Our Invitation

To all who are weary and need rest; to all who are lonely and want fellowship; to all who mourn and need comfort; to all who pray and to all who do not, but ought; to all who sin and need a Savior; and to whosoever will come—this church opens wide the door and says in the name of the Lord Jesus, welcome.

Celebrating 375 years
of Faith in Our Community
1639-2014

First Congregational Church of Stratford
2301 Main Street
Stratford, Connecticut 06615
203-378-2644

November 16, 2014
PREFACE

This folio is a collection of information about our Church. There are messages from the pastor, Reverend Ed Rawls, the music director, Dr. Joe Utterback, the church historian, Carol Lovell, and various church members. The 375th anniversary of First Congregational Church was a year-long affair, celebrated in worship, prayer, song and parade. It celebrated the yesterdays, rejoiced in the present, and looked to the future with hope, as Christians everywhere do.

This folio has information pertinent to those who want to know more about us, what we are involved in, the work that we do, the benevolence we dispense, and the trusts that we keep. “No matter who you are, where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.” That has been our motto and our conviction. ~ Zoltan Toman, Joshua Toman, your Church librarians.
The 375th anniversary year celebration was an effort by the members of the Church Council, collectively, who sought to include all boards, committees, staff and members, to bring about a completeness and fullness to the program. The Council members are: Steve Bump, chairman, Virginia Millington, secretary, Bill Cabral, Gale Whittemore, Meredith Ripley, Diana Kunkel, Bill Wilson, Lucia Smith, Deb Ranilla, and Tammy Trojanowski. Others were contributors as well: Irene Breault, whose idea it was to have a folio as a lasting tribute to the on-going work of the church; Carl Larsen, representing Benevolence and Social Concerns, and the Boy Scouts; Beth Turner representing the Chancel Committee; Cynthia Buckley, Nominating; Jean Martire, Sue Wilson, Stewardship; Frances Morra and Holly Fry-Taylor, Fair co-chairpersons; Carol Lovell, Church Historian; Ron Tichy, Facilities Manager; Ray Severance, our common sense leader; Walt Dunbar and Bill Hickey as all around go-to men in the church; Carol Haberlin and Eric Nyquist as co-chairs of the Deacons; Bill Haberlin, representing the Trustees; Tammy Langston, Youth Director; Don Coulson, Financial Secretary; Dick Ross, Church Treasurer; Kristine Bacon, Director of Christian Education; Sandy O’Neill, Church Administrator, who designs and prints this folio; Dr. Joe Utterback, Director of Music; and our leader in all ways and means, Reverend Edward Rawls, our Minister. If there are others, please forgive my oversight and my omissions.

Zoltan Toman, Church Librarian, with Joshua Toman

375th ad-hoc committee attached to the Church Council:

Zoltan Toman, chairman; Virginia Millington, Ray Severance, Diana Kunkel, Irene Breault

And the following thank-yous:

Nancy and Louis Mellardo with the Women’s and Men’s service clubs, respectively, for putting together the recognition picnic thank you for the Town’s First Responders.

Richard Elias, Town Historical Parade organizer, Historical service organizer.

November 16th Historical Service chair Richard Elias and his collaborators:

Paul Bernor, Meredith Bump, Andy Byrne, Deborah and Jeff Gedney, Carol Lovell, Eric Nyquist, Carolyn Ross. Other people instrumental: Dr. Joe Utterback, the Choir; Zoltan Toman, and of course, Reverend Ed Rawls.
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From Lippincott’s Magazine, July 24, 1879, published in Philadelphia. The folio starts on page 25 and goes to page 40. In it historians and storytellers write about the Stratford that was, and the article is witty if not tongue-in-cheek descriptive in its presentation of a “place unique, with a character and ways of its own. It has the flavor of wealth without the turmoil of commerce or manufactures; the flavor of exclusiveness, without the pretenses of fashion; the flavor of culture, without any tinge of pedantry. It is rural, yet neither primitive nor crude; easily accessible, yet isolated by its contrast to its surroundings; picturesque, though it offers little to the seeker of wild or romantic scenery; a place of summer resort, yet affording no facilities to the vulgar tourist. It is New England, yet curiously unlike New England.” [p.25].

Hold that thought. Surely 135 years has seen some change, yet in some ways, we are still that unique place, with a character and ways of its own. And why shouldn’t we be? We are in the State which boasts that it is the land of steady habits. Stratford is like that. It builds up and out, but maintains its uniqueness, or at least it tries to. The selection quoted above reads like Orcutt’s History of Stratford. Reverend Orcutt quoted Dr. Samuel Peters’ General History of Connecticut published in London one hundred years before in 1781: “Stratford lies on the west bank of the Osootonic River, having the sea or Sound on the south. There are three streets running north and south, and two east and west. The best is one mile long. On the center square stands a meeting house with a steeple and bell, and a church with a steeple, bell, clock and organ. It is a beautiful place, and from the water has an appearance not inferior to Canterbury. The people are said to be the most polite of any in the colony.”
from *Lippincott’s Illustrated Magazine*, July 1879, Vol.24, found in the Church archives, we quote Reverend Orcutt, in his History of Stratford, as he addresses as a subject, the person who is from Stratford. He wrote:

[page 40] “True Stratforders are of two classes: the first are those intimately connected with the place by associations and traditions, whose ancestors settled here and gave their early substance to the soil, so that the very dust became sacred to the generations that followed in the footsteps of those forefathers. The second are those who are Stratfordites by instinct—by destiny, as it were: not having known Stratford, they might have been happy living and dying in some less favored spot of the wide earth; having seen it, it becomes to them a possession, it may be, if not, *then a hope, a dream of the future*. These true Stratforders—and we want no others—love the place, not for its advantages, not for its desirability as a place of residence, not wholly for its beauty, but for the tone, the feeling, which is at the beginning definitely struck, and gives it forever after a distinct place in their consciousness. They may confess a certain stagnation, a lack of turbulent life; they may be more diverted in localities where events move on in a livelier tread and the play of the passions is more exciting and adventure more dramatic; they may go away and live for a time, fancying from idle whim or from necessity that transplantation from the mother soil suits them; but the tyranny of filial sentiment holds them in thrall; they feels an intimate homesickness: they return—they must return—drawn back by invisible—leading strings. This instinct is planted deep in all true Stratforders, and among the village worthies gossiping at the corner stores no more severe animadversion can be passed upon those transient families who remain for a season or two, then return no more, than ‘They never took to Stratford.’”

So, what kind of Stratforder are you? Our church has a dream of the future: to be a place of equality, worshipping the Creator with all our minds, souls and strengths, helping our neighbors, loving and serving the Lord.

“No matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here,” will continue to be our welcome, for all the years to come.
A Note from the Pastor

It’s a grave responsibility to be the pastor of this grand place. One can never take themselves too seriously. You have 375 years of history behind you and you are just one of so many who have come and gone. All you have to do is walk into the narthex and take a tour of the countless portraits of pastors who once served here.

The portraits begin with a picture of the Rev. Timothy Cutler, who served here from 1709 -1719. Why isn’t there a picture of Rev. Adam Blakemen? The answer to that is rather obvious. I am sure those first settlers didn’t have the time to think about drawing portraits of each other. They were trying to etch out a place in the wilderness and simply survive. Neither is there a picture of the Rev. Isaiahiah (now that’s a name) Wetmore, who led our members into the Revolutionary War. Of course there is a picture of the Rev. Joshua Leavitt who was on the Amistad Committee and started the first abolitionist newspaper in America. Down the wall is a picture of the Rev. Joseph Page who served about five years before the Civil War began. Anyone who looks at his portrait will immediately notice his striking resemblance to Abraham Lincoln. The Revs. Benjamin Swan and Louis Charpot lead this congregation just before and through the Civil War. There is the wonderful smiling portrait of the Rev. Dr. Stanley Sellick who led this church during the Great Depression and through WWII, from 1927 to 1957. There is the Rev. George Hodgkins who made prophetic stands for justice during the Civil Rights Movements, and went to the march on Washington in 1963 to stand with Dr. Martin Luther King. There are others who weren’t pastors here like the Rev. Esther Vodola, who was ordained here in the 1940’s, long before there was any support for the ordination of women. And yet Rev. Vodola found strong support from the Rev. Dr. Stanley Sellick and the members of this church. Rev. Vodola blazed a trail for women who would come along a generation later. Then there was my predecessor, the Rev. Dr. John Clarke, who led this church through a very frightening time in American history; through the bombings of the World Trade Center and the attacks on our country on September 11, 2001. We haven’t even mentioned the people who left here to become missionaries throughout the world with the American Board for Foreign Missions, or the number of women and men who were nurtured here and went on to become ministers in other churches.

All these people, those mentioned and those who are not, left a long legacy of faith. The following pages barely scratch the surface. It’s simply a snap shot, like the portraits in the narthex. It gives us a peek into this long legacy. The place isn’t sacred because of its beauty or its architecture, but because of the countless women and men who walked together in covenant with a deep faith in Jesus Christ. Through their faith, and their journey together, they crossed oceans, worked for justice, built schools and hospitals, shared the gospel, and had an impact not only on Stratford and this country, but on the world.

~The Reverend Edward Rawls, November 2014
To honor the 350th Anniversary of the Town of Stratford in 1989, Lewis G. Knapp, Town Historian, wrote the human story of Stratford “In Pursuit of Paradise,” from its settlement to the 1989 present.

I have chosen to use this book and one by Howard Wilcoxson, published in 1939, entitled “History of Stratford, Connecticut” to give a very limited history of the beginning of the Town of Stratford and the Congregational Church.

This year marks the 375th year since Reverend Adam Blakeman and the early settlers began what became the Stratford known today.

–Carol Lovell, January 2014
Rev. Adam Blakeman (born in 1598), a graduate of Christ Church College at Oxford (where some of his teachers had labored to produce a new Bible for King James I) and a Church of England (Episcopal) clergyman, emigrated to New England because he could not, in conscience, live with the orders of King Charles I and Archbishop Laud, Blakeman became a convert to the Puritan principles of Thomas Hooker.

When he and some of his parishioners arrived at Massachusetts Bay, much of the land was already taken up. Blakeman and his followers followed Thomas Hooker to Connecticut where, at Wethersfield it was found that the best farmlands had been taken by the first arrivals. They settled there but decided to move farther on to new and better lands at the first opportunity.

Early in 1639, Blakeman’s group moved on southward toward the shoreline of Long Island Sound. As soon as the weather allowed, the main group set out overland with cattle, sheep and hogs while boats were left at Wethersfield laden with heavy household goods and stores, and with the old and infirm.

Fording the Housatonic River near Oronoque, where the Paugussett Indians had a fort where their trails crossed the river, and where the depth at low tide was only a few feet, they came south along the river’s edge until they found their vessels moored snugly in the little inlet later called Mac’s Harbor (now on/at Elm St.). Here they erected the meetinghouse and built English-style wigwams and temporary sod homes. Tradition says that on a spring day in 1639 Rev. Adam Blakeman and his small group of Englishmen knelt to pray on the banks of a little cove near the mouth of the Housatonic River, and agreed that this was the place they sought. They had traveled over five thousand miles to reach this spot. The shores of this sheltered inlet. Cupheag, as the Indian name Okenuck called it, would be their home. After years of searching for the freedom to worship their God in their own way, this was to be their Paradise.

In the beginning, in 1639, Reverend Adam Blakeman prayed to God that this new plantation would be a Paradise on earth.

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When Roger Ludlowe arrived, and began settlement of the Town of Fairfield, in late August of 1639, the crops of Stratford, were already sown, and Pequonnock/Cupheag/Stratford was a functioning plantation. Almost a year later, in June 1640, a court order was sent to determine the bounds between Cupheag of Stratford and Uncoway of Fairfield.

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The earliest settlers who had died were buried (in Mac’s Harbor area) to face the rising sun. We do not know their names, how many there were, or where within the graveyard they were put to rest, but when they died, each grave was oriented so that on Judgment Day its occupant would rise to face the rising sun.

Today, the first burying ground is gone. In 1678 the present Congregational Burying Ground took its place—now behind the library. The dead who could be located in the original burying ground were exhumed and taken to the new location.

The men who settled Stratford were workingmen, weavers, masons, joiners, smiths, and husbandmen, servants and apprentices. They may have originated anywhere in the British Isles. Regular seasonal migration of farm workers was common. The harvest workers came from all sorts of occupations: ship’s carpenters, silk weaver, butcher, collier, chain-maker, even an owner of a boy’s school. Rising population, depressed wages, and a series of crises in the woolen cloth industry drove workers to the lowland farms and drove many overseas, some to end up in Stratford.

The original settlers came for their religious beliefs, and also for economic reasons; to feed their children and to have a better life.

The most important building in the new Stratford was, as usual, the meetinghouse—which served as church, town house, and fort, and probably as a school. New England meetinghouses assumed a standard form: a square building with a steep hip roof surmounted by an open turret. To house a hundred people, and serve as a watch house, it had to be about 30 feet square. In Stratford, at an early date the church procured a bell, the first in Connecticut; it is said, to call the people to church.

On the Sabbath every person came to church. Non-attendance means a fine. Husbands and wives sat together, ancient bachelors and maid in another place, and children in a third. Muskets and pistols were in evidence.

In 1647, the General Court ordered the towns to supplement the armed householders by a guard from the train band. Stratford, eight men were designated to come to church in armor and sit together at the rear of the church, ready for action.
The Church was the colony and the Church was the town. Becoming a member of the Church was not a decision made by the applicant; it was in the hands of the Church members, who were rather particular about whom they invite in. It sometimes took years for servants or menials to be allowed to join, and change their social status.

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The Colonial Records for May 15, 1651 state that the governor and 2 others were to go to Stratford to keep court on the trial of Goody Bassett for her life. Goody Bassett was accused of being a witch. She was declared guilty and hanged at the base of Clapboard Hill, where a little stream thereafter bore the name Gallows Brook. The brook once drained Gallows Swamp and fed into Tanner’s Brook which ran through Stratford Center (very near/south of the Lovell Building, formerly the home of Lovell Hardware) to the Housatonic River. Today all evidence of the Stratford witchcraft trail has disappeared in the name of transportation progress.

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Cotton Mather paid tribute to Reverend Adam Blakeman describing him as a very holy man, loved by all his people. Mather wrote “He was a useful preacher of the Gospel.” Thomas Hooker said of Adam Blakeman, “for the sake of the sacred and solemn simplicity of the discourse of this worthy man, if I might have my choice, I would choose to live and die under Mr. Blakeman’s ministry.”

Rev. Adam Blakesman’s memorial sign on the northwest wall of the Congregational Church was created in 1912 and donated by his descendants, including Miss Harriet Blakeman, a long-time member of this church.

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On Nov. 18, 1678, the freedmen of the town voted to build a new meetinghouse. All of the five sites suggested were north of the old meetinghouse and the site selected “upon the hill called the Watch-house Hill,” was the northernmost of these, showing that the town was growing northward. Watch-House Hill is now known as Academy Hill.

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By 1699 Stratford, the fifth town founded in Connecticut Colony, was flourishing. The beginning years of settlement were over; the transition from Cupheag plantation to Stratford town was complete. Civilization had arrived; the colonists had become colonials.
The third meeting house, was built in 1743 and burned in 1785 after it was struck by lightning. It was the last building of the Congregational Society to stand upon Academy Hill.

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The fourth meeting house was completed just 25 weeks after it was erected on Main St. On the next day, Sunday Nov. 12, 1786, the congregation met in it in the forenoon for the purpose of public worship. This fourth meeting house stood for seventy-five years.

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The present church is the fifth building of the Congregational Church. The movement for its erection began at a meeting of the First Ecclesiastical Society on June 20, 1857, when it appeared that several families could not be accommodated with sittings on account of limited space and that the building was inconvenient and uncomfortable. The proposition to build a new church was a serious one and it was determined not to proceed until the sum of fifteen thousand dollars had been subscribed. This was soon accomplished! But, a much larger sum was needed before the building was finally complete. The old house of worship was moved into the highway a few rods to the south and west (no longer there) and was used up to the Sunday preceding the dedication of the new church. The dedication services of the new church were held on Oct. 27, 1859 and were attended by more than 900 people. (I wonder whether everyone fit inside!)

The architect of this current church (Leopold Eidlitz of New York) stood high in his profession. The Stratford Congregational Church is a fine example of the Gothic Style and the original spire (no longer in existence) was admired as one of the most beautiful in the state. Mr. William A. Booth was a leader in both the proposal to build the church and working out the plans for the structure, both by his counsel and his large gifts. Mr. Booth also built the former parsonage on Broad St., and later sold it to the Ecclesiastical Society for two thirds of its actual cost.

There have been many ministers and many members of the First Congregational Church of Stratford in the 375 years since the beginning of the town. The current membership continues this very long tradition.
“The seventeen families under the leadership of Adam Blakeman, who settled Stratford in the spring of 1639, were ‘people of law, order and thrift and believed that as believers in Christ and in their Covenant with God that they could build a community based upon faith. They believed that a church had the right to legislate for itself as conscience dictated, free from coercion by anyone.’ Those values would later be reflected in the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut that governed Stratford, Connecticut, and would find their way into the U.S. Constitution.

Built that very first year, their meeting house was the place where all affairs of the town were conducted. It also served as the First Congregational Church, and for many years, the history of the church was also the history of the town. In 1660, a second building was erected on Watch House Hill—now Academy Hill. That building was replaced by a third in 1743. The fourth was erected on [Main] Street in 1786 near the old burying ground. In 1859 that church was replaced by the current lovely Gothic style church on the corner of Main and Church Streets that still features the lovely stained glass ‘Rose Window.’

Throughout its 375 year history, the church has been at the forefront in dealing with the issues of the day: the cause of freedom during the American Revolution; the issue of slavery of the mid-19th century; the support of its members serving their country during two World Wars; and the continuing issues of peace and justice of the last decades.

The First Congregational Church is “Mother Church” to more than 22 churches in this region, from Putney Chapel to Trumbull, from Bethany to Newtown, and from Washington to Woodbury.

Starting from its beginnings in 1639, the First Congregational Church has been at the very center of the Stratford Community, joining with other religious groups to respond to the needs and issues of Stratford’s people. Strong indeed are the ties that bind the First Congregational church and the Stratford community.
The following récit was composed by Winnie Nettleton, a former historian of our church. She used materials which were kept at the church and also those which were written by former Stratford historians, notably, Reverend Orcutt of the nineteenth century and William Howard Wilcoxson of the twentieth century, and former church historian.

“It is with just pride that we contemplate the long record of this, The First Church of Christ [Congregational] in Stratford, Connecticut which was organized with the settlement of the town in 1639.

During the early part of the seventeenth century there was great unrest in England, the people, tired of ecclesiastical tyranny, and of social and economic slavery, decided that since they felt directly responsible to God, they could only serve Him with complete freedom in another country.

In the Spring of 1639 “seventeen families containing 65 souls came here, probably overland from Whethersfield, with Rev. Adam Blakeman. They founded a new settlement on the West bank of the Housatonic at Sandy Hollow. They were a people of law, honor and thrift. They believed that a church was a gathered group of believers in Christ. The bond holding them together was their Covenant with God and each other, to walk in the ways of the Lord made known or to be made known to them through the Holy Spirit. They believed the church had the right to legislate for itself as conscience dictated, free from coercion by anyone.

Their meeting house was the place where all affairs of the town and church were conducted. For many years, the history of the church was also the history of the town. [The first church was built just west of Mac’s Harbor, ZAT, ed.]

The Second building was erected in 1680 and stood on Watch Tower Hill-now Academy Hill. It was fortified nine years later to become a place of security for women and children in times of danger. An end gallery was built in 1701 and side ones in 1716. On the west gallery were seated the married men, on the east side the married women, and “ancient bachelors and ancient maidens, the second seats.

The Third House of worship was built in 1743. The membership had outgrown the second one. The third structure was also on Academy Hill, just west of the former church. Its dimensions were 60 X 40 feet and 26 feet from floor to ceiling, with box pews and wide galleries, and a steeple 130 feet high. This was the church of colonial wars and the [American, ZAT,ed.] Revolution. It was struck by lightning in 1785 and totally destroyed.

The Fourth Church was dedicated in 1786. The site was a little east of the present structure [on Hiell’s Hill, ZAT, ed.] It had three galleries, a high paneled pulpit, built on the long side. About 30 years later it was heated by two huge wood [burning] stoves. The previous church had been heated by foot warmers, fired at home and carried to each service.

-continued on next page
The Fifth Building, the one in which we now worship, was dedicated on October 27th, 1858. In 1928 a pipe organ was installed in the west end of the church. Packard Hall was added in 1916; named after Dr. Edward Packard, pastor at that time.

Putney Chapel was built in 1843 for members living in Oronoque and Putney. Our local members contributed labor, time and materials, but did not worship in it. From time to time, ministers of other denominations held services there.

This church was one of the earliest in New England to have a Sunday School. The children memorized scriptures and hymns. There were no quarterlies or books. We call attention to the four pillars of our church: teaching, fellowship, Holy Communion, and prayer, and how this church during its history adhered to those principles.

Our daughter, grand-daughter, and great-grand-daughter churches are: Woodbury 1670, Bridgeport 1695, Huntington 1724, Trumbull 1730, Newtown 1740, Washington 1740, Monroe 1764, Bethlehem 1740, So. Britain 1769, N. Woodbury 1816, Bridgeport-Park Street 1868, Bridgeport-Olivet 1870, Bridgeport-Italian 1903, Bridgeport-Bethany 1920, Bridgeport-Swedish 1895, Bridgeport-West End 1887, Bridgeport-Westminster 1907. Some of the churches have merged, or are no longer in existence.

The spirit of the Stratford church’s worship and fellowship is reflected in the welcome extended... [to all]. Visitors are truly welcome in this grand old House of the Lord.”
Down at Mac’s Harbor...

Is where they came ashore and established a government that served their families, God, and nation. In 1639, hoping that they could keep together against all asperity, 39 families, under the leadership of Adam Blakeman, their chosen minister of the Puritan faith, soon thereafter to be known as Congregational, planted themselves to protect life and new liberty, in the fledgling colony of Connecticut.

Today, 375 years later, the members of that Congregational church, known today as The First Congregational Church of Stratford, celebrate with joy and thanksgiving. We welcome all and declare that “no matter who you are, and where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome” into our midst. We are 375 years young and we are growing still. We are growing in new hope for the future, life, liberty and continued happiness of our townspeople.

We acknowledge the sitting government of Stratford, the Mayor and the members of this Council, and hope you will celebrate with us. We are all together the descendants and inheritors of the legacy of the 39 families that settled here. We sustain their dream, their hopes and aspirations as befitting a free people.

The members of the First Congregational Church of Stratford, on this day in April, 2014.

Composed by Zoltan Toman, First Congregational Church
A PROCLAMATION

Sponsored by
The Honorable Kenneth Poisson
Sixth District Council Member

IN CELEBRATION OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF STRATFORD

WHEREAS, In 1639, 39 families – under the leadership of Adam Blakeman, their chosen minister of the Puritan Faith, soon thereafter to be known as Congregational – came ashore at Mac's Harbor and established a government. This government served their families, God and the Nation, and they hoped that they could keep it together against all asperity. These founding families planted themselves to protect life and new found liberty, in the fledgling Colony of Connecticut, in what would be later become known as the Town of Stratford; and

WHEREAS, Today, 375 years later, the members of the Congregational Church, known today as the First Congregational Church of Stratford, celebrate with joy and thanksgiving. Growing in new hope for the future, life, liberty, and continued happiness of our townspeople.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the sitting government of Stratford - the Mayor, and the members of the Stratford Town Council - celebrates the 375th anniversary of the First Congregational Church of Stratford. We are all together the descendants and inheritors of the legacy of the 39 families that settled here in 1639, and we sustain their dream, their hopes, and aspirations as befitting a free people.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Official Seal of the Town of Stratford, this fourteenth day of April, in the year of our Lord, two thousand fourteen.

Mayor John A. Harkins
Pictures at Town Hall, Stratford

Reverend Rawls, Carol Lovell, Church Historian, Virginia Millington, representing the Church Council and I as head of the 375th anniversary committee, and liaison to the Town 375th committee, found ourselves in Town Chambers, and also in the Mayor’s office on the evening of April 14th. It was a really great occasion. With the help of Carol Cabral, Town Clerk, and Ken Poisson, Councilman from the 6th District, who are all members of our church, we received a citation from the Town commemorating the founding of our church, and settlement of our town by Reverend Adam Blakeman and the 39 families known as Puritans from England. The first photo below shows Reverend Rawls, Carol Lovell and Virginia Millington in front of the founders’ mural in Council Chambers.

The second photo shows us all in the office of Mayor John Harkins, where we posed for an incredible photo op, with the Mayor, our little group and Ken Poisson. Discussion centered around the physical office of the mayor, on how it was formerly the office of the Town Manager, under the previous form of government. This info op showed how, through the course of human events, government is changed, yet remains essentially the same, to safeguard the community and support its continuity, while keeping a delicate balance. It was a lesson in showing how far we have come: from autocratic rule to democracy, to a separation of church and state, with the Creator’s blessings.
The third photo is in front of the Town Council. Reverend Rawls was called upon to give an invocation, to start the Council meeting. Then Council Chair, Joseph Kubic, called forth Reverend Rawls, Ken Poisson and Mayor Harkins to present the citation. Ken read the citation, Mayor Harkins presented it.

Respectfully submitted by Zoltan Toman
State of Connecticut

General Assembly
Official Citation

Introduced by
Rep. Laura R. Hoydick, 120th Dist.
Rep. Lawrence G. Miller, 122nd Dist.
Sen. Andres Ayala, Jr., 23rd Dist.

Rep. Terry Bucker, 121st Dist.

Be it hereby known to all that:
The Connecticut General Assembly
hereby offers its sincerest congratulations to:
The First Congregational Church Of Stratford

In recognition of

The 375th Anniversary Of Its Founding In Stratford In 1639.
Your Declaration Of “No Matter Who You Are, And Where You Are On Life’s Journey, You Are Welcome” Into Our Midst Has Provided
A Strong Foundation On Which You Have Thrived For These Many Years.
You Have Brought Together Families For Spiritual Worship And Good Works In The Community Of Stratford.
We Offer Our Sincere Congratulations And Pray That God’s Blessings Continue To Be With The Clergy And Parishioners For Many Years To Come.

The entire membership extends its
very best wishes on this memorable occasion
and expresses the hope for continued success.

Given this 1st day of June 2014
at the State Capitol
Hartford, Connecticut

by

[Signature]
President Pro Tempore

[Signature]
Speaker of the House

[Signature]
Secretary of the State
THE BOOTHE FAMILY

The Boothe family was original settlers, or planters, as they wanted to be called. They have contributed a lot to Stratford, as a town, and specifically to the First Congregational Church. The Boothe Memorial Park in the Putney district of Stratford, is an enduring testimony to their desire to give something of substance to the citizens of Stratford, young and old.

The accumulated collections and hobbies of the Boothes have no parallel. Their love of architecture and industry, of science and animal husbandry, farming and cultivation, horticulture, botany, tools, gemology and rock specimens, Connecticut Indian way of life, implement and means, and general local history is evident everywhere one looks. Proud of their heritage, they managed the family’s wealth through investments and rental properties, and kept a strict accounting of it.

When asked about their buildings, David Boothe replied, “Our principle purpose is to have something distinctive on the grounds that visitors will enjoy, something exclusive as well as artistic.” So in this way, aside from the brothers’ two homesteads, the grounds have a basilica, with an imported stone pulpit, a coliseum style building for parties and meetings, three wooden crosses in front of which yearly Easter sunrise services are held to this day, an historic hall housing a spectacular tower and clock from a church in Massachusetts, a “Technocratic Cathedral,” which is also called the “Redwood House,” or “Basket House,” a blacksmith shop, a decorated miniature windmill, a small masonry lighthouse, a horse trough and two mill stones, a trolley station, an aviary, an organ house, Putney Chapel, and most recently, the Merritt Parkway toll booths.

In their joint wills, it is written... “We deem it only fitting that the Town of Stratford shall have an appropriate site for recreation and rest, and where the beauty and serenity of life may be enjoyed to its richest and fullest apportionments.”

A non-profit group, the “Friends of Boothe Park,” was incorporated to provide both financial and technical support to the overall development of the museums. Volunteer members of the “Friends” provide the sole support system for special events and educational programs on a regular basis. Although the Town of Stratford maintains the park grounds, the cultural, historic, and educational aspects rely on the “Friends” organization. Many members of the First Congregational Church are on the “Friends” board.

In 2014, The “Friends” have given the First Congregational Church some Boothe artifacts, which are displayed in church. They are: a. a pew seat door from the Boothe family pew, date unknown, b. a velvet lined collection basket on a pole, designed so that no one can boast how much money they put into the collection, as velvet muffles sound of coins, and c. a large key which belonged to one of the first church doors.

[copied from “Friends” documents, author unk., except last paragraph, by Z.T., ed.]
HISTORY OF THE FIRST ECCLESIASTICAL SOCIETY OF STRATFORD, CT

[This chronological history was conceived by Walter Dunbar, JR. on May 2003, which he took from Gleanings, and minutes from the Society itself.]

1639 Sixty-five men and women and children founded a new settlement in Stratford. The Ecclesiastical Society was formed to govern both the Town and the First Congregational Church.

1723 The Episcopal Church was established in Stratford and for the first time in 84 years, the Town government was separated from the Ecclesiastical Society which continued to govern the First Congregational Church.

1812 William Henderson willed $1,000.00 to the Society, the income to be used for scholarships. The fund is still administered by the Trustees today.

1825 The Society changed the form of raising funds for the Church from taxation to the sale of pews.

1844 A Lecture Room and Town House was built by the Society and the Town of Stratford. The Church occupied the upper level, and the Town used the lower level as the firehouse.

1873 The Society raised funds to purchase a parsonage. [$4,200.00].

1874 The Society raised funds to purchase a new bell. [$800.00].

1879 The Minister was given permission to install a bathroom in the parsonage.

1898 The lower level of the Lecture Room [fire house] was deeded to the Society by the Town in exchange for Church property on the North side of Church St.

1902 Pledge cards and envelopes were introduced.

1909 The Society is invited by the Church to join in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the church edifice.

1913 The Society thanked the “Blakeman descendants for the tablet dedicated to the first minister of the parish, the Rev. Adam Blakeman, which adorns the Church wall.”

1914 The Society approved plans and specifications for a new parish building not to exceed $12,200.00 and for the Lecture Room to be demolished.
1915 The Society...honor[s] the Rev. Dr. Edward Newman-Packard, the beloved pastor of the First Congregational Church: “Resolve: that the building shall be and here by is named Packard Hall...”

1919 After the Church incorporated and set up by-laws, it was then appropriate that the “First Ecclesiastical Society of Stratford, CT assign, transfer and convey all the property and estate, real and personal, and trust funds of said Society to the First Congregational Church of Stratford.” This ended 280 years during which the Society was directly involved with the administration of the Church.

1927 A vote was taken to keep the Society in existence “owing to the fact that there might still be property or bequests left to the Society in the future that could not be reverted to the Church without action of the Society.”

1931 The Society accepts a trust under the last will and testament of Cordelia Sterling.

1957 The State of CT pays the Society $77,000.00 for land taken from Sterling Park for the Thruway. This is placed in a special fund.

1959 The Society pays $46,000.00 from the special fund to purchase land for Sterling Park.

1965 The Society pays $27,000.00 from the Special Fund to purchase land for Sterling Park.

1980 The Society votes to change the by-laws for membership from “any male” to “any person.”

1999 The [Society] by-laws [add offices and duties] as well as change[s] to gender neutral language.

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From these gleanings, one can see how important to the Town the workings of the Ecclesiastical Society have been and continue to be. It oversees disbursements maintaining Sterling House, which is a top level community center. Sterling House promotes sport, arts, drama and music programs, and also educational opportunities for the Town children and adults.

The Ecclesiastical Society also oversees the working of the Congregational Burying Ground Association.
The Congregational Burial Ground lies behind the Library and Sterling Park. It was originally an appointment of the First Ecclesiastical Society. According to old writings, the original churchyard burying ground was at Sandy Hollow. Reverend Adam Blakeman was buried there. When the “new” burial ground was opened, Reverend Blakeman was moved there, and a headstone was erected, which has since been lost in time. The burial ground was established in 1678. Since the Congregational Church was the only church in town for several years, it was known as the “cemetery.” Anyone was buried there, regardless of color or religion.

When other religions were established, the churches set up their own cemeteries. The Congregational church maintained its own cemetery until the 1920’s, when prominent citizens petitioned the State Legislature to allow “The Congregational Burying Ground Association” to incorporate, as a non-profit.

Headstone counts were done at certain times. There are 900 headstones, and it is estimated that there are about 300 unmarked graves, for whatever reason. In 1966 a memorial stone was erected for Rev. Adam Blakeman. The burial ground is no longer open for burials, since it is quite full, however, a columbarium is available for cremated remains.

Many people today are interested in history and ancestry. They come to Stratford to look up their roots. It is the job of the Association to help them find graves, dates, records, and answer unanswered questions about their ancestry.

The Association continues today through the volunteer efforts of the members of the First Congregational Church and other townspeople unaffiliated with the church. The current volunteers and officers are: President, Carol W. Lovell, Vice-President, Raymond Severance, Secretary/Treasurer, Carol W. Lovell, Irene Breault, Richard Breault, Carol Cabral, J. Vincent Chase, Susan Curry, Bill Haberlin, Carol Haberlin, Joseph Janucik, Carol Lovell, Todd Lovell, Bonnie M. Paradise, Donald Robbins, Ray Severance, Gale Whittemore, Fred Whittemore.
SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The Kate Sterling Bunnell Scholarship Endowment Fund – The scholarship was established through the generosity of the late Catherine T. Mitchell. It offers financial assistance for college expenses to Stratford resident students, based on financial need, without regard to academic achievement, sex, race or creed. Graduating high school students and undergraduate college students may apply. Applications are available at area high school Guidance Offices or can be picked up at the Church Office.

First Congregational Church Scholarships – The following scholarships are available to Those undergraduate students who are members of First Congregational Church as of January 1st of the current year.

The Frances C. and Harriet B. Blakeman Memorial Scholarship of $2,000 given by the Board of Trustees. This is in recognition of their devotion and generosity to the First Congregational Church.

The Jim and Ella Cebik Memorial Scholarship of $500 is funded by a grant from their son, the late Roy Cebik.

The John Miller Edward Zorn Memorial Scholarship of $250 if funded by a grant from his father, the late Bob Zorn.

The Carol Lawlor Memorial Scholarship of $400 is given by her children, Kristine Bacon, Jacki Potter, and Joe Lawlor for a student majoring in Nursing as well as based on financial need.

The Joel and Mary Vodola Sacred Music Scholarship of $2,000 is funded by a grant from Rev. Esther Vodola. Limited to a student at any level majoring in music, or secondarily, education.

The Edna Viner Memorial Scholarship(s) of $2,000 or more, funded by a bequest from the late Edna Viner, is for graduate students only.

The criteria for judging the first three if these awards will be scholastic achievement, church and community activity involvement, leadership qualities and achievement potential. Applications can be picked up at the church office.

Carol Haberlin, Chairperson, Scholarship Committee
The Women’s Service League is a long standing tradition at the First Congregational Church of Stratford. It was founded in 1934. Its mission was “to enlist the women of the parish in a fellowship of worship, education, service, and giving to the programs” of the church. In 1935, the WSL held eight all day meetings during which the women sewed for various charities. They had speakers, soloists and musicians for seven program meetings, with an average attendance of 114 women.

In 1934 the WSL paid down the mortgage of the church, paid for a mimeograph machine and purchased fifty new chairs for the dining room, and redecorated the Ladies Parlor, which is now the Kee Board Room.

In the 1960’s, the WSL divided into two groups: a. the Evening Service League for young mothers and those who worked, and b. daytime WSL for those who could meet during the day. These women organized and ran the church fair and a rummage sale until the early 1970’s. The money raised was used for scholarships and mission projects. The women also made home visits to shut-ins.

Among the various projects the WSL has undertaken over recent years are:

- Giving luncheons and dinners for important causes
- Taking part in inter-faith ministry and programs, including covenant to care, meeting the needs of abused and neglected children, as well as to those in need of special services
- Refurbished and redecorated Upper Packard Hall,
- Refurbished and redecorated the Pastors’ Parlor
- Renovated the kitchen in UPH
- Knitted and crocheted prayer shawls for the ill, infirm, and confined
- Delivered meals and transportation for those who have become ill,

and many other projects. The WSL continues to be there for the church with heads, hearts, hands and feet.
Stewardship Corner

When we pledge to this church, along with supporting the upkeep of our building, paying staff salaries, etc., we are also reaching out to many important and worthwhile programs. In the Summer Courier, our focus was on some of the Board of Benevolence projects, concentrating on their support of the UCC Wider Mission and the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, totaling $19,300.

This month's focus is on an additional $8,700 of their total budget of $28,000. $500 is allotted for scholarships to Silver Lake; $750 to Sterling House programs; $250 to "Good Start" and $500 to "Adopt a Family; $1950 to the following organizations: $300 to Covenant to Care for Children, $250 to the Stratford Clergy Association, $400 to Holy Joe's Cafe, $200 to Emerge, Inc., $400 each to Habitat for Humanity, and Campus Crusade for Christ. $4420 is broken down for the following: $1000 to Mercy Touch, Zambia Orphanage; $1420 to the Lord's Kitchen and $2000 to the Pastor's Discretionary Fund. The Board holds a balance of $1080 - Discretionary Reserves.

We can all be proud of this record of support to so many worthy organizations.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave...

This church does, too
FISH DINNERS DURING LENT

It was Reverend Dr. Lamar Kincaid who initiated the Lenten Fish Dinners in 1985. His idea was to offer the members of this Church, and the members of the community a time of fellowship, sustenance and stewardship during the darkest days of the year. With his Southern charm and charisma, he brought the entire Town Council to the Friday dinners, so that they may sit and break bread with their constituency in a way that no other church has done before.

The idea caught on, and soon there were 150 Congregational church people serving many hundreds of townspeople in several shifts. It had humble beginnings. There was no committee. Dr. Kincaid called upon Ray and Charlotte Severance, Bill and Sue Wilson, Tom and Roberta Creighton, Bill and Carol Cabral, and Bob Kee to start it up. The Wilsons went to a local frozen fish warehouse and procured frozen fish. The group served baked fish and French fries, for which they charged under $7. According to Bill Cabral, the church kitchen had to be refitted to accommodate the refrigerators and fryers they needed.

The monies collected went to various concerns. After expenses, any money left over paid for the church kitchen, thereafter church budget items, and some money went to offset mission projects.

Today, fish dinners come in many combinations: baked fish, fried fish, shrimp, clams, scallops, and crab cakes, along with the prerequisite French fries, coleslaw, cakes and drinks. With other churches in town attracted to the idea, they are holding fish dinners of their own during Lent. Our numbers are down, but the zeal, comradeship and fellowship are sustained.

~ as told by Bill Wilson to Zoli Toman, ed.
MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

The Lord’s Kitchen began about 3 years ago [2011] by the Stratford Council of Churches. The idea was espoused by Paul Kurmay, Stratford Judge of Probate. It is sponsored by the benevolence committee of the First Congregational Church. There are approximately 11 churches that are now participating. Every Monday and Wednesday evening a free dinner is served at Christ Episcopal Church. The meal is prepared and served by volunteers from the various churches. It has grown over the years and now serves 50 to 80 people each evening.

HOW THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH DOES WORK THROUGH BENEVOLENCE

For the board of Benevolence just about everything we do is listed as a line item in the annual budget. Some of the important outreach efforts include:

Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport - We support multiple programs including: Project Learn, Janus Center, Bridge Building and the Co-op Center. The Council website has more information about these programs at http://www.ccgb.org/?q=services

The Lord’s Kitchen - In Sept. 2013 the Stratford Star wrote a nice article about the program and that is available online at http://www.stratfordstar.com/12497/lords-kitchen-serves-more-than-6000-meals-to-local-hungry/
Our church has been involved with the Lord’s Kitchen since its inception and we typically serve 8 times a year.

Sterling House’s Good Start & Adopt a Family programs - During the holiday season the Adopt a Family program distributes gifts to children and youth in need from Stratford. The Good Start program distributes new back packs with new school supplies to youth at the beginning of the school year. Our church makes a monetary donations to both programs.

Mercy Touch - There was a nice article in the May 2014 Courier and they also have a web site with the latest information at http://www.mercytouch.net/
Our church supports Mercy Touch with money from the annual Benevolence budget and additionally with a special offering held in May.

Holy Joe’s Cafe - The Facebook page describes the organization as follows: An all-volunteer non-profit that sends coffee to U.S. troops in AFGHANISTAN via a network of deployed Chaplains. Holy Joe’s Café is the conduit for Chaplains who set up oasis not in size but in purpose and that purpose is to bring a taste of home through coffee which sometimes that is the most important place for people when they are in the midst of great havoc.

~Contributed by Carl Larsen
TODAY’S music program is a varied one. It not only entails choirs and a handbell choir, but also musical cantatas, concerts, and special services. This prolific program is due to the expertise, dedication, energy and direction of the director of music, Dr. Joe Utterback, who ministers to our church family. In his words:

“We present artists throughout the year as part of the Rose Window Concert series, which I [Utterback] founded 16 years ago [sic 1998]. ‘Octoberfest’ and ‘Michael and Friends,’ fall into this category. We often present such local artists as Joe Carter, and Beth Palmer under the auspices of the Rose Window Concert series. Laurie Delgado continues to be a valuable assistant to Dr. Joe in the children’s music programs. All music groups meet regularly for rehearsals to learn music for performance in worship services.”

The music groups in the church are: a. the Senior choir, b. the Handbell choir, aka The Meetinghouse Ringers, c. the Youth choir, d. the Junior choir, and e. the Cherub choir. The music program has two paid soloists: Allison Fay, soprano, and Michael Jovovich, tenor.

The major events of the musical year include: The Rose Window Concert series, the Fat Sunday Service, with a New Orleans style service, before Lent, Palm Sunday Annual Choral Concert, Octoberfest Concert, Christmas Cantata, Michael and Friends, and the Valentine Day Gala.

The following récit is an excerpt from “A Short Note from Dr. Joe.”

“In November of 1937, Louise Miller became Music Director and Organist at this church. Then only 23 years of age, Ms. Miller was in the early phase of her long career in church music. In 1979, she retired formally from First Congregational Church as Dr. M. Louise Miller, having received an honorary Doctorate of Humanities degree the year before from Bridgeport Engineering Institute.

Dr. Miller established the outstanding music program here and set it on its long course which continues into the present. In 1942, she inaugurated the Palm Sunday Concerts, also known as Oratorio Concerts, which continue as a great annual event. Louise is widely known and respected in the field of church music.

Following the nearly 42 years of Dr. Miller’s leadership [to 1979], Carol Greenawalt led the music program until 1983. In that year, Elizabeth Brodeen took over and served for ten years, until 1993. At that time, Shawn Whynot, fresh out of Westminster Choir College, assumed the leadership role and held it almost two years.”

It is fitting to describe the kind of music Dr. Joe has brought to First Congregational Church. The English music magazine, Pianoforte, sums it up:

“Utterback brings...what might best be described as a composite of the greatest American and jazz piano styles of the century...a technique that makes light of every hurdle...married to contemplation and to colour and to phrasing and shaping of ideas.”
His Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Kansas, followed by degrees in classical piano performance from Wichita State University, was followed by ASCAP awards, many performances nationwide and worldwide, and has enabled him to lead numerous workshops for venues such as National Federation of Music Clubs, College Music Society, and the American Guild of Organists. His 400 published compositions reflect the energy, color, and moods of his improvisations. “His many jazz-influenced works for piano, voice, chamber music, organ and choir have been performed throughout the United States and in more than fifty countries.” [Bill Todt, Jazzmuse, Inc.] We revel in “Beautiful Night,” “August Teardrop,” “We Are Not Alone,” “Ballade,” “Peace Will Come One Day,” “Visions,” “Skyscape,” and “Dreamscape,” “Wayfaring Stranger,” “Epitaph,” “‘Tis the Gift To Be Simple,” and many spirituals, among others. The church piano and organ resounds with the sounds of Utterback in every way and form, and our church is blest by his music.

~ Zoltan Toman, July 2014

HISTORY OF THE ORGAN FUND

The Organ Fund, known also as the Helen Jones Organ Fund, was established in 1987 with an amount of almost three thousand Dollars. Adding Helen Jones’ name to the organ fund in 1995, ensured that an amount of money would be available for the replacement of the organ in the unlikely event that the church organ would suffer loss through any means. She alone funded the organ from 1995 until her death in 2007. Currently, the balance is much higher than the original amount.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The Austin Pipe organ was installed in 1962.

The Yamaha Grand Piano in the Sanctuary was valued new at $24,500 [2004], when it was purchased at a discount of 30% of that price, thanks to Dr. Joe.

The piano donated by the Pert family is now in the Music Room. There are pianos in the Sunday School rooms, an old Steinway upright, located in the Handbells’ room, and the Steinway Grand [a gift from the Bundock family] now in UPH are valued collectively at: $14K. The Orff instruments, assorted percussion instruments, and an autoharp are worth about $1K, and the Schulmerich English Handbells and the Malmark Choirchimes are valued at nearly $4K, with accessories.
THE PALM SUNDAY CONCERT

When: Sunday, April 13, 2014 at 4:00 P.M.

Dr. Joe Utterback, DMA, professor of Music at Sacred Heart University the last twenty years, composer of modern and traditional jazz music, composer, arranger and adapter of secular music, known in the United States and throughout the world, has thoughtfully composed and arranged a rhythmic and spirit-lifting program for the 375th anniversary of the Town of Stratford.

72 years ago Miss Louise Miller, then music director/organist of the First Congregational Church of Stratford, instituted a music tradition which has grown to include choir members from churches all over town, and vocalists from many neighboring towns. This program was held yearly on Palm Sunday, and is known today as the Palm Sunday Concert. The music director at First Congregational has historically always been the arranger of the Oratorio. The present choir director is Dr. Joe Utterback. He has carried on this tradition since 1996, when he began at First Congregational.

The Concert opens with Gabriel Fauré’s “Requiem” as the first half of the program. A suite of six pieces follows in the second half, arranged and composed by “Dr. Joe” : “Prayer,” “Way-Faring Stranger,” “Deep River,” “Epitaph,” “Cometh Spring,” and “We Are Not Alone.” These six pieces reflect the struggles, achievements, and enduring hope of the Town’s people throughout the ages. The music gives strength and courage to a people battered by forces over which they have little control. Over-riding these things is a sustaining hope for the future, under the guidance of the Creator.

Baritone Tom Woodman, and tenor Michael Jovovich, Allison Fay, soprano, and Carol Woodman, alto, sing the principal parts in the program, and Joshua Toman accompanies on the flute.

Galen Tate accompanies the entire choir on the Austin pipe organ, and Dr. Joe plays the Yamaha grand piano, while conducting certain pieces in the program.
Summer Camp - Troop 71 spent the week of August 3rd-10th at Camp Yawgoog, an 1800 acre Scout Reservation in Rockville, RI. During the week 16 scouts worked on a combined 69 merit badges. The troop once again earned “honor troop” by participating in camp activities and by having its campsite pass inspection every day. In addition, Nathan Larsen earned a Marksman Award for his rifle shooting skills.

Boys interested in joining scouts are welcome to visit the troop at their weekly meetings held on Monday nights at 7 PM in Lower Packard Hall.

Equipment Donations – A big “thank you” to Jim Michel and Susan Yermes for their donations of used tents and camping equipment. Donations such as these help to reduce the troop’s expenses and keep scouting affordable for families.

For more information about the troop or donations of used camping equipment please contact Carl Larsen at 203-375-5284 or cwlarsen@yahoo.com.
On Sunday, February 2\textsuperscript{nd}, Troop 71 hosted the annual Scout Sunday Service. Joining the troop were members of several Girl Scout troops and Cub Scout packs. The Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts together recited the Scout Oath while the Girl Scouts recited the Scout Promise and Scout Law. We are proud to have so many of our Church youth and adults involved in scouting.

After the service the troop held its annual lunch, where members were recognized for their years of service.

On behalf of all the scouts, the troop wishes to thank Rev. Rawls and the entire congregation for their continuing support of scouting.
Leaning on the Everlasting Arms and  
Standing on the Shoulders of Those Who’ve Gone Before.

This year we celebrate 375 years of faith, fellowship, the pursuit of personal freedoms and the dream of peaceful coexistence in a troubled world. Our forefathers settled in Cupheag, a shelter from the storms of the wild seas they’d crossed and the persecutions they’d left behind, bringing with them the symbols of their beliefs—the music of praise, the tokens of worship, the bell that called them to a common place to bow their heads and offer thanks.

We’re not so different today. Our stormy seas may be more internal, our persecutions often self-induced, yet we seek the same shelter. We find it in each other’s company in this sacred place, only a little less than half the age of the founding church of Adam Blakeman. We seek respite from the trials of daily life—illness, sorrow, loss. We believe in the power of this place and in the God we trust to transform our lives, to relieve our pain, to give us purpose, usefulness, and the ability to look beyond our own frail needs.

We look back in gratitude to the generations that came before, who sought to shape this town and this church by love. If we had a time machine we would see them engage in so many of the same activities—grateful worship, family gatherings and church picnics, voices raised in joyous song, help for those less fortunate.

We would see them work to fulfill, as we do today, the simplest and most powerful commandment of all: do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

Because we are human we fall short in our attempts, as did our ancestors and as will future generations. Because we are human we seek forgiveness for our failures, but we must always use the forgiveness that is granted to spur us on in our quest to be more than we think we can be.

The First Congregational Church of Stratford had a significant role in the origins of this town. As we reflect on our history let us sit side by side in these pews with the presence of those who’ve gone before. Let us listen for the rustle of long skirts sweeping down the aisle, catch a glimpse of the men with their stiff high collars and the restless children in their Sunday best, hear the clip-clopping echo of horses hooves drawing carriages down the road outside.

These spirits are here to assure us that our efforts are not in vain. Stratford and the First Congregational Church remain and prevail. Let us link arms and dedicate ourselves to treasuring the past, awakening the present and opening the way to the future. Let us provide strong shoulders for new generations to stand upon and raise their arms to even greater opportunities in faith and community.

~Andy Byrne, September 22, 2014
Poem in free verse, of Stratford Plantation, Past, Present and Future

On the Occasion of the 375th Anniversary of the Town of Stratford

Far away from home and hearth, from bonnie England to New England’s wooded shores, to a new paradise, to build a new Zion in pristine wilderness, they came.

The Puritans, the planters, the righteous, the dreamers, the adventurers, their servants and slaves, they came.

And here across the ages they were blessed, by harvest and industry to build that dream for God and their children, their legacy, through to the modern age and beyond.

We dwell here in anticipation, looking to the future to sustain our community.

**Men:** "Far away from hearth and home
To New England’s shores we did roam;
To a paradise wilderness we came,
The piney wooded shores to tame."

**Women:** Our children grew in harmony,
Upon their planter father’s knee,
And learned of tending to all things,
In nature, which around us rings.

**Men:** We men and boys have learned to toil,
Plying sail, weaving, tending to the soil,
Building homes for our families, and even more,
Churches and schools from forest to shore.

**Women:** We women and girls did keep our homes,
We gardened, cooked, baked bread and scones,
Taught sewing and quilting, kept ducks and chickens,
Conserved foodstuffs in cellars and kitchens.

**Men and Women:** Now we all look to the future, new times,
To have new beginnings, that are sublime.
The Heavens approve and smile on what may be:
Our community is Stratford, Stratford by the sea.

~Composed and envisioned by Zoltan Toman, March 15, 2014
FAMILY TREE OF
THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
(United Church of Christ)
Stratford, Connecticut — 1639
"Looking Back and Seeing Forward"

Courtesy of Russell Hartel