

Annual Report of the Senior Minister

“This is a different church!” a visitor recently exclaimed. This person, a former member of First Church, left a number of years ago to live in another part of the country. This was her first visit back in more than 20 years.

“What strikes you as different?” I was curious to know.

“Everything feels *fresh*,” was her reply.

Like many congregations, this church had a heyday in the 1960s. Subsequent annual reports trace a pattern of steady decline in worship and church school attendance, as well as the number of households contributing to the financial support of the church.

But those numbers don't tell the *whole* story!

In the 4-1/2 years I've been here, First Church has changed and grown in significant ways. Sometimes, when I realize how much we've accomplished in such a short time, it makes my head spin!

- *We clarified our purpose* in the phrase “Transforming people to do God's work” and lived out in three overlapping activities... exploring, connecting, and serving.
- *We organized for results*. A task force looked at how “form follows function” and recommended structural changes two years ago. Program Ministry Coordinators now facilitate the work of ministry teams. A separate Governance Board keeps an eye on the overall strategy and direction of the church. Three congregational meetings a year highlight our activities and provide for conversation and cross-pollination of ideas.
- *We embraced a bold vision for reaching out to young people*. During 2014 an ad hoc committee listened to you, and then imagined a new position, while a fundraising team sought your support for this vision through the Campaign for Kids. An intense search process in 2014 resulted in our calling Rebecca Brown to join us as full-time Leader of Children and Youth. A year and two months later, her impact has already been enormous.
- *We've taken risks and tried new things...* Café Church during the summer, “Kids in Community” creating service opportunities for our youngest, Grandparents Day, Simply Smiles, Boomwhackers, gleaning, Jerrotones, Acoustic Christmas, Bell

Sunday, Star Sunday, and seasonal worship themes with lots of singing, new rituals, and unusual and varied instruments in worship.

- *We've strengthened bonds within the congregation.* The Connections Committee came into being the year I began and hasn't let up, constantly looking for ways to help people connect... AppleFest, Souper Saturdays, TGIFs in the summer, book discussion groups, and Extended Families.
- *We emphasized care.* We adopted a comprehensive set of Safe Church policies. Our first class of Stephen Ministers completed their training in June 2013 to extend the care we offer (and another group will soon begin the training). They, in addition to the many who call, write, bake, drive, visit, and organize, provide a solid foundation of care within the congregation.
- *We've ministered to our community in new ways,* shifting our spending priorities from a charitable giving approach (to support a large number of organizations with which we partner) to providing seed money to ministry efforts initiated by members of the congregation... the Community Garden, Tara's Memory Café, Community Meals, to name a few.
- *We've strengthened our partnerships...* with Guiding Eyes for the Blind, with South Congregational Church in Granby, with Suwon Presbyterian Church in South Korea, with the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ, with Maternal and Infant Outreach Program through the Covenant to Care for Children.
- *We've begun to emphasize evangelism.* That's Greek for "marketing" and it means getting the word out to the community about who we are and what we do... through articles and a regular column in the Granby Drummer, a new website, direct mail, and social media.
- *We've focused on hospitality* with Welcome Ambassadors who greet first time visitors with a loaf of First Church's Famous Cheese Bread. New members have brought vitality and fresh perspectives as we have tried to match their interests and passions with existing ministries, or encouraged them to start new ones.
- *We hired wonderful new support staff* and they have multiplied Rebecca's and my ability to focus on leadership, bringing much needed technological and social media savvy.
- *Building renovations and upgrades have been completed.* With the steady leadership of a deeply committed group of trustees (thank you!) all of the hoped for projects of the 2010 Capital Campaign have been completed... most recently a new commercial kitchen that enables new ministries, B-14 has been transformed into a dedicated youth room, and (drumroll please) *we now have classroom space that*

brings us into the 21st century! With Rebecca's leadership and the help of many (Hank, JC, Sherry, Hunter, Spencer, Kevin, and others) all of the educational and meeting spaces for children and youth are now attractive, kid-friendly, and technologically current.

- *And financial support for the church has increased.*

This is all wonderful news. But there's more to do.

- There's a difference between being a congregation that welcomes and a church that *invites*. We know, and feel, the importance of First Church in our lives, but how well do we communicate this impact to our friends and neighbors?
- Sporadic participation that results from competing priorities will continue to make planning and programming a real challenge.
- A fraction of our church family provides the lion's share of volunteer energy.
- Our new structure helps us focus on the important things, but communication and coordination are still far from smooth. We haven't yet figured out what interdependence looks like so that we aren't a "collection of silos shooting off bottle rockets" (thank you, Moderator Audrey Lampert, for that image!).

We have tough challenges and life-affirming opportunities ahead of us. I am excited and grateful to be completing five years here, and look forward to participating in our growth and impact in the future.

Pastor Ginny

January 31, 2016

Report from the Leader of Youth & Children

2015-2016

SCHOOLHOUSE – This past year we accomplished the renovation of five rooms. We remodeled a discussion room (also serves as meeting room for church committees), a craft room, a Godly Play room and a Nursery. Our Gathering Room is where the One Room SchoolHouse meets – a unique room with state of the art sound, lighting, and technology, complemented by the creative vision of Hal Prussing. Children meet there the first three Sundays of every month, and join their families on the fourth (or last) Sunday, and for the last 20 minutes on communion Sundays. We have welcomed three new families (5 children) into the school house, but growth is slow. The recently organized Youth Boosters will consider other ways to help grow the program. The facility is there. Rebecca is creating personalized curriculum with themes that carry on over weeks and months. We need more children.

FAITH ED – Four 9th grade boys have been meeting weekly since September for 90 minutes. It is designed not as a confirmation class but as an education course: how the Bible was written / the value of Old Testament stories / interpreting OT theology / the life and teachings of Jesus / the development of church history, creeds, and divisions / the other world religions / and how religious history intersects with their school history – the Roman Empire, Middle Ages, Enlightenment, and the establishment of American thought. Recently one of our high school girls has asked to join the class.

SUNDAY NIGHT YOUTH – In September I spoke to both parents and youth about changing the direction of high school youth group. I've asked that we not refer to the group as G Crew, but as SNY (Sunday Night Youth), as we are trying hard to break old habits and to be more welcoming of new youth. We currently have 33 members on the email list, 20 of them are not from this church.

The Fall Focus centered around the power of the WORD – the spoken word, texted word, and all forms of social media that too often serve as a cloak for gossip, meanness, and subtle bullying. We studied the book, THE FOUR AGREEMENTS, supplemented by skits, interactive discussion, challenges and videos.

This Winter, we began our 2016 theme of PERSPECTIVE. In January and February we have explored the ideas of Dr King, and how our perspective is affected by our privilege – whether recognized or not. Sunday night meetings usually include:

- 1) Announcements
- 2) POINT-COUNTERPOINT
- 3) Student Reports on timely and thematically relevant videos or songs
- 4) A WOG report (a student presentation on the World Outside Granby).

5) A focus from Rebecca on our winter theme – PERSPECTIVE

The Winter retreat is Feb 26-28, and is called “The Things That Unite Us”, with a focus around welcoming and accepting each other. The Summer Trip will be to Washington DC, July 31 through Aug 6th. It will be the “PERSPECTIVE” trip, as everything that we do that week will be about stretching our perspective through up close and personal encounters with other SES groups, religions, ideologies, and service opportunities. The Dessert Auction is March 19th and we have a parent team in place, to begin the planning for this.

Finally I am grateful for the financial support of this church for the children and youth in this church both as line items and as individual givers.

My personal struggles are;

- 1) Getting realistic boundaries with my work hours and
- 2) How to attract young children to the SchoolHouse. (The high school group is probably at max right now.)

Rebecca Brown

Director of Music Annual Report

I joined this church in August of 2013 and feel strongly that I have been a part of a resurgence of the music program at First Church in the two and a half years since. In addition to many unseen growth spurts, very tangible and public improvements that have been made to the church's music program, for which I have been lucky enough to lead the charge with the help of too many hands to name:

- The updating of the music library was officially completed
- The choir room was reorganized out and reimagined! What was once a cluttered and hectic space is now a clean and healthy environment for both the adults and the youth to take ownership of and make music in every single week
- A beautiful new 5'7" Weber grand piano was donated to the music ministry's service
- A shining three-octave set of Malmark handbells was donated into the church's arsenal
- An upright spinet Baldwin piano was donated and now takes up residence in Cook Hall, allowing that beautifully acoustic space more flexibility of use
- A self-sustaining concert series was started in the memory of Barbara Crouse, providing the Granby community with a variety of free professional concerts every single year featuring local musicians and bringing an audience into the church which may have otherwise never stepped foot into the sanctuary of First Congregational Church
 - 1 Classical concert
 - 1 Contemporary or non-classical concert
 - 1 Choral festival
 - Creating fellowship between First Church, South Church, Old Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church, and the Greater Hartford Academy for the Arts
 - Providing young or amateur musicians an opportunity to work with a conductor or composer of national prominence
 - Bringing 100 singers into the church for an entire day, filling the halls and sanctuary of the church with music and fellowship
- Each musical ensembles have grown into having a strong sense of self identity; each contributing in their own unique ways to the spiritual life of the congregation
 - The Chancel Choir moved from singing two Sundays per month to three and sometimes even four, maturing into the flagship ensemble of the Church
 - The Chimes Choir is now known as the Bell Choir; because of their new brass bells they have been able to learn entirely new and more advanced techniques making for an entirely different sound ensemble
 - The Seraph Choir is now known as the Jerrotones (of which I can take absolutely no credit). In 2013 an ensemble on the verge of disappearing has taken ownership of their own identity and rebranded themselves as a group with explores music making in a large variety of ways. We sing, we drum, we play Boomwhackers, we even make music out of things that were never intended to be instruments!

- “The trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised!” said George Frederic Handel’s famous *Messiah*. Since 2013, a brass quartet has added to the spirit of Easter Sunday as only brass can. This is in addition to a number of other times every single year professional-quality violinists, pianists, brass players, and vocalists have joined the congregation for music making and worship on Sunday mornings
- Instituted an Adopt-an-Anthem program, aiding the church in the purchasing of new music while simultaneously providing an opportunity for church members to commemorate an event or memorialize a loved one in a beautiful and meaningful way

Now that I’ve reached the end of the list, it is really inspiring for me to see how many ways the ministry of music has changed and grown over the last two years. Oh, the places we can go from here! The following are areas in which I most hope to continue helping the church grow:

- For the Barbara Crouse Memorial Concert Series to continue to grow at an appropriate pace over the next few years as it gains ground in the Granby community and becomes an important part of the local musical culture
- To continue providing opportunities for both young and professional musicians alike to come and share their skills and talents with the congregation on Sunday mornings and for special events and services
- Continuing to grow participation and membership within the musical ensembles as well as for special music on Sunday mornings
 - Chancel Choir – potentially starting a modest First Congregational Church scholarship to a few local Granby Memorial High School singers to come join in singing with the choir on a regular basis while simultaneously providing for and fostering a youth’s love and passion for music in preparation for them to continue their education at a college in the future
 - Bell Choirs – in need of two more ringers to complete a full three-octave ensemble
 - Jerrotones – in need of more youth from within the church to join the ensemble to allow for greater flexibility of repertoire as well as to bolster and embolden the confidence of the members already currently participating (safety in numbers!)

With a strong vision and helping hands, all of these things can become a reality!

Jerron Jorgensen, Director of Music
February 18, 16