered... ' Request granted '".

"Be kinder than necessary, for everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle."

Usher Schedule

Sunday, Dec. 7:

Doug Hyde (C)
Jerry Verzino
Michael Gettings

Sunday, Dec. 14:

Dix & Dianne Howard (C)
Steve & Ingegard Larch
Ron & Joy Sudduth

Sunday, Dec. 21:

Bob Kadehjian (C)
Bob Robertson
Jim & Linda McKenzie
Tom Underhill

Sunday, Dec. 28:

Bill Holbrook (C)
Sheldon Blaney
Don Freidl
Lee Adourian



Silent Auction Thank You

A big Thank You to all who contributed to this year's Silent Auction.

We were concerned that this year was going to be a challenge both for donations and bidders. Gratefully, many in our First Parish family came through again as did local merchants and organizations. As a result, we matched last year's total, and helped to make this year's Fair a success. Thanks to all who donated and participated!

Dave Blomquist, Louise Donovan & Suzie Peterson

Rosie's Place Volunteers Monday, December 15

NOTE: Please make **turkey sandwiches on wheat bread**, with no condiments. Do not wrap individually.

Drivers:

S. Reeber & J. Forsberg

Fruit (1 bag of apples):

S. Reeber J. Forsberg J. Clay C. Getman
M. Speros J. Holbrook J. Marsh

Sandwiches (12-14 TURKEY ON WHEAT):

S. Reeber T. Berg L. Owen S. Dobra
P. Oliveri C. Getman J. Hansjon
S. DeFeo T. Bruno J. Germano



Coffee Volunteers

Thank you to the volunteers who agreed to supply refreshments and host Coffee Hour on the following dates.

If you would like to help, please contact the church office or sign up in the Parish Hall.

Sunday, Dec. 7:

The Ellis and Friedl families

Sunday, Dec. 13:

The Werths

Sunday, Dec. 21:

The McKenzies

Sunday, Dec. 28:

Ministry of Spiritual Life & Fellowship

Dear Friends,

As many of you know, I am an avid runner and have completed 25 marathons, but never the Boston Marathon. In 2009, I will finally run in this prestigious race, and I am proud to be raising funds for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS) as a participant in their "Team in Training" program.

I am running the marathon in support of our family friend Dave Messersmith from Leonardtown, MD, who is currently battling Acute Myeloma Lymphoma. In honor of Dave and the many others battling Leukemia and Lymphoma, I ask for your help and support.

My personal goal in support of Team in Training is \$5000. I hope you can help me in this worthwhile endeavor. Please use the following link (<http://pages.teamintraining.org/ma/boston09/ladourian>) to donate online and to learn more about my progress. You will receive a confirmation of your donation by email, and I will also be notified.

Each donation helps accelerate finding a cure for leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma. I am hoping that my participation in Team in Training will help make a difference for the more than 823,000 Americans that are battling these blood cancers.

On behalf of The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, thank you very much for your support. I greatly appreciate your generosity.

Sincerely,

Lee Adourian

Dear First Parish Church,

Thank you very much for your support for my work as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador. I am writing to keep you updated on my work here as well as to develop a connection between the community I am a part of in Westwood, Massachusetts and the community I am becoming a part of here in Caimito, Esmeraldas.

I have been teaching computer classes to the kids and teenagers in town. They are learning quickly to write letters, draw pictures, and even make power point presentations. One boy just made a presentation about cows, which was very interesting. We're working on a town history where the children interviewed their parents and grandparents about the past and are now writing stories about what they learned. We also go take pictures of places and things in the area and are planning to make presentations about Caimito, the different types of trees and plants here, and the culture. In Caimito, like in many rural areas, most of the young people leave their homes to go to school in the city and then never come back. I hope that these types of projects, along with some small business development projects, will help the kids develop a sense of pride in their community so that they will want to come back and contribute what they learn in school to better their home town.

One of my favorite projects here is working to build home gardens with different families in the community. I enjoy working outside and spending time talking with each family individually. I also feel productive helping people grow their own vegetables and improve their diet. My sixteen year old friend Charo and I worked hard to clear a plot to plant her garden, build a fence and garden beds, and carry dirt to fill the beds. We just finished planting in her new garden, when one of my Peace Corps friends came to visit. Charo could not wait to show her the cucumber, pepper, and bean sprouts that are just starting to grow. She even promised my friend some cucumbers if she comes back when they're ripe!

One of the major challenges in creating productive gardens here is improving the quality of the soil. Caimito sits on the ridge of a hill overlooking the ocean, and while the view is beautiful, the geography lends itself to problems with erosion. Families cut down all the trees and plants to build their houses, leaving nothing to hold the soil in place. As a result, all the topsoil washes down the side of the hill when it rains and the land next to people's houses is hard and rocky. We have worked to dig out garden plot, build raised beds, and fill the beds with soil that we carry from lower spots where rich soil collects. To start the gardens, we planted stronger plants like beans that will produce in poor soil and will release nitrogen to improve the earth for the future. All of the gardens are now producing some vegetables, and I hope there will be more in the next couple of years.

We recently started a small group of gardeners to work together on all the different plots. The six of us take turns working in one garden a week to help each other with the more difficult work of carrying soil and to share ideas on how to improve the gardens. We are planning to use and better manage big compost bins next to our gardens so that we will have rich soil that is easily accessible and make good use of all the organic waste in the town. We also started two terrace gardens where we built steps out of logs and branches so that when it rains, the soil stays on the steps, rather than washing away, and we can plant on these passes. The idea is to improve the soil and to increase the amount of healthy food that is available in the community.

I sometimes think about how the projects I am working on here would translate in the United States or more specifically in Westwood. I think that organizing people to grow food together and to be proud of their culture are projects that are useful and necessary everywhere. Thank you again for your support and please write to me with any questions, suggestions, or ideas: kjoyce1104@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,
Katie Joyce