Please join us for worship this September!

Outdoors and Virtual

September 5th
10 a.m. — **Outdoor Worship**
Also available via [Virtual Church]**
Rev. George Harris, preaching

September 12th
10 a.m. — **Outdoor Worship**
Also available via [Virtual Church]**
Rev. George Harris, preaching

September 19th
**Mission Trip Sharing Service**
10 a.m. — **Outdoor Worship**
Also available via [Virtual Church]**
Rev. Kevin Weikel, preaching

September 26th
10 a.m. — **Outdoor Worship**
Also available via [Virtual Church]**
Rev. George Harris, preaching

** Livestreamed worship will also still be offered via Facebook Live**
Many of you have heard that I will begin a three-month sabbatical leave on October 1st and return on January 1st.

Our First Church Personnel Policies & Procedures Manual grants full-time, ordained staff, three months of sabbatical leave after five years of employment (I completed my fifth year as your Senior Minister on January 6th of this year). What a blessing; thank you in advance. The manual continues, “Such leave may be taken in the form of structured courses, conferences, travel, or such other form of study and renewal as the individual may wish.” A sabbatical is all about study and renewal.

A couple people have remarked, “Gosh, I wish my job included sabbatical leave.” Me too! It seems to me that everyone deserves time set aside for study and renewal, and I understand that such sabbatical provisions are becoming more common beyond just academia and ministry. That said, I do think there are a couple aspects of ministry that make a periodic sabbatical especially helpful.

I preach about forty Sundays a year (Rev. Weikel prepares a comparable number of Sundays for the youth, while also preaching once a month). Just as professors take sabbatical to keep current in their field, so ministers benefit by having an opportunity to enter more deeply into their faith and call. We have all seen professors who dust off the same lesson plan year after year, and preachers who trot out the same old jokes and sermon illustrations. I don’t want to be that preacher!

And, although ministers have scheduled days off and regular vacation time, it is also true that a minister is always on duty. Not only do we receive calls at all hours, a quick trip to Fitzgerald’s, while a sweaty mess from mowing my lawn, can turn into an unplanned conversation with a member about, well, just about anything. I am NOT complaining. I love being “Pastor George” 24/7; I wouldn’t have it any other way, and, after five years, an extended leave to renew and replenish is most welcome. Remember, the root of the word sabbatical is sabbath.

Study and renewal. So, what will that look like.

I am working on a book (more information on Page 9). When home, I plan to spend five hours a day at a Hartford area library researching and writing. I will be participating in a Writers’ Week with Pilgrim Press, and will make four, week-long trips to complete additional research and writing.

And yes, there will also be time for renewal. On Sundays, I will be practicing at White Lotus Zen Haven of Connecticut, in Collinsville. There will be morning walks with Lourdes, day trips here and there, and Thanksgiving week with my mother and brother’s family in Baltimore. Then, after a final week of research and writing in Honolulu, Lourdes and Abby will join me in Hawaii for one last week of relaxation.

Continued on Page 10
From The Desk of Rev. Kevin Weikel

The 2021 Youth Summer Mission Trip took place last month, from August 6-15, 2021. After having to cancel last year’s trip to St. Louis due to COVID-19, we returned to the site of the 2019 trip, Appalachian South Folklife Center (ASFC) in Pipestem, West Virginia.

What sets ASFC apart and makes them unique as a mission trip site is that they are local in every sense of the word. Some mission trip organizations have a headquarters located in one geographical area and send employees out to oversee trips in many locations. As a result, there can be a disconnect between the work and the people and community. At ASFC, what you see is what you get. They have one location, a beautiful summer camp-like grounds where we stay, and their Board of Directors all live in town.

ASFC commits to hiring local carpenters who care deeply about their community, and they treat their carpenters well, having committed to pay them $15 an hour when they could get away with paying them much less. Greg, one of their carpenters who spent the week with us, said it's by far the most he has ever made per hour.

Youth Advisor Evan Gross said upon reflecting on the journey, "It's the kind of organization you just want to support." Due to COVID, ASFC hosted only six groups instead of their typical 30 this year. They are struggling financially. Therefore, our youth advisory team voted that ½ of this year’s Pumpkin Patch proceeds will go toward the ministry of ASFC.

I want to share the scene of our last day on the job at our homeowner, Ms. Belle's house. Upon finishing our work, Ms. Belle and her fiancé, Tony, thanked us for our time and work. Tony shared a prayer thanking God that we spent the week working on their home, and with tears in his eyes, asked God for our protection on our drive home.

Carpenter Greg shed a tear as well, telling us that he brought his 10-year-old granddaughter Paige with him for most of the week to the worksite because he wanted Paige to be around such "kind and thoughtful youth, so she could grow up to be just like them." My typing about this does little to convey the emotions that Tony's prayer and Greg's words brought to each of us.

We did a lot of work to Ms. Belle's home, repairing leaks by fixing the outside wood rot and flashing. We sealed the house with paint. But we didn't have time to do much-needed work on her kitchen. That would have been the next project for the incoming group. However, no groups were coming after us, at least for now, and they won't be able to hire someone to do the work.

When I asked Ms. Belle how she will get by without an oven and stovetop, she said, "You don't understand. One week ago, I was worried about outside of my house – all the wood rot – and how I would seal it up. And God sent you guys. And I know, whatever it is, when I need it most, God will provide. I'm not worried. I'm grateful." I brought these words home with me and made a point to think about them every day.

Continued on Page 11
Musical Notes

So here we are. We all knew fall was coming, and yet, somehow, speaking for myself, I’m not as prepared as I thought I would be. I think that it has to do with the idea that, despite thinking we were going to be back to normal by now, we in fact are not. Here we are, walking down that path to what we thought was going to be a more normal place, and, Bammo! Blindsided by Delta. So once again, we can make plans but have to be ready to change at a moment’s notice. So Plans A, B, C and sometimes D – here we come!

Being in a situation like the band I am in, where musically I have to react to the moment, be ready to improvise in front of God and everybody, and really pay attention to what others are doing; this way of thinking has become somewhat the norm. And there is stimulation and creativity in having to entertain the possibility of changing course, and figuring out how to make it all work from there. It’s all a moving target, and just when you think you have a bead on it, it moves again. Really, nothing in life is certain – that fact is becoming more and more evident to me.

There are some plans, though. We are having a parking lot tailgate reception for all those involved in music, and all those interested in music – now moved to Tuesday September the 7th at 6:30 because of Ida. Again with the plan changes… But this will be for everyone. If you like listening to what we’re doing on any given day, come and be with us. It won’t be recruitment - it’ll be a party. You all know I love talking music with everyone about all of it. Come!!

But then, I would like to start rehearsing on Wednesday the 15th, and Thursday the 16th; Women’s choir on Wednesday at our usual rehearsal time of 4 PM, but in the parking lot, and bells and Chancel Choir on Thursday. Men’s Choir will start up as soon as we can get the whole idea of an outdoor rehearsal under control – probably the following week, and we will see what happens as the weather gets cooler. Again, there’s that playing by ear thing.

Christmas is coming, and I am going on the assumption that we will have Christmas services and concerts as usual. Christmas Eve is a huge event here, and our preparation can’t be encumbered by some little old virus. So we’ll start learning the music now, and believe me, we will be actually singing it in a service it in some form or another. If Jesus can be born in a stable (not Mary’s plan A, I’m pretty sure), we can make adjustments to our rehearsals… I mean… a stable. How could it get any worse?

We will still be learning Sunday anthems, but there will be some that will be recorded and have our wonderful faces on the video screen, if we are not able to sing in public…The is going to be one of the beauties of our new AV system. We will also have some soloists record themselves, as well as some instrumentalists, along with playing or singing live. It’s a win/win. And again, in some of these cases, you don’t have to leave home. I will keep you appraised, and, if you have any ideas, we can talk next Tuesday!

So welcome back! The church will be beautiful – everything updated – the parking lot smooth, and we will have so much more technologically speaking, to help us out on Sundays.

If you have a hankering to be a part of the technology, let me know –talk with me as soon as you can. It’s pretty darn interesting!

So happy fall. The leaves will turn, the weather will get crisper, the pumpkins will arrive down by the lower parking lot; and we will start thinking turkey and cranberries and sweaters. It’s a beautiful time of year. Thank you, God.

With love and in Christ’s spirit -Mark
A Message from Jessica Wolanin

If you go into any store during the month of August, it is a mixture of Back to School supplies and fall decorations. I’ve always loved this transition, as a teacher, because it meant that I was getting back into the swing of things. My son, Grayson, loves fall so when those pumpkins and skeletons start to hit the aisles, he gets so excited to see what he can find to add to our decoration collection. August also brings the start of signing up for activities and buying all of the different necessities for those activities. One of those activities that you can (and we hope you will!) sign up for, is the program for children here at our church.

Click here to register!

Children’s Program:

This year in the Children’s Program we have so many fun, new and old, and exciting events planned! Let’s start off with the Sunday morning curriculum. During the month of September and into October we will be holding Church School outside in the Memorial Garden. Children will join their favorite Space Ranger and Cowboy as we learn all about how much God loves us using people from the Bible and characters from Toy Story! In October we will return to our Church School classrooms to “Dig into the Bible.” The students will begin learning about the Bible basics, the format of the Bible, how the Bible began as an oral tradition passed from generation to generation, and the sequence of events in the Bible using the “Bible in 50 words.” At the culmination of this unit, children will receive their own Bible.

Church School Activities:

Outside of our Sunday morning lessons, we will have an array of activities offered for the children at First Church! Check out all of the upcoming events this fall!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pool Party</th>
<th>Christmas Kid’s Night Out</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Hosted by the Caponetti Family</em></td>
<td><em>Friday, December 10th</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saturday, September 11th</strong></td>
<td><strong>5-8 p.m.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2-4 p.m.</td>
<td>Drop your kids off! We will have pizza, create ornaments, play some games, and finish off with watching a movie!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be sure to bring your bathing suit and a towel!</td>
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From the pool to Christmas, we have so many fun events planned for your children! Be sure to check your emails for updates regarding these events and others to come!

Continued on Page 10
Children’s Ministry News
Grow your heart at First Church

Outdoor Worship this Sunday!

Join us for Outdoor Church School this Sunday, September 5th! We will meet prior to worship in the Memorial Garden for the Bible Story, an activity, and a snack. Children will return to their families after the sermon. We can’t wait to see you!

Register for Church School!

Please be sure to register for Church School for 2021-2022 so your child(ren) can participate in all the fun activities we have planned! We can’t wait to see you and your families!

Click here to register!

Pre-Confirmation Classes

Join us for Pre-Confirmation classes each Sunday during worship! We will meet at the lemonade table to gather as a group. There will be games, an activity, conversation, and of course SNACKS! We will return to our families after the sermon!
First Church Youth and Young Adults

*All youth meetings will take place at Town Forest Park (86 Town Forest Rd.) until church renovations are complete in mid-October.

**Junior Fellowship (all 6th through 8th graders welcome!)**
- Sunday, September 12, 4-5:30pm at Town Forest Park.

**Pilgrim Fellowship (all 9th through 12th graders welcome!)**
- Saturday, September 11th, Kidnap the Freshmen (and sophomores): Email Rev Kev at kweikel@fccsimsbury.org for more information and to sign up.
- Sunday, September 19th, 10am: 2021 West Virginia Youth Summer Mission Trip Sharing Service.
- Sunday, September 19th, 6-7:30pm at Town Forest Park
- Sunday, September 26th, 6-7:30pm at Town Forest Park

**Confirmation**
- Wednesday, September 22, 5-6pm at Town Forest Park: Confirmation Information Meeting. [Sign up here.](https://fccsimsbury.org/confirmation) To Register for Confirmation here: [https://fccsimsbury.org/confirmation](https://fccsimsbury.org/confirmation)
- Friday, October 1, Confirmation Registration Closes.

**Pumpkin Patch**
1/2 of the proceeds will benefit the ministry of Appalachian South Folklife Center in Pipestem West Virginia, with the other half benefiting the 2022 Youth Summer Mission Trip (Destination TBD).
Youth, parents, and church members and friends of all ages are invited to sign up for time slots to help. [Sign up here.](https://fccsimsbury.org/confirmation)

**Photos from the Summer 2021 Mission Trip to Pipestem, WV**
Moving Help Needed!

It's time to move back to our offices!!! On September 15th, 16th, and 17th, we will need all the help we can get to unload storage units and get the First Church staff back into their offices. Please sign up below if you are able to help on any (or all) of these days!

Click here to sign up!

Sunday Morning Bible Study-New Series!
The Sunday Morning Bible Study Group invites you to join us in our alternating discussions of books from the bible and books about applying our faith. We are currently discussing the book Jesus and the Disinherited by Howard Thurman. Thurman's book is known to have been a source of inspiration to Martin Luther King Jr. and will challenge us to live out the gospel as a call to care for the poor and disenfranchised. We meet via Zoom each Sunday at 8:30 a.m. All are welcome and feel free to join at any time. To receive a link to each session, contact Mark Scully at mwscully29@gmail.com.

A Note from the Church Office
With construction underway, please note that church office hours may vary as we try to stay out of the way. If you need to come in to the building, please call the office ahead of time to ensure a staff member will be in. If we are not available to take your call, please leave a message on the main voicemail, and one of us will return your call as soon as we can.

Feel free to email Tom Polizzi or Shannon Lindsay with any questions, or to make an appointment. Thank you for your flexibility!

Wednesday Bible Study
Feeling a bit stir crazy and want to get studious?
Join Rev. George Harris in a virtual Lectionary Bible Study on Zoom! We will meet on Wednesdays at 10 a.m.
To join the meeting this Wednesday, click here!

Women's Ministries Group Walk
Please join us for a lovely walk and a chance to be together. We meet every Tuesday at 9:00 a.m. in the parking lot behind Fitzgerald's along Iron Horse Boulevard. No sign-ups or RSVP needed. Just come and bring a friend!
Pastor George Sabbatical Donations

As you know, Pastor George will be taking a well-earned and overdue sabbatical in October thru December. This is intended to give him uninterrupted time to pursue a project he is interested in; refresh his approach to ministry via reading, visiting other places of worship and being in dialogue with his peers; spend more time with family and generally ‘recharge his batteries”, relax and have some fun.

With this in mind, Pastor George has plans to commit a large portion of his time to researching further and writing a book he is calling “In Plain Sight”. Below, in his words, is a summary of why he feels compelled to write this book and what it will include.

Pastor George is paid during his sabbatical and receives a small expense allowance to defray some of the costs incurred during the above activities. In the past, in order to provide some additional discretionary money, members of the congregation have made donations that are then given to the minister at the start of his sabbatical. We would like to do this again.

If you would like to contribute, please send your donation to Shannon Lindsay at the church. Please note that it is for Pastor George’s Sabbatical. We will plan to give this to him on Sunday, September 19th so please send in your donation by September 13th.

Click here to give online

Select Pastor George Sabbatical from the dropdown menu

In Plain Sight: Pastor George Book Info

At First Church, we have a wonderful story to tell. When he was nineteen years old and working in Simsbury tobacco fields to earn money for college, Martin Luther King, Jr. attended our church, and was invited up to the balcony to sing with the summer choir. The choir director famously responded to critics in the church, “I don’t care about the color of his skin as long as he can sing!”

I first heard this story when I met with the search committee to explore my call to ministry at First Church, and I have retold the story many times since. But just a couple years ago, I learned other, less flattering stories from our church’s history. One of our former ministers, Rev. Timothy Woodbridge, was Simsbury’s first slave owner, and another prominent member, Andrew Robe, also owned a slave.

The fact that our MLK story is so beloved and oft repeated while these other stories of enslavers and enslaved are largely unknown to the congregation made me curious, and I began to google. Within twenty-four hours, I discovered previously unknown stories of significant acts of racism, “in plain sight,” in every place my Harris ancestors and I have lived.

And so was born the idea for a book, In Plain Sight: One White Man’s Story of Living with Antiblack Racism – with the closing phrase subject to change by me or a publisher.

My great-great-great-great aunt Hannah was the largest slave owner in Newtown, Pennsylvania. I was a child in Hamden, Connecticut during the Black Panther trials in New Haven. Harold Green, an NAACP organizer from Brevard County, Florida, where I grew up, was murdered with a bomb placed under his house. These stories are just a Google search away, but were little known to me and the white people who live in these places. I suggest that this is no accident. White people are able to tell stories and organize their lives in ways that flatter them, and so, remain ignorant of racism “in plain sight.”

Each chapter of the book is set in a place my ancestors and I have lived, and will begin with the story of a heroic, if less well-known, black person from that time and/or place. Then, responding to that black, justice-seekers life, I will share stories from my own life in that time and place, revealing ways I learned to ignore and justify the racism all around me. In response, I hope readers, especially white readers, will open their eyes to the presence and impact of racism in their lives and feel empowered to tell their own stories in response.

I have a draft of four chapters and hope to make significant progress during my sabbatical. During my sabbatical I will return to some of the places I have lived to do more research, including the Philadelphia Main Line, Brevard County, Florida, New Orleans, and Honolulu. I hope to structure my days so I can work up to six hours a day on the book. I have attended a book proposal workshop offered by the Pilgrim Press and hope to submit the book to publishers next year.
**Pastor Pondering (continued from Page 2)**

And while I am gone?

First Church will be busy! We will return to our beautiful, new building, including worship in the sanctuary, beginning Sunday, October 17th; we will continue to navigate the ever-changing COVID landscape; and we will draw upon the excitement of our return in our annual stewardship campaign. Rev. Weikel will provide strong, inspired leadership throughout, as will other staff and lay leadership.

I will work to be disciplined about maintaining my boundaries, not functioning as Pastor George during this time, and I kindly ask you to respect these boundaries as well. Important decisions should not be delayed until my return, nor should there be undue consideration given to what Pastor George would do in any given situation. We have an extraordinarily capable church, and I trust you in my absence.

I am already looking forward to a joyful return in the new year.

In Christ,
Pastor George

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**A Message From Jessica Wolanin (continued from Page 5)**

**Motherhood with Mary:**

It’s been a very difficult past year and half for all of us. I am sure that the return to church brings some anxiety and much excitement for each of you. Please know that all of us here at First Church have missed you, care about you and will do all that we can to provide support to your family as we rejoin one another in faith. One way we are hoping to provide some support to families is by offering a *Motherhood with Mary* small group for parents. In this group, we will meet regularly to provide fellowship, support, and belonging while also using this opportunity to grow deeper in our faith. Our first meeting will be on Thursday, October 7th at 6 p.m. at Ironhorse Pizza and Pub. All parents; expecting, new and veteran; are welcome to attend! [Please RSVP here](#)

I am so looking forward to connecting with each of you as we move into the fall. There is so much that First Church, Simsbury offers and we hope that you will find that you feel a sense of belonging in any number of the activities here! So come, join us for a worship service or a children’s lesson on a Sunday morning… Sit in on a Bible study group or drop your children off at a Kid’s Night Out… Join the choir or join the walking group… We invite you to join us this fall. We’ve missed you and hope that you and your families will continue to grow in faith with us at First Church!

Many blessings,
Jessica Wolanin

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**Capital Campaign Payments**

When writing a check towards the Capital Campaign, please clearly mark in the memo line “*Capital Campaign.*”

If you choose to have your payments made via your bank web bill pay, it is important the check makes mention of the *Capital Campaign*. Failure to do so, may lead to donations being posted toward an incorrect fund.

If you have further questions, please contact Shannon Lindsay in the office at (860) 651-3593 or email slindsay@fcssimsbury.org.
From The Desk of Rev. Kevin Weikel (continued from Page 3)

Since returning from the trip, I've spent much of my time planning the youth program for the 2021-2022 program year before Pastor George heads off for his sabbatical on October 1st. During his sabbatical, I will hand the various groups over to Evan Gross and MacKenzie DuBois (PF), Jessica Wolanin and Annie Petitti (JF), and Mark Scully (Confirmation), so that I can focus on other aspects of the church.

On October 1st, my focus will be on weekly preaching, calls and visits (with some help from Rev. Gay Godfrey), and our move back into the building after renovations. Church President Carol Pollack and I are also working to form a "COVID Response Team," compiled of church representatives from every aspect of church and professional life (doctors, teachers, etc.) to help make decisions in response to the Delta Variant. In addition, I am mindful of the importance of this year's Stewardship initiative. I am grateful to the Stewardship Chair John Burrows and the Board for the planning that has already begun for this year's campaign.

These are exciting times at First Church as we move back into a beautifully renovated church sanctuary and building and gather for worship for the first time since March 2020. I look forward to writing more about all of this next month. Until then, blessings to each of you this September. May each of us consider the divine in one another as we navigate this busy and anxious time of year. May we remember that we are not alone. Christ walks with us each day.

Peace to you,
Kevin

Youth Room Renovation

Plans to renovate the Youth Room shifted when Bricks and Mortal campaign funds were needed in other areas of the church. Therefore, we used some donated youth funds for materials and did the work to renovate the room ourselves. With the help of Megan Schuck, we compiled a design team and came up with colors for paint and couches. The mission trip primed our youth for the work. Together, we are installing a more "youthy" looking ceiling. I am grateful to the youth and youth advisors who volunteered their time. Of particular mention are Megan Schuck, Steve Novy, Gary Caponetti, MacKenzie DuBois, Evan Gross, Abby Ritson, Andrew Hart and Jay Callahan.
Status—Financial Review Committees

Background
During our financial meeting earlier this year, we noted that the 2021 Budget reflected a deficit of $46,170 due to lower-than-normal pledge income and reduced revenue from other sources such as rental income and loose offerings collected at in-person worship. We indicated that we felt this shortfall was primarily due to COVID, so we asked that the deficit be funded by a draw from the endowment. This was approved.

At this same time, we committed to reviewing 2021 expenses in more detail to see if additional reductions could be found. We also said we would convene a group to look at long-term revenue and expenses in order to define a sustainable budget.

2021 Expense Review
Lead by our Treasurer Erik Barrows and Nick Czuchta, this group reviewed all budget line items and examined existing expense reserve accounts. Based on their work, specific cost reductions of $900 were found. In addition, it was decided to use $8,814 of reserves to further reduce 2021 expenses.

This group also reviewed budgeted income and it was determined estimated Pledge Income was too high so expected income was reduced by $14,000. This was offset by $12,500 in additional pledge income collected during the stimulus appeal.

The net result of the above was a deficit of $37,956, $8,214 less than previously thought.

Rita King, a member of the Board of Finance, noted that First Church might qualify for additional payments from the federal COVID relief programs through the Employee Retention Credit program. Shannon Lindsay completed the work required to claim this credit. If approved, we could receive up to $37,000. A final decision is expected in the fall.

Sustainable Budgets
Two groups have been meeting to look at revenue and expenses for 2022 – 2025. They are projecting net income or expense for these years assuming a continuation of current patterns, adjusted for inflation and any known future activity. It is anticipated that this will reflect large deficits for all periods. To address this, revenue and expense sub-committees are working to identify ways to increase revenue, do the church’s work differently and decrease spending. In support of this, they are examining the sources of revenue and the actions needed to grow this. Within expenses, they are reviewing what activities are supported, how much each costs, and opportunities to do these functions differently and at a lower cost. These alternatives are not easy to develop and some of them would drastically change select activities of the church as we currently know them.
The following are the sub-committee chairs:

**Expense**

**Co-chairs:**
- Marguerite Boslaugh
- Chris Morkan

**Revenue**

**Co-chairs:**
- Tim Abbuhl
- Jim Trimble

**Expense Committee**

An analysis was performed of the total cost for major activities of the church (staffing costs as well as direct expenses.) For 2021, the budget is allocated 19% for Mission and Outreach, 16% for Worship, 14% for Church School/Youth/Young Adults, 12% for Music, 8% for Pastoral Care and 31% for Buildings and Grounds.

Each activity and the underlying expense categories were reviewed to assess if any could be eliminated, reduced, or done in a less costly manner. A wide variety of savings opportunities were developed but any major savings would require significant reductions to programs and/or staffing, which the group does not recommend at this time.

Instead, the group recommends an especially robust stewardship campaign be conducted for 2022, including education on the costs associated with the current level of church programs. With a greater understanding of the cost of the good work being done (as well as some relief from COVID, a return to in-person worship and a renovated building, a significant increase from 2021 pledges may be possible.

If pledge levels remain below those needed to cover our costs, this group will re-convene with the Board of Finance to discuss potential program cuts needed for 2023 and beyond. Any 2022 deficit would again be funded from the endowment in order to provide sufficient time for program identification and implementation.

**Revenue Committee**

This group reviewed historical patterns for pledge income and analyzed giving by various categories of church membership. The conclusion was that future proceeds from pledge income will need to exceed pre-COVID levels in order to cover expected expenses. Several suggestions have been given to the Stewardship Committee to potentially lead to higher giving. In addition, ideas for growing membership were generated and will be shared with the Executive Committee (EC) in September in order to assess how these might be put in place.

Other income components were also analyzed. It was determined that there may be ways to increase many of these, post COVID constraints. These ideas will also be discussed with EC in September. These increases will be helpful but will not eliminate the projected deficit.
PLEDGE INCOME

We are excited to report that we are in excellent shape with respect to the collection of our capital campaign pledges. As we approach the 18-month mark since the end of the campaign in February 2020, we have collected $2,550,568 (68% of the total pledged amount of $3,724,780). We have received payments from 176 out of the 204 pledgers thus far, with only 27 pledgers (representing $102,648) not yet contributing. Another positive note is that we have received full payment of pledges from 61 members and friends representing $1,036,820.

Because we have received these funds so quickly, we have not had to draw down on our construction loan to fund the projects that have already taken place, thereby avoiding any interest charges at this time.

On behalf of First Church, we thank all of you for your past and continued generosity. Without your commitment and love for First Church, we would not be where we are today.

The Bricks & Mortals Follow-up Committee, under the leadership of Mario Chiappetti, continues to monitor pledges and payments. If any of you would like to make a new pledge or increase your pledge, or if any of you have concerns about being able to honor your previous pledge, please do not hesitate to contact either Pastor George or Mario.

BRICKS & MORTALS

Construction Activities

Since our last update in May, the activity around the church has been intense! Under the strong leadership and watchful eyes of Kris Barnett and Kathy Wildman, our General Contractor, Margison, has undertaken work in nearly every part of the building and grounds. Some of the things that have been accomplished include:

- New heating and cooling in Palmer Hall
- Site improvements including improved drainage around the building, removal of sidewalks in the lower parking lot in preparation for new sidewalks to be installed, new and added lighting around the entire property and repairs to the exterior of the building around the horseshoe and the stair tower
- Significant renovation of all restrooms, with some expansion
- Installation of a new security system for the building
- Initial installation of a new audio-visual system in the Sanctuary
- New ceilings being installed in the horseshoe, Palmer Hall and some corridors
- New heating in the office and 2nd floor entry way
- Removal of all flooring in Palmer Hall, the stairways, the office and Horseshoe, the sanctuary and narthex and all church common areas in preparation for new materials
- In these same areas, walls have been prepared for painting
- In the sanctuary, scaffolding was installed to allow for work on replacing the sprinklers, the ceiling, lighting and hard to reach surfaces. The scaffolding has recently come down and all of the sanctuary trim has been repainted.

A grant from The Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office for $67,500 has been approved to defray a portion of the costs associated with the refurbishment of the sanctuary’s historical windows. They will be removed over the next month and sent to the vendors where the repairs and cleaning will be done. This work will extend into December, so we will be relying on the storm windows until they are returned.
On the outside, in addition to the site improvements, stairway railings have been removed so new concrete stairs can be built and new railings installed, a new handicap ramp with a new railing was put in place outside of the Parlor entrance, wood damaged by water was replaced and various column masonry work on the horseshoe wing and stair tower were repaired. Next steps include repair of the blue stone steps at the Parlor and Meetinghouse entrances.

New signage for the interior of the building and for placement at our outside entrances has been finalized. Cynthia Yoczik has been busy taking pictures of all of this work. Some of the more dramatic activities are portrayed in the photos accessible through the link below. We plan to incorporate these photos into a slide show that will be available on the website in the future and when we return to church.

*Click here to view construction pictures.*

Significant changes to the church will be more visible over the next two months as new flooring is laid, painting throughout is completed and the sanctuary is returned to its previous configuration, including newly painted pews. On the outside, new stairs and ramps will be completed, the upper parking lot will get an upgrade and the lower parking lot will be repaved.

**Finances**

To date, the vast majority of the projects completed have been at or near projected costs. Added steps were necessary in a couple areas but the incremental costs were covered by contingency budgets.

All work to date has been funded from pledge proceeds already received. With significant work scheduled in the next 6-8 weeks, we expect to have to draw from our construction loan beginning in October since total pledge payments are not due until the end of 2022. We are minimizing the size of the draw by temporarily deferring any projects or purchases that are not needed to reopen the church.

**Timeline**

As you have heard, or experienced, the environment for procurement of building supplies is very challenging. Margison, along with our team, has managed this extremely well but some delays are inevitable. The largest issues coming out of the supply chain issues have been the availability of gutters and interior and exterior doors. We continue to monitor the situation very closely with our construction manager, but expect that receipt of some of these materials may continue past our reopening.

Current estimates put completion of work on all major parts of the church at October 5th. Following this, some deep cleaning and reorganizing will need to be done throughout the building. This suggests a return to in-person worship on October 17th. These are our best estimates and could change. We will keep you posted.

**Outreach to Members and Friends**

For many of us it will be nearly 19 months since we have worshipped together in person. To ensure that you are informed about the reopening and the status of other church activities and to maximize the benefits from worship, Amber Abbuhl and Rob Cushman are organizing a group of church members to call all members and friends to welcome you back, talk with you about your worship and pastoral needs and inform you of key dates and activities for First Church. These calls will be starting as soon as there is more certainty about the reopening schedule. Be sure to answer the phone or return their message so we can bring you up to speed and receive your input.
The Friendship Center at St. Elizabeth House
Breakfast Volunteers Are Needed!

Please join us as we prepare and serve breakfast on the third Tuesday, each month, from 7-9 a.m. at The Friendship Center at St. Elizabeth House.

The Friendship Center at St. Elizabeth House is a shelter and facility that supports homeless people and those at risk for homelessness in downtown Hartford.

[Click here to sign up!]