

Keeping In Touch

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF STAFFORD

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Grief

To all the believers at Second Congregational Church: Grace to you, and peace and comfort, to all those who have lost someone they love. I write in order to offer an honest reflection about the nature of death and grief. Is there a more universal human experience we all share than facing the death of someone we love? Who among us is untouched by the sting of death?

Following the resurrection, Jesus spent a serendipitously sweet forty days with them. Then he mysteriously departed. But before he ascended into the heavens, he promised he would return. In the meantime, they were to “watch and pray.” That original band of followers committed themselves to the church believing Jesus was coming back and that they would be reunited with him. Only this time, Jesus would reappear not limited or bound by the power of death.

Their hope was challenged by the reality that death continued to take freely from their fellowship. One after another, members of the early

church died when their time came and the survivors were forced to consider the meaning of death based on their belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb. We who speak almost glibly about our fundamental belief in the power of God over death are rendered near silent when death strikes someone dear to us. Our grief over our loss and questions about what happens to us in death are the core issues Paul wanted to address in his letter to those early believers. Maybe the threat of death is one of our earliest and deepest fears.

When John Claypool was faced with preaching in the shadow of his 9-year-old daughter's battle with leukemia, he was forced into speaking about the harsh personal realities of losing her. He was immersed in her illness, knowing he was helpless in stopping the sure certainty it would take her life. He knew he could no longer get by with repeating the typical Christian platitudes about death and grief. He knew he was being drug deeper into the mystery because he found those time-worn platitudes were empty as he stood in the shadow of the valley of death with his frail, afflicted daughter, Laura Lue.

Others encouraged him to share honestly what it meant for him and his daughter to face this daunting illness that eventually took her from him. His pastoral colleagues asked him, “Those of us who have not been there wonder what it is like in the Darkness. Can you tell us?” And so, Claypool accepted their invitation to honesty and shared with them. He described himself as their “burdened and broken brother limping back into the family circle to tell (them) something of what he (had) learned out there in the darkness.”[1] Claypool preached four sermons over the next year and a half about those experiences that were collected in a small book titled, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*.

Grief is the soul's response to any significant loss. It affects our emotions with the strong sense of sadness, despair, or even a non-feeling numbness. For a period of time, we feel like lost children and even the simplest tasks are overwhelming. Depression and deep sadness hover over us like a dark cloud and we feel cursed. Grief affects us in bodily form. We may feel we can't get out of bed and we sleep for endless hours. Or, we may not be able to get more than a few moments of sleep and we spend long hours in bed swallowed by our loss. We may lose weight from having no appetite. Grief may attack our ability to think or reason. Simple tasks appear as Gordian knots we can't unravel. Even our friends can add to our feeling like a snake out of our skin. They don't know how to talk to us or they may even avoid us because our grief may be too hard for them to share. Or, they may act as if there's been no loss at all by strangely never mentioning the name of our lost one. It may feel as if our loved one never existed in our conversations with friends.

But our grief is strangely tempered by a great hope centered in our deep faith in Christ. We find in the despair of our grief a mysterious power that is grounded in a faith that believes that even death is subject to God. The sting of death is overwhelmed by the power of God to reign over even the grave.

In 1925, Eugene O'Neill wrote a play about Lazarus. From his journals, we learn that O'Neill felt a drama centered on Lazarus might be of interest since he was "the man who had been dead for three days and returned to life, knowing the secret." What secret? What Lazarus discovered and proclaimed to the world upon his return is, "There is no death!" In his play, Lazarus stumbled out of the grave, having passed through the door of death on to the other side where the mystery lies, and like a discoverer returning from a strange, unknown world, he came back with the startling news "that death is only a doorway ... (and) there's a life on the other side of the door!"

Brought to the tomb of Lazarus, John tells us in the shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept," and O'Neill recognized Jesus' sadness in realizing he had arrived too late and Lazarus had already left on the journey of death. Summoning all the courage he could muster, Jesus shouted into the gaping hole of the grave, "Lazarus, come out!" and the dead man stepped from the darkness into the bright sunshine of his previous earthly home. The great, simple truth of the mystery of death literally became for the resurrected Lazarus a fountain of youth, and in each scene, his age peels away one layer after another as the play progresses. Throughout the play, because he already knows the secret of what lies beyond the door of death, Lazarus lets loose a hearty laugh for all the threats the Roman government or the Jewish Priests of the Temple might offer him for his faith in Jesus.

O'Neill imagines Lazarus with an otherworldly confidence in life that takes a lighthearted look at how over-inflated our fears of death can be. He understands death is merely a portal to the next existence and that death is not the ultimate victor. Death, in fact, is swallowed up in the victory of God who rules over even the sting of death. Lazarus moves back into the world of the living like a butterfly emerging wet and folded from its cocoon. In O'Neill's creative imagination, he decided that Lazarus, free from the fear of death, "would rise radiant and full of laughter in joyous affirmation of unending life." In effect, O'Neill was protesting against the wrongly placed emphasis we superimpose on this New Testament story centered on the grief that Jesus displayed at the death of his friend. And in his protest, O'Neill found the title for his wonderful play, "Lazarus Laughed."

In the fullest expression of the incarnation, Jesus came to live among us. In that life, even he understood what it meant to stand before the grave and contemplate his grief. But Jesus also understood that death was not the final word. Jesus understood the pain of his grief was a momentary experience of loss that would soon be eclipsed by the joy of reunion.

I want to invite you, my sisters and brothers, to remember the power of our community as Christian believers. We stand together and share our tears with one another in honest grief over our loss. In our standing together, a new sense of power is released that is healing and comforting. In the pain of our deep feelings of loss ... off in the distance a hearty laugh erupts reminding us that even death is absorbed in the life-giving power of God. And the Jesus who stood before the tomb of his dear friend shedding his own tears reaches out to us to embrace and hold us while whispering softly in our ear, "I have conquered the mystery of death. Have no fear."

Have no fear, my fellow strugglers, have no fear. When that awful moment comes unbidden, we will stand together until the dawn of another resurrection day rises once again. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Your brother and fellow struggler,

Pastor Keith
Dr. Keith D. Herron



TREASURER'S REPORT

Category	Year-To-Date	Budget-To-Date	Percentage
R21—Freewill	\$ 948.00	\$ 1,000.00	95%
R22—Pledges	\$ 4,048.00	\$ 4,750.00	85%
R23—Contributions	\$ 1,420.00	\$ 1,750.00	90%
R24-Fund Raising	\$ 420.44	\$2,500.00	16%
Capital Campaign	\$ 458.00	\$ 750.00	61%

Thru March 31

CLERK

During our first quarter of 2025 we held 11 Sunday Services from January to the end of March. There were 13 weeks during this time with 10 of those weeks being recorded. One week was not recorded, and we had two weeks with church being cancelled due to weather.

During the first quarter of 2025 we had an average attendance of 26.2, compared to in 2024 we had an average of 30.6, and 2023 an average of 18.1. Our attendance is down a little bit but if we take out Easter total of 63 in attendance last year the 2024 average falls to 27.6. So we are still having a great turnout at church considering all of the loss we have gone through.

Our church membership as of Jan 1, 2025 was 60

Additions

Affirmation 0

Transfer 0

Inactive to active 2

Deletions

Transfer 0

Death 1

Moved to inactive 0

As of the end of March our church membership was 61

Respectfully Submitted,

Andrew Greaves

Church Clerk

CHURCH COUNCIL

Church Council Report for April 2025

- Treasurer report: Bills are being caught up on and paid, balance in checkbook \$2127.29.
- Trustee Report: Banner Water tested our water and the results have been posted in the kitchen. I will be taking over snow blower and mower maintenance. Timmy Sprague has taken over as the church custodian.
- Diaconate: Supply Pastors have been set through the end of May.
- Nominating Committee: Multiple roles have been moved around and filled. Still searching for an extra deacon, and Sunday School teacher
- New/Old Business: Dates to keep in mind Spring Flea Market May 9th and 10th with a rain date the following weekend. The Duck Race will be July 12th rain or shine. The Fall Flea Market dates have changed to

September 5th and 6th with a rain date of the following weekend.

- Pastoral Search: Committee is all set and will be meeting in May to put together a profile to hand in.
- Rest Stop Fundraiser: This again took up the largest part of our meeting. We have set June 26, 27, 28 and 29 as the days for this fund raiser to be held. We will have sign up sheets in Fellowship Hall to make sure we have enough interest in doing this together as a Congregation.

These were some of the items discussed and acted on at our Council meeting on April 14th, 2025

Andrew Greaves
Moderator

T R U S T E E S

Our water was tested by Banner Water on March 25th and the results have been posted in the kitchen. These results are handed into the Board of Health for our Rest Stop and Holly Bazaar fundraisers.

Timmy Sprague has taken over duties as our church sexton. We want to thank Kara for numerous years of service cleaning our church! I will be taking over lawn mower and snow blower maintenance. Tim Sprague has agreed to be called upon if I run into any issues. Thanks Tim for your years of maintenance on our lawn equipment!

A piece of siding fell off of our church and Scott from Scotts Karpentry will be putting that back up. He will also be looking at our Parish House roof to give us an estimate on its life left and so the trustees can update our new insurance company on the state of the roof.

The Trustees have put a hold on cutting down the tree by the barn and will be focusing on the two trees in our lower lot that are dying. We hope to have them cut down before the Flea Market so there is no risk of any debris falling. The Trustees have also put on hold getting quotes on sealcoating until we talk about our finances with the Treasurer.

The Garden Commission has dressed the garden beds with new mulch but also added landscaping fabric and/or cardboard to limit any more yuca coming up. We hope to have success with this. Lisa donated two more weigelia plants to go with the two donated last year. The lilac area we will keep covered until we see if any bittersweet comes out of the stone wall. This continues to be a project that has been no cost to the church.

The Safe Conduct Committee continues to be an ad hock committee and will meet for its yearly training in the near future with Sarah heading this training.

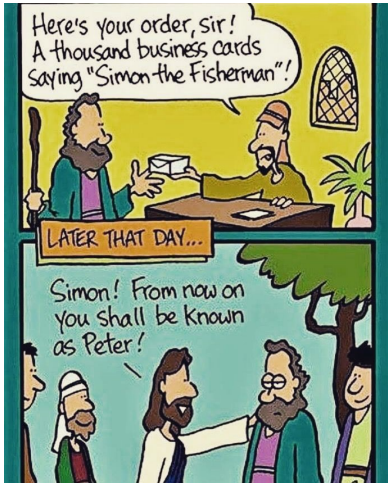
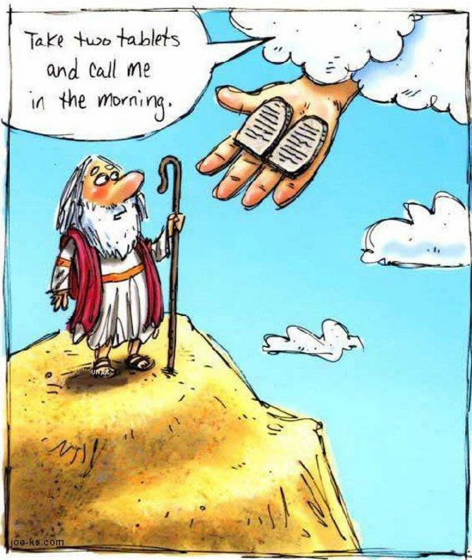
Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Greaves, Board of Trustees Chairperson

I N A N D A R O U N D T H E C H U R C H ...

Our Hearts and Prayers reach out to our Brothers and Sisters who have various needs and struggles: CONTINUED PRAYERS FOR Donna, Lucy, and Sarah ... prayers for Kathy and family ... continued prayers for Carey Crawford ... hope for Gabe Bake to feel better ... prayers to the Ladr family ... prayers for warmer weather ... health, peace, UConn ... continued prayers for Trisha and the LaRochelle family ... prayer for all who suffer with mental illness and addictions and their families ... prayers for Claire and Bertrand ... prayers for the people of the US and democracy ... prayers for Adam's recovery from shoulder surgery ... prayers for everyone else's happiness ... prayers for my son-in-law going through some health challenges again ... prayers for our Church as we go through the losses we've had—Bob, Linda and now Bruce. Give us strength to regain our strength ... prayers for world peace ... prayers for our old dog's health as we look forward to his 12th birthday ... prayers for my brother Mark who was just diagnosed with liver cancer ... prayers for my dad who will be 88 this month ... prayers for David who underwent surgery on his neck ... prayers for Aunt Laura and her chemo treatment ... prayers for Jackson and his seizure diagnosis ... prayers for Chad as he recovers from surgery ... prayers for the family that lost their husband this week after a hit and run ... prayers for my

brother Eddie Breton who entered St. Francis hospital ... special prayers for Elizabeth and her family ... prayers for Juan and his family ... prayers for Michelle ... to all that are alone in nursing homes peace and blessing to them each and every day ... God bless my children and grandchildren ... prayers for my brother John Biggerstaff in the Suffield house ... prayers for Peg Ekenbarger ... Celebrations: for my Dad celebrating his 88th birthday

A LIGHTER MOMENT. . .



BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

May Birthdays

May	5	Liam Parker
	21	Tom Hoefle
	22	Sheila Hoefle

May Anniversaries

May	16	Ellen Lancaster
	17	Ross and Lee Kerr
	19	Adam and Rosalie Starvish
	19	Andrew and Sarah Greaves

MISSIONS

I have been getting acclimated into my new role as Missions Chair. Judy Delbene and Kim Dickson have agreed to serve as committee members. I reached out to contact people from Crystal Lake Food Pantry as well as the safe Net Ministries/Food distribution center. Both these programs are very busy at this time and are fulfilling a great need in our community. The Volunteers I spoke to expressed gratitude for the help we have been providing. I purchased some collection boxes that I can label, and decided to use them instead of passing out envelopes. I felt that maybe people would feel less pressure and can just toss in 'Some money, if and when it was convenient. I will try to put them out at least a few weeks ahead of whatever the deadline is for various charities/organizations we collect for. We will see how it goes, and I will look for input from our church members as to which method they prefer.

Linda had \$40.00 ear-marked for Easter Hams for the food pantry. We were able to collect \$82.00 more from the congregation, and donated a total of 122.00, This was enough for 6 hams which was our goal. In addition, we collected 25 pounds of food which I brought to the pantry for our neighbors in need.

March had 5 Sundays, so I also took up a collection for SafeNet. This was the system Linda had in place.

We collected a total of 60.00 which I gave to Kim. The volunteer at SafeNet mentioned they were always in need of Jelly, pasta. and tomato sauce. I shared with the congregation and if any of those items are left in our bins, I will drop them off at Safenet. The next month with 5 Sundays is June; I will add the contents of this box to whatever we collect then.

We had some blankets that have been sitting in the Little Shop over the winter. They take up a lot of space and do not seem to sell very well. I decided to take them to the Paw Safe Animal rescue, which is just over the Stafford line, in Ellington CT. They are always in need of old bedding and towels for the dogs and puppies they care for.

Before the next Council meeting I am planning on reaching out to Stafford Human Services to discuss what our church has helped them with in the past and see what their immediate and future needs may be. I will also have my eyes and ears open for any other needs/opportunities to help that may arise in our town.

Respectfully,
Michele Sedor. Chair

SPRING FLEA MARKET

Our Spring Flea Market will be Friday May 9th and Saturday May 10th from 9 am to 3 pm. I ask all volunteers involved with any set-up to be there at 8:30 am or earlier. The regular vendors have all been called, and all duties have been handed out to the volunteers. I am looking for another Barn volunteer and a volunteer to work Friday in the Little Shop and Saturday in the Little Shop. Please consider helping out in these areas. I am also looking for bakers! Baking is a huge part of our success at this event. I ask for ingredients to be included with your baked goods, either printed out or cut out of the box if you're doing box made. I hope for a successful event, and thank you everyone for your help and support after the loss of Linda. She has huge shoes to fill. If you know anyone who is interested in renting a space please have them call me at 860-716-7057.

Thank you!!

LIGHTING OF THE CROSS FOR MAY

In loving memory of **Barbara Kellem** from Roy, Linda and Judy

In memory of **Frances Barton** from Millie

In loving memory of **Anne Shapera**, **Linda Sprague** and **Barbara Kellem** from John and Judy DelBene

In loving memory of our husband and dad - **Edward Breton** by Carol and his family

In memory of **Bruce Ladr**. We miss you! Bill and Janice Gowdy

In memory of **Linda Sprague** and **Bruce Ladr** by Linda and Ken May

PULPIT SUPPLY FOR MAY

May 4th—Rev. Carrie Bail

May 11th—Sarah Roman Greaves

May 18th—Rev. Carrie Bail

May 25th—TBD

FLORENCE DEMARS

I received an e-mail from Ross Kerr stating that Florence Demars has been moved from her previous room to the memory care unit. This means that she no longer has a private phone so the only means of contacting her is by mail through her son David, and she may no longer know who you are.

S A V E T H E S E D A T E S

May 9 - 10 — Spring Flea Market

June 26 - 29 — Rest Stop

July 12 — Duck Race

September 5 - 6 — Fall Flea Market

November 15 — Holly Bazaar

D U C K R A C E

Our Annual Duck Race will be held on Saturday July 12. Festivities will begin at noon with the race being held at 1 PM. Tickets will be available in June. We need donations for the prizes. If you know of a local business that would be willing to donate a gift card please reach out to them. If you need other prize suggestions see Kim. We will need baked goods . More info to be available soon . If you have questions please call Kim at 413-374-3247 and leave a message. Thanks!

H O L L Y B A Z A A R

Just a reminder, the Holly Bazaar will be held November 15 from 9 AM until 2 PM. I will be holding a volunteer meeting in August. Any questions, call Kim at 413-374-3247.

H I S T O R I A N

Hi everyone,

An update on two long-term projects:

Research into our history of our church, 1900s to present day, has continued! There is always more history to uncover, and I am grateful for the work of past historians which has made this project possible.

On my other "final project" before handing the reigns to Stefan: I have been researching past pastors of our church, with the intention to display pictures of them together, with quotes (if able to find them) for each pastor, from pastor sermons and services. I have found, so far, that interim pastors have not always been properly noted (or even included in our timelines, in some cases, while others have been included!). I am looking to remedy this as I go through our archives and come across inaccuracies. A few dates have been inaccurate, and I seek to correct those in the records.

If there is anyone who might have a picture of a prior pastor of our church, please let me know. I have some already from our historian room. I would need clear pictures of the following people for this project - other pastors, I have plenty of pictures of and do not require more:

Reverend Stuart Charter (interim 2011-2012), Rev Alice O' Donovan (interim 2004-2007), Rev Howard Cramer (1985-1988), Rev Arthur R Orth (1962-1964), Rev Don E Stanley (1960-1962). With each of these pastors, I am finding quotes from past services to include with their picture. The majority of these pastors are no longer with us, and I hope to encourage a spirit of appreciation for each of the people who have shepherded this congregation, throughout the years.

Sincerely submitted,

Sarah R.G.
Historian

May 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednes- day	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	4 Little Shop 10 - 2
4 Worship Service 9:30 AM Search Committee - 11 AM	5	6	7	8	9 SPRING FLEA MARKET	10 Little Shop 10 - 2 SPRING FLEA MARKET
11 Worship Service 9:30 AM	12	13	14	15	16	17 Little Shop 10 - 2
18 Worship Service 9:30 AM Food Bank Sunday Church Council - 11 AM	19	20	21	22	23	24 Little Shop 10 - 2
25 Worship Service 9:30 AM	26 - Memorial Day	27	28	29	30	31 Little Shop 10 - 2