

Welcome! Thank You for Worshiping With Us Today!

Welcome to the First Congregational Church of Southington, dating from 1724, & worshiping in this Meetinghouse since 1830. We are one of the larger, more vibrant United Church of Christ churches in New England. Our purpose is to love & worship God; extend God's radically-inclusive love to all people everywhere; make more & better disciples of Jesus Christ; & inspire people & society to become more & more just, loving, compassionate & Christ-like. You will find here an accepting, caring, non-judgmental community, where lives are transformed, faith is renewed & power for positive living is received. Welcome!

February 19, 2006 SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY 9:30AM
"It's easier to go down a hill than up, but the view is better from the top"

PREPARING TO WORSHIP GOD

The Prelude *Adagio in E Major* Frank Bridge
The Welcome/Welcoming One Another
Church Family Announcements
Music for Meditation *Tallis' Third Tune* Charles Callahan
Lighting of the Candles Acolyte: *Katrina Aberizk*

PRAISING GOD

The Call to Worship
PASTOR: We gather to strengthen one another, to share one another's burdens.
PEOPLE: We come with open minds, open hearts, and open arms. We come with our whole being open to the Word of God.
PASTOR: The Spirit of God is present to heal us and make us whole.
PEOPLE: We rejoice in the presence of the Creator, the love of the Redeemer, and the power of the Spirit.
*Hymn of Praise: #273 *Praise With Joy the World's Creator* *Lauda Anima (Praise My Soul)*

*Prayer of General Confession (unison)
O God, our Redeemer, we confess before You this day our weakness and our faithlessness. We confess that we have failed to see You in the needs of our neighbors, that we have turned our backs on their suffering, that our ears have been deaf to their cries, and that we have failed to carry one another's pains. Forgive us when we are complicit in injustice, when we profit from the conditions that create poverty, and when our worship is superficial, our prayers selfish, and our beliefs justify our own behavior. Forgive us, Lord. Now in the silence, hear our personal prayers of confession.
*Prayer of Personal Confession (in silence)
*Response: *Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.*
*Assurance of Forgiveness

HEARING GOD'S WORD

Anthem *A Time to Sing Praise* (Mustard Seeds Children's Choir) Robert
Leaf
Children's Message

Children & Teachers Exit to Church School

A Brief Interview With Lori Stafstrom

Scripture Lesson MARK 2:1-12
Sermon WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN A FRIEND OF JESUS Rev. M. John Arens
*Hymn: #178 *We Have the Strength to Lift and Bear* Tallis' Third Tune

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Prayers of the Church & Lord's Prayer (using *sins*)
Presentation of Our Offerings & Tithes
Offertory Anthem: *Sing Praise to God* (text - hymn 6, altered) *Mit Freuden Zart*, arr. Lloyd Pfautsch
*Doxology: *Praise God from who all blessings flow! Praise God, all creatures here below!*
Praise God above, you heavenly host! Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost!
*Prayer of Dedication
*Hymn: #495 *Called as Partners in Christ's Service* Beecher
*Words of Parting (unison)
Let us leave this holy place praying for the courage to be friends. Let us leave this place praying for the wisdom to understand the needs of our sisters and brothers. Let us leave this place praying for the pride to proclaim our love for Jesus everywhere in our lives. Let us leave this place with confidence in our Creator, with love for our Savior, and with trust in the Spirit that unites us all.

*Benediction
*Response: (join hands) *Blest Be the Tie That Binds*
Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.
Postlude: *Sing Praise to God* Helmut Walcha

PLEASE JOIN US DOWNSTAIRS FOR COFFEE & CONVERSATION

Ushers: Gail Fulop; Gary, Lisa & Garrett Cooper; George Moore; Judy Chatfield & Geoffrey Doble
Coffee Hour Hosts: Kate & Doug Hutton & Melinda Baumgartner
Greeters: Paul & Nancy Smith and Colin Daigle
Flowers: In loving memory of our daughter, Alice Elisabeth Maddy from Ben & Jacqui Maddy.
To provide flowers in memory/honor of a loved one/event, please sign-up on Memorial Hall FLOWER CHART.
Joys & Concerns for Prayer: We pray for our *Youth Mission Trip* participants & advisors in Washington, D.C. We celebrate the births of Emily Hayes Taylor (2/8), daughter of Doug & Julie Taylor, & Daniel Joseph Falco (2/15), son of Tony Falco & Michelle Nucifora. Matthew Plourde had surgery this week. Hospitalized: Joy Nell, Fran Child & Jeannette Faitella. Upcoming surgeries: Pat Livingstone (2/27); Clive Greenough (3/2). We continue to pray for Diane Lamb; Matthew Plourde; Andrea Sinclair; Judy Costa; Maureen Curtis; Pat Diego; Janis Leger; Dorothy Greenough; Mary Lou Thompson; Donna Morin; John O'Connor; Matt Currao; our Stephen Ministers & care-receivers.
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WE WELCOME JOHN ARENS as our worship leader today. John coordinates our *Men's Breakfast Club* & chairs the Board of Directors of *Every Dollar Feeds Kids*. He served our church as a *Minister-in-Training* several years ago. A Search Committee from an area church is here to listen to John today.
ASH WEDNESDAY IS MARCH 1st: Our holiest season, Lent, begins Wednesday, March 1st. We offer **3 Ash Wednesday Services of Penance**, when you may receive ashes. Services are at **7:00AM in Chapel** (30 min.), **12:00Noon in Meetinghouse** (30 min.) & **7:00PM in Meetinghouse** (45 min.). Plan to attend one. Gordon's life-giving sermon: *Kill the Cyclops*. A luncheon (\$3) follows the 12:00N service.

JIM COLE IN CONCERT: Jim Cole, the James Taylor of Christian music, is known around the world for songs like *Humble Yourself as a Child, Master of My Heart, Every Generation, & In Bethlehem Tonight*. **Mark your calendar:** Jim Cole will be with us **all day on Sunday, March 26**.

He'll sing alone & with our choir or band at all 4 services, then offer a wonderful, Spirit-filled **concert** in our **Meetinghouse at 7:30pm!** Tickets: **\$10** (\$5/under 18) from Church Office. **DON'T MISS IT!**

SPECIAL OFFERING NEXT SUNDAY: Our sister church, *Central Congregational* in New Orleans, can no longer pay its pastor, Rev. Wilmer Brown, because of Hurricane Katrina. He has committed to stay anyway. Our *CT Conference, U.C.C.* is helping with a special offering, hoping that each church can raise \$300. Our offering is NEXT Sunday at all 4 services! Would you help?

USHERS NEEDED: Would you usher **1 Sunday/month at 9:30AM** starting in March? Training provided. Substitutes available. Get to know more people! Sign-up next to Gordon's office TODAY.

MUSIC OF THE AGES FOR ALL AGES: A CONCERT BY OUR MUSIC MINISTRY: Our church is blessed with a fantastic music ministry! Join us to hear all of our musical groups: *Senior Choir, Mustard Seeds Children's Choir, The Celebration Ringers* (handbell choir) & *Branches* (our *T.G.I. Sunday* worship band & singers). It's **Saturday, March 11, 7:30pm**, in our **Meetinghouse**. A free-will offering will be received for *Southington Social Services*. **DON'T MISS IT!**

SUMMER CAMP FOR KIDS: Our *United Church of Christ* runs a wonderful summer camp for children & teens at *Silver Lake Conference Center* in Sharon, CT. Brochure & registration are available on-line at <http://silverlake.ctucc.org>. A limited number of brochures are available in our C. E. Office (see Karlene Archambeault or Carole Lantz). Some scholarship \$ available (see Gordon Ellis).

MOVIES THAT MATTER happens again **Friday, 3/10, 7:00pm**, with Academy Award-winning movie: *Life is Beautiful* with a **discussion** on 3/12, 7:30, led by Sharon Vocke & Clare Lindsey. Join us for discussion whether you watch movie at church or home. **FUTURE Movies:** ; **April 21 (7pm) The Scarlet & the Black** with **discussion:** 4/23, 7:30pm, led by Gabe Selmi & Alice Niemczyski & **May 12 (7pm) 12 Angry Men** with **discussion:** 5/14, 7:30pm, led by Gordon Ellis & Sue Meissner. **JOIN US** for these *Movies That Matter!*

MAUNDY THURSDAY ACTORS NEEDED: 12 actors/actresses are required for our drama on Maundy Thursday, 4/13. Please contact Crystal Sullivan (860-276-8614 or Kencyr@sbeglobal.net).

QUIET WORSHIP IN THE STYLE OF TAIZE is offered **EVERY Tuesday, 6:30-7:00pm**, in our **chapel**. It includes 10 minutes of silence, along with scripture, prayers & simple choruses. Join us!

VIDEOS OF SUNDAY SERVICES & SPECIAL EVENTS are available in our Church Library.

CHILD CARE for infants/toddlers is offered at all 4 Sunday services in our Infant/Toddler Nursery.

CHECK OUT OUR CHURCH'S WEBSITE, www.firstchurchsouthington.org. You'll love it!

All small groups are open to everyone, whether or not you've ever attended before.

NEW BIBLE STUDY: Gordon Ellis & Linda Fernandes-Bailey lead a new *Living the Questions* video Bible study: *Victory & Peace OR Justice & Peace* by historical Jesus scholar, John Dominic Crossan. It will be presented at **7:00pm** on **4 Wednesdays, March 8-29**, in **Memorial Hall** as part of our *Lenten Family Nights*, which include a **potluck supper at 6pm** (bring a dish to share), a program for children (*Fun Lenten Crafts for Kids*) at 7pm, & infant/toddler care. **Mark your calendar TODAY!**

DRAMA MINISTRY GROUP plans &/or participates in church dramas & musicals, including brief worship dramas. **Next meeting: TOMORROW, 7:00pm, in the Meetinghouse.** For info, call Crystal Sullivan (860/276-8614).

CRUZ'IN CONGOS TRAVEL CLUB: *Spring Fling to Coopertown, NY* on **Tuesday, May 23; \$65/person**. Choose 2 from these 3: *Baseball Hall of Fame* (with many new features), *James Fenimore Mansion & Art Museum* or *The Farmers' Historic Museum*. Leave municipal lot (next to church) at 7am sharp & return about 8pm. Cost is for transportation & 2 admissions. Call Meredith Mann (860-628-8982) for details OR just send a check with your 2 choices to: Fred Nyren, 276 Carriage Drive, Southington, CT 06489. ALSO: watch for our exciting overnight *Autumn Adventure to Vermont*, coming in the fall.

QUILTS FOR CHILDREN IN NEED GROUP meets **every other WEDNESDAY, 10:00AM**, room #207, to sew quilts to comfort children in need. No need to sew; you may cut, piece or tie. **Next meetings: March 1 & 15.** For more info, call Carole Lantz.

2 PARENTS & TOTS GROUPS: **Tuesdays & Wednesdays, 9:30-11:00AM**, Fellowship Hall (under Meetinghouse). More info? Contact Lisa Christensen (860-276-0235). Fun for kids; fellowship for parents!

PRAYER CIRCLE: **EVERY TUESDAY, 7:00PM, Church Parlor.** Join us anytime! Leave prayer requests & addresses (card will be sent) in the folder next to Church Office marked, "**Prayer Requests.**"

SEEDS OF HOPE GROUP works in & through our church to foster awareness, communication, educational opportunities & action regarding our role as compassionate Christians living in a small, small world, taking seriously Jesus' statement: *Whatever you do to even the least of your brothers & sisters, you do it to me.* The group sponsors forums, speakers, film & book discussions & more. **Next meeting: SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 7:30PM**, in room #204. **ALL WELCOME!**

ProCRAFTinators is a group for those who enjoy crafts. We meet the **2nd & 4th Thursdays** of every month in Memorial Hall. Bring a craft to work on or share. For more info, call Meredith (860-628-8982).

OUR ADDICTION ASSISTANCE NETWORK is for individuals/families needing confidential assistance with problem drinking, drug use, gambling, etc. Contact Steve & JoAnn Ray (203-591-1291).

SMALL GROUPS

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

MAUNDY THURSDAY ACTORS NEEDED: 12 actors/actresses are required for our drama on Maundy Thursday, 4/13. Please contact Crystal Sullivan (860-276-8614 or Kencyruss@sbcglobal.net).

HEALTH KITS FOR DISASTER RELIEF? The do-it-yourself *Church World Service* kits will be available in Memorial Hall & Chapel from TODAY through Sunday, February 26, with a return by date of March 5th (Return to Memorial Hall.). These kits were used extensively for disaster relief in the Gulf Coast, New Orleans and most recently in Pakistan. Would you fill one or more kits for us? THANKS!

COVENANT TO CARE: Carseats needed for family in need: 2 toddler seats (for 11 mos. old & 2.5 yr. old) & a booster seat (for 4 year old). Call Kim Rees to help out (860-621-7768). Thank you!

2006 CALENDAR FOR EVERY DOLLAR FEEDS KIDS: For \$25 you get a *2006 Wall Calendar* that puts you in a drawing for a weekly *thank you* gift (average value: \$25). Call Church Office.

EVERY DOLLAR FEEDS KIDS OFFERING ENVELOPES are available next to Church Office.

TWIGS CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S CHOIR, for grades 1-8, rehearses 1st & 2nd Tuesdays of each month, 6:00-6:45pm in our Meetinghouse, & sings on the 3rd Sunday of each month at either our 11:15am or our 6:00pm service. For more info, contact Crystal Sullivan (860-276-8614).

INFANT/TODDLER CARE PROVIDERS NEEDED during 11:15AM & 6PM services. Even 1 Sunday/month will help; *Safe Church* training provided. Can you help out? Please call Beth Crowley Winne after 6:00PM (860/621-6159) or e-mail her at Crowleyba@cox.net.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY WORK DAY: Our next work day is **SATURDAY, 2/18** (& monthly on the 3rd Saturday). Sign-up TODAY next to Gordon's office! Men, women & teens (16 & over) welcome. If you can't join us to work, please consider providing fuel for the volunteers, **SNACKS**, morning break food for 15-20 people. Call Michael Halloran, (860/426-1304) for more info or to sign-up. Thanks!

AMERICARES HOMEFRONT DAY IS BACK!

NOW IS THE TIME TO APPLY!

AmeriCares HomeFront Day, a community-based home repair program that culminates in a 1-day repair event on **Saturday, May 6**, targets homeowners physically or financially unable to maintain their homes/properties. Our local sponsoring team is *The Southington Faith Community*, comprised of volunteers from *First Congregational Church, Plantsville Congregational Church, Mary Our Queen Church, & St. Paul's Church*. Together we do this extreme makeover of someone home. All work, material, & repairs are performed at no cost to recipients. Would you like to help?

SPONSORS & VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Our church seeks businesses/individuals to make **financial contributions** to our church's portion of the cost. If you can help, please send checks (payable to *First Congregational Church*, but clearly noted *AmeriCares Homefront Day*) to: Gordon E. Ellis, *First Congregational Church*, 37 Main Street, Southington, CT 06489. We also seek **volunteers** to work on Saturday, May 6. Sign-up next to Gordon's office.

[A Church Family Opportunity to Participate in the Southington Reading Initiative](#)

Following other cities & towns, Southington has initiated a town-wide reading event. People in town will read the same book then discuss it in groups. The book, *Honky*, by Dalton Conley, details the author's experiences growing up as a white minority in a predominately black & Hispanic neighborhood in NYC. Conley will also be at SHS at 7:00pm on Wednesday, March 8, to discuss the book in person.

Given the subject matter, we encourage as many church members as possible to read the book & come to ***our own group discussion***. Our discussion is at **7:00pm on Tuesday, March 7 in room #204**, led by Chuck Miceli, who also grew up in an ethnically diverse neighborhood in NYC. We will discuss our impressions of the book & draft questions for the author during his presentation the next day. Please secure your own copy of the book. The *Southington Public Library* has multiple copies. Sign-up next to Gordon's office to take part in this stimulating program.

Proposed Open and Affirming Statement

(to be voted on by the congregation at our Annual Meeting of the Church on Monday, June 19, 2006)

We, the members of *The First Congregational Church* of Southington, Connecticut, hereby declare ourselves to be an open and affirming congregation. We accept the challenges and joys of Christian faith, a faith profound enough to embrace even uncertainty. We struggle with the difficult issues of our day, understanding that God's Word touches and guides us as a congregation and as individuals.

With God's grace, we welcome and affirm the total identity of all people as beloved children of God. We are a congregation that seeks to break down the barriers of prejudice, declaring respect for the worth and dignity of all persons, embracing differences in age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status, and physical, emotional, and mental capability. We also recognize and affirm loving, committed, and diverse families. We actively welcome all people to become members of our church and to share fully in our church's life and leadership, ministry and fellowship, worship and sacraments, and responsibilities and blessings.

(Watch for educational & discussion opportunities coming soon.)

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE LESSON

Mark 2:1-12 When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.
²So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. ³Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” ⁶Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷“Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ⁸At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ⁹Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’? ¹⁰But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹“I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” ¹²And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

TODAY’S ANTHEM TEXT

A Time to Sing Praise

by Robert Leaf

There is a time to weep, there is a time to laugh,
Everything has its very own season, Everything has its time.
There is a time to pray, there is a time to preach.
There is a time to gather together praising the Lord with Alleluia.

There is a time to mourn, there is a time to dance.
There is a time when silence is golden, there is a time to speak
There is a time to work, there is a time to play.
There is a time to gather together praising the Lord with Alleluia.

There is a time for Bach, there is a time for blues.
Everything has its very own season, everything has its time.
There is a time to pray, there is a time to preach.
There is a time to gather together praising the Lord with Alleluia.

Now’s the time to sing Alleluia!

(Robert Leaf, based on Ecclesiastes 3:1-7)

GORDON’S CHALLENGING SERMON NEXT SUNDAY will be a revised re-run of last week’s
(blizzard of 2006) sermon: *Let’s Not Forget the Mission*, based on Mark 1:28, 32-45.