

The Bell Rope

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH OF VERONA, NJ
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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President's Column

Several times this Christmas, we used this poem or the Christmas hymn that is based on it to help us understand the meaning of Christmas for us today.

The Work of Christmas *by Howard Thurman*

**When the star in the sky is gone,
When the Kings and Princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins.
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry
To release the prisoner,
To teach the nations,
To bring Christ to all,
To make music in the heart.**

Friends, now that the Christmas decorations are packed away, we need to get serious about the work of Christmas. We all want our church to thrive and grow. An article on the next page presents some recent research findings about how growing congregations differ from others. It is very informative and I hope you read it. But the most important thing about church growth is that it begins, not with the desire for new members, but with a passion to do the work of Christmas – to find the lost, to heal the broken, to bring Christ to all.

This is nothing new, and nothing new to our church. We DO welcome the lost and lonely, feed the hungry and teach the nations. We try to bring Christ to all.

But we need to rededicate ourselves to these tasks. We need to get better at it, raise our visibility, get our message out, not only to Verona, but also to the greater West Essex area. Although many people in our communities claim church membership, they do not necessarily attend, or even if they do, they may not feel welcome or that their spiritual needs are being met. And a whole generation of young adults has not been in church since they were children. They could find a welcome here, but only if they know we exist. We have work to do!

See you in church!

Marge

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What Should We Do Next?

On Sunday, January 29, the Church Council invites you to an Evangelism Planning Idea-Fest. We need your help as we seek to find ways to spread the word in Verona and the rest of West Essex that we welcome people to our faith family “whoever they are, wherever they are in life’s journey,” and that we have resources to help them in their faith journeys as well.

After a light lunch/coffee hour, we will hold a brain-storming session. Council has been gathering ideas --from an Evangelism conference Marge Royle attended in November, from Council discussions in the last few months, from the internet and other sources. Now we need your wisdom. What ideas can you share? What new ideas will you have after hearing some of these? Which ones do you think would work well in Verona and West Essex? Which do you think are within our energy level and resources? Which ones excite you? What should we do next? Please plan to attend and sign up on the table in the Founders Room for this important planning event.

Food + Fun + Mission = Souper Bowl



February 5 is Super Bowl Sunday, or as we celebrate it, Souper Bowl Sunday. On this Sunday, along with congregations across the country, we will collect cash and food donations to be given

to the Montclair Human Needs Pantry to help feed the hungry in our community. In our own special style, following church (but before the big game) we will have a Souper Luncheon, with soups made by several of our church’s Souper Chefs. Please sign up at the table in the Founders’ Room to bring or to eat soup, and plan to be in on the fun.

How Do Churches Grow?

A new report on church growth, just published by the FACT2010 study, a national, interfaith study of congregations, provides some clues about what churches are growing and why.

Location is important. Congregations located in the South or in downtown or central city neighborhoods of metropolitan areas, as well as those in newer suburbs were more likely to grow in recent years.

New congregations are more likely to grow than are those with a longer history.

If a congregation has a **significant percentage of ethnic minorities** or is predominantly made up of an ethnic minority it is more likely to grow.

Youth is a key factor. Congregations in which people over 50 make up 30 percent or less of the active participants are most likely to have growth.

Congregations with **a clear sense of mission and purpose** and those who are "spiritually vital and alive" are more likely to grow.

Congregations that are willing to try new things in worship, such as having **a contemporary worship style**, electric guitars, drums, projectors and an "innovative" approach to worship are more likely to be growing, and, especially, attracting younger people.

Congregations that **reach out to newcomers** by conducting special events designed to be comfortable and interesting to non-members, such as parenting and marriage enrichment groups, and by following up when people visit are more likely to be growing.

In growing congregations, **the clergy leader** spends more time in evangelism and the recruitment of new members as well as developing and promoting a vision for the congregation.

Considerable additional information is included in the 24-page report, *FACTs on Growth: 2010*, available at www.faithcommunitiestoday.org or from Marge Royle, who is on the study team.

February 12 is Boy Scout Sunday



Please join us in church on Sunday, February 12, as we welcome Boy Scouts and their families and leaders from Troop 2 in Verona, the troop for which we hold the charter.

Our church continues to provide a meeting-place for several troops of Cubs, Boy Scouts and Venture Crew. On Boy Scout Sunday we honor our ongoing relationship with this youth-serving organization. Get to know the Scouts and their families.

Annual Financial Statements

Reports on member financial giving during 2011 are being prepared and should be mailed to you shortly, for your use in preparing your Income Tax Returns. If your records and ours do not agree, please notify Jeannine in the church office (973-239-3212 or fccv@comcast.net).

Death in the Family

Thelma Zukosky, a long-time member of our congregation who resided in Lake Hiawatha in recent years with her husband Donald "Zeke," passed into life eternal on Tuesday, January 3rd. After being a professional dancer in New York, Thelma was a court clerk in Verona. She was 85 when she died. Our prayers go with Zeke and her family.

Today's Thought

(from Alternatives for Simple Living's "Any Year" Calendar)

A black bishop from Africa said, "White folks... yes, they're the people who can sing and NOT move at the same time." African music can help liberate other Christians.

This calendar offers a thought-provoking idea or action you can take to love God and other people.

Go to:

<http://simpleliving.startlogic.com/indexoth.php?place=archives/Calendar/Calendar.php#ToC>.