

DECEMBER 2023



“Christ could be born a thousand times – but all in vain until He is born in me.”

–Angelus Silesius

Dear Friends,

Several years ago I had the opportunity, along with several other Tree of Life travelers, to visit the Church of the Holy Nativity in Bethlehem, the site where Jesus is reputed to have been born. At the front of the church, one can descend a stairway into a grotto, the place where, supposedly, the manger would have been found. And then within the grotto, one can reach into a hole to touch a rock, which, we were told, was the very spot in which Christ had been laid as a baby. I openly confess that I am a little skeptical of such sites as historical markers. I don't, in other words, really believe that Jesus was born *right there*. Even so, I stood in line and waited for my turn at the hole. When it came time, I reached my hand in and placed it upon the rock. As ex-

pected, I felt no shudder of recognition, and I experienced no moment of awakening. I felt only...a rock.

If I am skeptical of the sites themselves, I am far less skeptical of the truths such sites have the power to convey. Where, precisely, Jesus was born does not interest me. That he once came into the world, and comes into it still, is a truth that moves me to the core. That there are those who continue to embody the grace and the courage that he exhibited is, in large part, what grounds me in my work as a minister. The nativity of Christ continues to occur, over and over again.

As we turn toward Advent, and toward the manger, I am haunted

by what is happening in the land in which Christ was born. We all are. But I am led to consider the many people in that battle scarred region that somehow manage to allow the living Christ to be born into the world once again. I think of a theater troupe in the Jenin refugee camp, who perform the sorrows of those living in the camps scattered throughout the West Bank. The players listen carefully to the stories that residents of each camp tell, and then they spontaneously act out the scenes, somehow returning to the original teller of the story their agency, and their dignity. In such a way, Christ is born anew. I think of the peacemaker teams who accompany Palestinians through the worst stretches of hell in the town of Hebron, protecting them from

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CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE

Into The Mystic: A Quiet Christmas Service To Light Up The Darkness
Wednesday, December 13th at 6:45 pm at FCCOL.

Christmas Pageant
Sunday, December 17 at 10:00 AM

Christmas Eve Services*
10:00 AM - Worship Service in the Meetinghouse
5:00 PM - The Living Manger
Service for families with young children
8:00 PM and 10:00 PM - Candlelight Service of Lessons & Carols

Christmas Day
Monday, December 25 the church will be open for prayer and meditation.

***Christmas Eve Service Memorial Music & Flowers**

If you would like to contribute to our special Christmas Eve music and flowers in memory of a loved one, please leave a message at the church office, fccol@fccol.org or 860-434-8686 by Friday, December 15th.

Partnership Holiday Sale

There are going to be two unique and different sales held at FCCOL to help all shoppers, young and old, get everything they could possibly need for the 2023 holiday season. Seriously.....gifts and decorations, dinnerware and olive oils, mittens and wrapping paper. Two different sales on two different weekends!

On December 2nd (9am-3pm) and December 3rd (9am-1pm), LBS will have the always popular Elephants-in-Winter sale. All the holiday items collected during the intake days for the White Elephant Sale this past July will be arranged throughout the Sheffield Auditorium and sold at bargain basement prices. If you've come to this sale before, you know from experience the vast assortment of delightful treasures that await. If this will be your first time attending, you will find Christmas decorations, greens and wreaths, holiday china and glassware, linens and sweaters and stockings, toys, books, CD's and DVD's, paper goods, lights, candles, and ornaments.

On December 9th (9am-3pm) and December 10th (9am-1pm) the Partnership Committees of the First Congregational Church of Old Lyme will have their third annual Holiday Sale in the Fellowship Hall at 2 Ferry Road in Old Lyme.

Here is your chance to get beautiful, thoughtful and unusual gifts for everyone on your holiday list. There will be Haitian arts and crafts, imported Olive Oils and soaps, Lakota jewelry and tribal crafts, and one-of-a-kind handmade stitched and knitted items from "The Ladies Who Stitch". Everything for sale is wonderfully unique, and the support provided to the partnerships helps many people, both near and far.

Come and shop, immerse yourselves in the holiday spirit, meet old acquaintances and make new friends.

Ladies Who Stitch

'Tis the season for cooking, eating, thanking and gifting and LWS has creations to support all of this. We're preparing for two big sales opportunities:

- Elephants In Winter - December 2 & 3 - the Partnership Store will be open Saturday from 11:00 am - 3:00 pm featuring items from all four partners - Haitian, Tribal, Palestinian and Ladies Who Stitch.
- Holiday Partnership Sale - December 9 & 10 - in the Fellowship Hall

You don't have to wait for these events, as we also open the Partnership Store every Sunday following the church service and every Monday from 10:00 to 2:00.

We will of course take a break on Monday, December 25th and Monday, January 1st, but otherwise we'll be sewing, knitting, crafting and otherwise enjoying LWS camaraderie from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Sheffield Auditorium. You are welcome to visit, shop or join us during that time.

Questions: eunicetaylor@me.com



WELCOME TO THE CHURCH

We then, as members of this Church, gladly welcome you to take part with us in the hopes, the labors, and the joys of the Church of Christ. We promise to walk with you in love and sympathy, to join with you in the ministries of grace to neighbors near and far, and to promote, as far as in us lies, your growth in the life of faith.

On November 19th, we welcomed as new members:

Robin Baskett
 Angela & Bradley Mock
 Bill Colihan & Susan Switzer
 Burgess Dole
 Gordon Hurlbert & Sarah Gallardo

Diaper Bank Saturday: December Present

By the time you read this article, the Thanksgiving holiday will have just passed. A deep breath or two is taken as we transition and prepare for the sacred season of Advent and Christmas. Do our friends who frequent the Food Pantry and the Diaper Bank celebrate this season?

The Diaper Bank volunteers unanimously made a decision to offer the gift of a full case of diapers to our friends in December. Maybe a tank of gas for the car is needed; more non-food items; or help paying electricity or heating bills during these cold months.

Our hope is that a full case of diapers, lasting longer, will provide a little more disposable income for other needed items. Who knows, maybe a gift or two will be bought for their child/ren. It is a small gesture and an important gesture. We care and we have not forgotten the least of our brothers and sisters.

Our babies grow out of sizes 1 and 2 very quickly. In 1 month's time, our guests ask for a bigger size. Babies wear size 3 diapers for months; however, babies wear sizes 4, 5 or 6 for quite a while before they are potty trained.

Your generosity to this local ministry makes this December "present" possible. We thank the church community, family, friends, neighbors, and strangers who have heard about and supported diapers for babies. When the diaper inventory becomes low, there always seems to be a gift of diapers or a monetary donation made. Coincidence? God provides what is needed, and certainly works through others. The "others" are you.

Donations of sizes 4, 5, and 6, in any quantity, are greatly appreciated.

Senior Choir

To all members of the Senior Choir - thank you for your uplifting singing in November!

Here is the December schedule:

Sunday, December 3: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, December 6: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, December 10: Singing at the 10:00 am with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, December 13: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, December 17: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Wednesday, December 20: Rehearsal at 7:30 pm

Sunday, December 24: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Evening services at 8:00 pm and 10:00 pm with a rehearsal at 7:00 pm

Wednesday, December 27: NO REHEARSAL

Sunday, December 31: Singing at the 10:00 am service with a rehearsal at 9:15 am

Many thanks and best wishes to all, Simon



Bible Study

Join us Thursdays from 11-12 in the Library or on Zoom.

Progressive Bible Study

Join us Thursday December 7th and 14th from 11-12, as we journey through the matriarchs and patriarchs in the Book of Genesis.



Adult Forum

Following our church service on Sunday, December 10th, all are invited to an Adult Forum in Sheffield Auditorium. More information to come.

Into the Mystic: A Quiet Christmas Service to Light up the Darkness

Wednesday, December 13th at 6:45 pm in the Meetinghouse.

The weeks leading up to Christmas can be a time of joy and hectic anticipation as well as pain and loss. For some, it can be a season of hardship and illness, disappointment or anxiety. Many of us, too, are acutely aware of the chaos of our world and looking for hope in the darkness.

Join us for a contemplative service of music, prayer and candle lighting as we gather to create sacred space for one another this Advent. We'll honor the blessings that come from attending to what is deepest and most in need of healing. Featuring the music of Elm City Winds, a woodwind quintet from New Haven, and our church choir. All are welcome!

Grief Group

Francis Weller, Grief "is an act of protest against living numb and small."

Join us on Wednesday, December 13 from 5:00-6:00 pm in the Hoag Parlor.

Monthly Newsletter Folding

We are grateful to the following people who helped this year with the folding of the monthly Newsletter: Camilla Bailey, Nina Bazinet, Nancy Bell, Jody Belluzzi, Nathalie Fogg, Doris Hungerford, Connie Johannessen, Susan Lang, Jane Marolda, Jeanne Nichols, David Pellerin, Carolyn Randall, Hildegard Rennhard, Nancy Strohla, and Priscilla Swanson. Others have come on occasion to help out when needed, and we thank them very much.

After many years of chairing our group, Hildegard Rennhard has retired from being the organizational leader. If anyone is interested in helping out once a month in getting the 550 church Newsletters folded and ready for mailing, please contact Jane Marolda by text at (860) 608-0257 or email at jsimmonsm88@gmail.com.

Writing at the Well

On Friday, December 15th from 10:00-11:30, join us as we meet once a month to write pages together. Using informal writing prompts, participants give voice to memories and the stories that make up our lives. No writing experience necessary...just a willingness to pay attention and tap into the wellspring. Meeting in the library.

South Lyme Union Chapel: Lessons and Carols

The South Lyme Union Chapel will hold its annual Lessons and Carols on Sunday, December 17th at 3:00 pm at the chapel. The Select Singers from Lyme-Old Lyme High School will once again bring their beautiful voices to the chapel, offering traditional songs of the season. All are welcome! Please stay to enjoy some snacks and hot chocolate with us immediately after in our Fellowship Room.

SSKP Old Saybrook Pantry

SSKP Old Saybrook Pantry will be closed Tuesday, December 26th and Tuesday, January 2nd. We will resume regular hours Tuesday, January 9th. Have a happy and safe Christmas and New Year.

Pantry Needs:

- Granola bars, breakfast bars
- Canned & boxed meals (mac & cheese, hamburger helper, Chef Boyardee)
- Soup
- Peanut butter
- Pasta

The Old Lyme Ringers

The Old Lyme Ringers begin a new season of ringing at its first rehearsal on Wednesday, January 10, at 6:30 pm. We are a fun group of people who enjoy making music together. If you are interested, or know someone who might be interested, please send Gary Jungkeit an email at gjungkeit@charter.net. Both experienced and new ringers are encouraged to contact Gary!

DEAR FRIENDS, CONTINUED

the stones, spit, urine and trash (and far worse) that is too often hurled at them by settlers. In such accompaniments, Christ is born anew. I think of former Israeli soldiers who did as the old Spiritual instructed - they laid down their swords and shields (or in this case their machine guns and body armor), refusing to participate any longer in the dehumanization of Palestinians. In such a way, Christ is born anew. And I think of a young Israeli refusenik, who chose prison rather than military service, because she would not learn to kill in the name of a country. In such a way, Christ is born anew. These are, obviously, not followers of the child born in Bethlehem in a literal sense - most come from different traditions entirely. But they radiate the spirit of the one born in Bethlehem, who we gather to celebrate during the Christmas season.

I'm glad to be entering this season once again. A decorated Meetinghouse, Advent and Christmas hymns, the Christmas Pageant (held this year on Sunday morning, December 17th), and the run of services on Christmas Eve, all fill me with gladness. Important and good as those things are, they are not meant to be mistaken for the thing itself - the coming of Christ into the world - any more than the stone at the Church of the Nativity is meant to reveal the Spirit of the living Christ to us. Such things merely disclose a pattern, made real in the human beings who labor to bring Christ into the world over and over. As the theologian Angelus Silesius put it, "Christ could be born a thousand times - but all in vain until He is born in me."

That's the task - and the question - this holiday season. How might Christ be born in each of us? How might we come to embody the child laid in the straw? It need not be as dramatic as the instances I cited earlier, though surely finding ways to stand for human rights in Palestine - and elsewhere - is among the ways we might embody that child. For the most part, though, I think it will occur in the gestures of care we extend. The patient listening to the story of another. A call to one who is grieving the loss of a beloved partner. A genuine question of interest offered to a child. A smile to a stranger while passing through the market. Saying "I love you" to those given to each of us along our pilgrimage through life. In such a way, Christ is born anew.

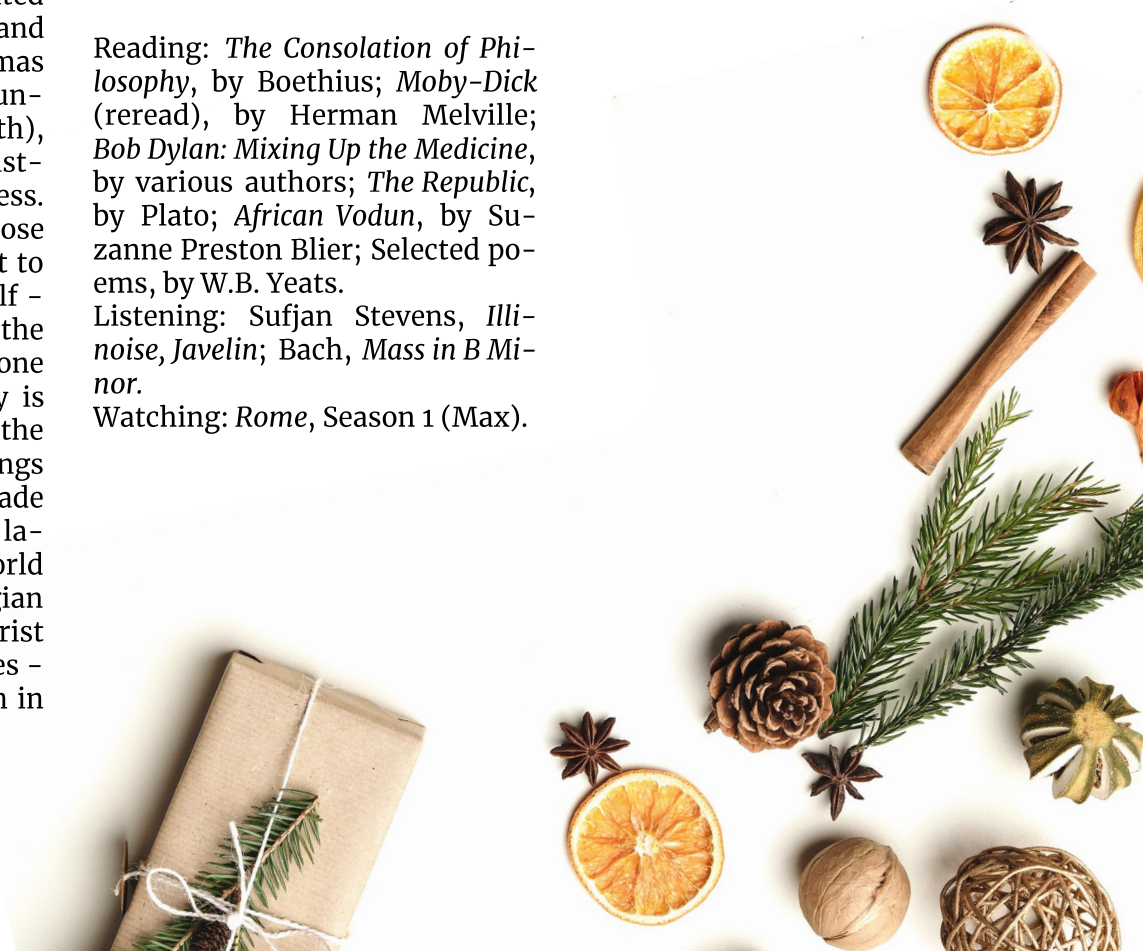
Stay human...

Steve

Reading: *The Consolation of Philosophy*, by Boethius; *Moby-Dick* (reread), by Herman Melville; *Bob Dylan: Mixing Up the Medicine*, by various authors; *The Republic*, by Plato; *African Vodun*, by Suzanne Preston Blier; Selected poems, by W.B. Yeats.

Listening: Sufjan Stevens, *Illinois*, *Javelin*; Bach, *Mass in B Minor*.

Watching: *Rome*, Season 1 (Max).



GOD'S NEIGHBORHOOD



Giving Tree

This year we are going to collect gift cards for a few local families and individuals in need. Please donate what you can to help us with this. On December 3rd and 10th, you can drop off \$10, \$25, or \$50 gift cards to the church. You can put it on the desk in the Youth Education office or please attach the gift card to a branch on the Christmas Tree if you're able. We appreciate every single one! Thank you!

On December 10th, help write Love Notes during Fellowship hour. A Love Note is a simple hand-written message of hope and comfort to let the recipient know we are thinking of them.

December 3rd, 1st Sunday of Advent

We'll begin our review of the Christmas story and start rehearsals for our Christmas Pageant 2023 which will be held on December 17th at the 10:00 am service!!! Calling all angels, shepherds, sheep and stars!

December 10th, 2nd Sunday of Advent

We continue reading the Christmas story and keep making our way to Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph, innkeepers and animals. Pageant practice will continue with lots of stars and anticipation!

Saturday, December 16th

Christmas Pageant Rehearsal, 2:30-4:30 pm with pizza.

Sunday, December 17th, 3rd Sunday of Advent

Christmas Pageant at the 10am service, and 3rd Sunday of Advent. We have the pleasure of our Christmas Pageant being directed by our Gavin Lodge again

this year, and our Sunday School students will truly shine in the magic of this event. Please join us for this wonderful day.

Sunday, December 24th

Christmas Eve, Living Nativity at 5 pm with guest animals!

January 14th

Restart of God's Neighborhood Sunday School January 14th at 10 am service.

Save the Date

Confirmation Class for freshmen and sophomore HS students (if there are juniors or seniors that would like to participate you are welcome to join). This begins Sunday, January 28th, 4-5:30 pm. More details to follow. Email Laura for more information.





In November, God's Neighborhood Youth Group collected clothing for their Clothing Drive and prepared food for this year's Breakfast Run.

On November 18th the Youth Group met at the church at 6:00am and headed to New York City to distribute the clothing and food to the homeless.



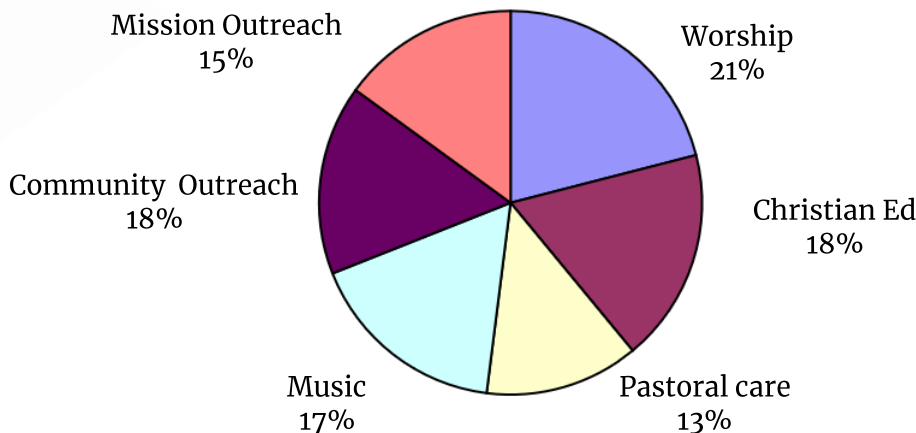


GIVING MATTERS—YEAR-END MESSAGE

As our calendar – and financial – year concludes, we want to emphasize how vitally important it is for our members and friends to satisfy their 2023 pledge commitments or to complete their annual contributions. We need to continue completing each year with our financial books balanced. The 2023 budget was constructed carefully, and 90% of our expenditure commitments are fixed in the near term. This year our annual stewardship campaign fell short of expectations, presenting us with a possible budget deficit. And, over the last several years whatever “cushioning” funds we had on our balance sheet to cover budget shortfalls have been used up.

Not only are satisfying pledge commitments important, but additional gifts from whomever is able will be critical and appreciated.

Here are how your contributions to FCCOL are invested:



These are vital ministries for our congregation and for many others in need. They are dependent on the pledges and contributions of our congregation. Thank you all for supporting our church!

Bob McCracken, Treasurer
Jim Matschulat, Chair Board of Stewardship

MOMENT FOR PLANNED GIVING

As we come to the end of the year, it becomes the time of year when we think about our donations to the church. Clearly, our Annual Stewardship Campaign is crucial to cover ongoing costs to maintain the staff and basic expenses of the church as well as our church’s mission outreach work.

However, if your retirement plan is creating high Required Minimum Distributions, would you consider making a Qualified Charitable Donation to the Preservation Fund? This donation qualifies as part of your

RMD. If you don’t need a life insurance policy anymore, would you please consider donating that to the church and our Preservation Fund? If you want to name the church as a beneficiary of your life insurance, retirement plan, or other asset, would you please consider the Preservation fund?

The Preservation Fund was created to raise funds to support the ongoing costs of maintaining our historic church property.

If you need help understanding the techniques that can be used

to give to the church, please feel free to contact me or Bob McCracken at the church.

Thanks,
Tom Grant
Chair
Preservation Fund
Tcgrant9215@gmail.com
860-598-9419

MOMENT FOR STEWARDSHIP

Today, I want to share with you one of the wonderful things you make possible through your stewardship.

Recently, I visited Martin House in Norwich. Martin House provide flexible support to 54 individuals with a range of challenges from chronic homelessness; mental illness, addictions and cognitive disability in a group living facility. The agency focuses on positive healthy living, communication and employment skills. The length of stay ranges from six months to four years, but recently that has lengthened due to the difficulty of finding affordable and subsidized housing. Martin House's mission, in their own words, "is accomplished by providing dignified housing, nutritious food, a safe, caring environment, and supportive services for 54 men and women who seldom experience any of these."

On my visit I met three residents. One with a cognitive disability, another with clear mental health issues and another who was just returning from work. They were all friendly and curious about me being in their home. I met and spoke with four staff, one who had been working there for over 30 years. Their dedication and commitment to the residents and program was impressive. The program can't afford a janitor, so residents and staff all chip in to keep the large facility clean. Like many social agencies, they could use an infusion of help, painting hallways, upgrading furniture and funds. The staff wanted me to tell you how much they have appreciated FCCOLs support since 1998.

Martin House is just one local agency that we have funded.

This year, we have provided \$21,500 in funding to support 11 local programs. Overall, our local focus has been on supporting agencies that lift up people dealing with poverty.

The church's 2023 budget projected that there would be \$80K with a 10% hold back if the church's income does not come in as budgeted. It is not clear yet, how this is going to come out for this year. Last year, the trustee's found it necessary to hold back the 10%. They may again need to do that this year. Our church's remarkable generosity can only be accomplished because of your support.

In closing, I'd like to share a personal story.

In 1963, my father bought a self-winding Omega watch which he was very proud of and used daily for the rest of his life. During the last few weeks of his life, as his daily movements lessened, his watch started to slow down and would stop. When this happened it caused him great distress. A few days before he died, he said to me, "Erik, my watch is not working. I think it's broken." The first time this happened I became concerned, asked if I could see it and whether he wanted me to get it fixed. After looking at it, winding it and shaking it, it started ticking again. I set the time, put it back on his wrist and said, "Dad, it's ticking! It's a self-winding watch and it has to keep moving to keep going." He was relieved to have it back on his wrist keeping time the way he was accustomed for a little bit longer.

As a congregation we are like my father's self-winding watch. Without movement we will stop working.

We are blessed at FCCOL to have the leadership, and gifts that keep us moving with a steadfast outward focused mission. This is remarkable, but like any vibrant organization it needs to grow to be sustained. Please consider taking a step up in your monetary giving for 2024 to magnify what Jesus said, that "whatever we do for these brothers and sisters of mine you do for me". It's not too late.

Thank you for sharing, and making so much possible.

Erik Johannessen
Chair, Board of Missions





EMPLOYMENT

Rab Nawaz/Kappri Painting, LLC

Free estimates. Power painting, power washing interior and exterior, gutter cleaning, wallpaper install and removal. 30+ years experience. Satisfaction guaranteed. The church has experience with this company. Kappripainting@gmail.com or 860-857-0326.

American Craftsmen needs America's help. Let me restore your family heirloom as a furniture maker of 33 years. My work includes restoration of antiques, work on cherished family pieces, and general furniture repair. As well, my passion is designing and building fine furniture. Please contact Dick Humphreville at 860-442-5003 or www.humphrevillefurniture.com.

Home Designer: Design & drawing from concept to construction documents for new homes, additions, and renovations. Servicing home owners, builders, and architects. Other services include drawings to help sell a house, develop & present an idea. Computer aided using DATA CAD12 - 2 dimensional and 3 dimensional. David S Nelson-Building Design Service DSNdesign@comcast.net or 860-434-5526.

The "Pet Nanny" Carol Giuliano, an Old Lyme resident, will provide loving care for your pets when you are not there. Over forty years experience with all types of animals. Call 203-738-9932.

Sue Mandeville: Transportation and/or accompaniment to professional or medical appointments, as well as outpatient surgeries and home stay following anesthesia. Airport, train or bus transport. Livery license, insured, references and medical training. Call Sue Mandeville 860-908-2310.

Professional Caregiver Available. For evening hours. For more information and references contact Sim at 203-833-2992.

Mediator, Lorelei Mitchell, is available to assist with family dilemmas, landlord-tenant disputes or workplace conflict. Mediation is a better alternative to litigation and can often transform relationships, while giving you a say in the outcome. To schedule a consultation, contact Lorelei at 860-536-0260 or loreleimitchell12@gmail.com.

Guli Gvelesiani: I lived in Old Lyme and worked for 7 years as a live-in caregiver for a church family. I can provide live-in caregiving for families in Old Lyme and other locations in CT. 860-391-5691.

Carolyn Randall: If anyone is flying somewhere for the holidays and you don't want to leave your car in long term parking, I will drive you to airport. Going South for the winter, I will drive you to airport—Bradley, Providence or JFK. Call me at 860-343-3573.

Professional Male Caregiver Available with car: My name is Aldrean and I'm available for full-time and/or live in caregiving. For more information and references contact Al at 917-957-3963.

We periodically receive requests to post notice of people who can be hired to help transport, help in light housekeeping or help by offering companionship to those who are housebound. We are not able to make recommendations; but their names and number are listed below:

. **Martha Durfee** 860-575-6518





THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF OLD LYME

Staff

The Rev. Dr. Steven R. Jungkeit, Senior Minister (860-434-8686)

The Rev. Laura Fitzpatrick-Nager, Senior Associate Minister (860-304-9096)

The Rev. Carleen R. Gerber, Associate Minister (860-304-2070)

Simon D. Holt, Director of Music (860-705-3037)

The Rev. David W. Good, Minister Emeritus

The Rev. Rebecca T. Crosby, Minister for Haitian Outreach

Rebecca A. Francisco, serves as minister to the South Lyme Union Chapel.

Jolene Brant, Director of Christian Education/Junior & Senior Pilgrim Fellowship Leader

Rachael Jungkeit, Director of Children's Music

Robert McCracken, Church Administrator

Odile Delehant, Church Office Manager

Julie Mardjekaj, Bookkeeper

Sean McCarty, Sexton

Church Office Tel: 860-434-8686

Fax: 860-434-1135

e-mail: fccol@fccol.org

Website: www.fccol.org

Sunday Worship - 10:00 a.m.

South Lyme Union Chapel Worship - 9:00 a.m.

Counseling and Psychotherapy Tel: 860-434-3813

Cary Walker, LCSW

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF OLD LYME,

Member U.C.C.

The reproduction of our Meetinghouse on the back is from a sketch by William Steeves.

**THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
2 FERRY ROAD
OLD LYME, CONNECTICUT 06371**

U.S. Postage Paid
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Non-Profit Organization



The next Newsletter will be for January; deadline is December 15.

Please e-mail the church office at fccol@fccol.org if you want to be removed from the newsletter mailing list and read it on the website. Please let us know if you would like an e-mail alert when the new issues are available on our website. Thanks for your help!

