

Oral History Interview of Rev. Sally Colegrove
December 26, 2012 and 2013
by Pat and Tad Larrabee

Sally: I have to start long before I arrived on the scene because my ancestors actually founded First Congregational Church. I am descended from the seven original proprietors of First Congregational Church, all seven, through my father's side of the family. Through the years, our family went in many different directions so that the family actually had left First Church. My dad was worshiping in the Methodist Church in Greenwich at the point that he met my mother. My mother was a member of First Congregational Church and in fact her father was the Senior Deacon of First Church, Edward Grant. They had come from New York when she was two and she had grown up as a member of First Church. My mother and dad met actually at Youth Fellowship at First Church because a friend of my father's had asked him to go to Fellowship with him. So when they married, it brought dad back into the church basically bringing the line of descent from our proprietors back into the fold as it were.

So I grew up at First Church from literally the day I was born. I never had to make a decision as to the fact that it would be the church I would go to. I wouldn't have to make a decision as to, "Did I believe what First Church believed?" It was the family church, and it was really the family church on both sides of the family.

My earliest memories of First Church are of the church facing the other way, facing what are now the rear organ pipes and the Narthex entrance of the church – that was the Chancel. Our family sat - if you were looking face forward at that Chancel - we sat back on the left hand side, in the left hand back pew. I can remember being about three years old and I think it was either Palm Sunday or Easter, I can remember being in the back pew and looking up at the stained glass window which fascinated me, right over my head, which I now know is "St. Cecilia with a lyre". It is still in that back corner. I thought it was one of the most beautiful....the sun was streaming through that window and the colors just intrigued me as a three year old.

I was baptized there at the church by Dr. Daniels. Dr. Daniels was a great good friend of my maternal grandparents. Ed Grant was his Senior Deacon for several years. My grandmother, Eva Grant, was president of the Women's Fellowship, except it was called Women's Guild at that point. So my first memory of the parsonage (at 106 Sound Beach Avenue) in the front yard of the church was being told to put on my best dress, my Mary Janes and my white gloves because I was going to see Mrs. Daniels at the parsonageand being taken by my grandmother and walking to the front door of the parsonage and walking into the big living room which is now back to being a living room in the downstairs apartment. It was such a lovely, big parsonage. They had a beautiful living room and then we walked through the living room into the dining room of the house which is the room that has the glass cupboards and fireplace. There was a big dining table and a big punch bowl on the table. I was given fruit punch and cookies as my grandmother talked to Mrs. Daniels. To bring it full circle; I now own that punch bowl. The punch bowl was given to my grandmother at the time that Mrs. Daniels broke up the house and she wanted my grandmother to have it. My grandmother then passed it on to me. So I've got that punch bowl and I used it at the house several times when I was living there.

So I grew up always sort of knowing not only the buildings of First Church, but knowing the people of First Church from a very early age. I remember the extension of the church being built in the early 1960's. During the time that they were building the church, those of us in the church school – the church school was huge at that point; I think there were 900 kids in the church school. There were two different services so there were two different church schools running. Mrs. Hightower was the church school superintendent. She had us very well organized. We were having classes in all of the different houses that the church owned all around the property. The pastor at that point had stopped living in that front parsonage. I was a 3rd or 4th grader and my church school class met in what was the dining room of the parsonage. There were French doors that closed and the next oldest grade was meeting in what had been the living room of the parsonage. Rick Woodman's class was behind those French doors. That's when I first met up with Rick who later became one of the youth advisors as I started to develop the youth program. It was a grand good time to be part of First Church.

I remember as a child running up and down the construction site which is now where the sanctuary is. I remember the dedication of the Church and Dr. Daniels being there. I remember the great sadness when Dr. Daniels died. I think I was about nine years old when he died. And then the fact that we were in this transition time; we had this great big new church, we had all these members - and we had no pastor. The person who came to help us was Harry Adams who was a professor at Yale Divinity School. He was the interim and then the person who was called as the new minister was Duke Potter. Merton Libby had been Vincent Daniels' associate and he was still there - he went on to be Duke Potter's associate as well. The other member of the staff who was there and was a constant was Gerry Mack who was the Director of Music who was also the senior choral person at Greenwich High School. Another person who was a real part of that transition and stability during that time was Ray Harrington who helped install all the microphones and really put the church together in the form that we know it now.

So suddenly we have this new minister, Duke Potter. To use a Maine expression, I don't think that Duke and Gerry Mack "hitched horses." I don't think they really got along with each other. Gerry went on to be on the music staff at Hartt School of Music at Hartford. And we suddenly were looking for a new person, and the new person who came was Richard Vogt. Richard came in 1966 and everything sort of changed.

The 300th Anniversary of First Church - 1965

But just before Richard came, the last thing that Gerry did was to help us celebrate the 300th anniversary of First Church. I spent a year of my life doing almost nothing, it seemed, but being part of the 300th anniversary because my Dad was the coordinator of what was called the "Old Town Social." It was a huge fair that we had out on the lawn and all through Binney Park and everything to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the church. We had an amazing torchlight parade through the streets of Old Greenwich and up and around and then several days of this fair. We literally had built a little Town of Old Greenwich with different store fronts and everything right on our lawn. There was a barber shop and an apothecary. As a kid, it was just magical - to see the torch light... That is when the Sound Beach Volunteer Fire Department acquired their antique fire truck, the horse drawn one. That was bought for the Old Town Social. To see that coming down with Clydesdales pulling it down the street with it belching smoke and everything - it was wonderful. It was a wonderful community event.

The other thing that happened - and my dad was involved - was the publication of the book "The First 300 Years." We had a book tea and a big signing of the book by the author and wonderful events around that book and that tea. That book was a very special edition; the fact that it was in a slipcase; the fact that it had color plates of our stained glass windows. It was hugely expensive. The church took a real bath on the publication of those books. If they had all sold, that would have covered the costs of publication, but the \$10 cost was too much for people and they didn't all sell. So for years and years, we gave them to new members. There still are plenty of them in the church attic. And there are still some unbound ones in the attic.

All of that was very exciting. Then the high point of that year was something called "The Flame of Faith" which was a pageant written by Charlotte Heimann.

Pat: We've found scripts for that in the church archives.

Sally: "The Flame of Faith" was enacted by.....anybody who wanted to be in it, you got a role. They actually wanted descendants to play the first proprietors and their families. I played the daughter of one of the first proprietors. That was a wonderful thing. I think we did four performances of that play. What "The Flame of Faith" did was tell the story of First Church up through almost to the present. People played all the different pastors that came along. It was very well received, very well reviewed. That was the first time that I saw the sweep of the history. It was in the Meetinghouse, in our big new church. For many of us, it was our first time really to play with the church. It was for that that they put the lighting bars up in the ceiling and hung the theatrical lights. That was the first time that any of that happened, and it was all Ray Harrington's doing along with Bill Pierce who did all of the technical work around the church at that point. "The Flame of Faith" gave me a grounding of the fact that the church history was mine and I could play with the building and I could continue to be a part of its history.

So as I continued growing up, there was suddenly this new person in our lives, this Dick Vogt. Before I talk about Dick, I need to tell about how my mother came to be on the church staff. In the summers I had always gone to First Church Day Camp. That was a wonderful experience as a kid. Helen Allen, who was then Helen Hull, and her family had been really instrumental in putting that Day Camp together with one of our first youth ministers whose name was Doug Allen. Doug and the whole family all really created this wonderful summer camp where the camp was all over the church. We had science in what is now the Youth Room. We had arts and crafts down in what is now the pre-school.

At about the time I was in the second or third grade, my parent's finances were such that it wasn't going to be possible to send both my brother and me to Day Camp. So my mom went to the person who was the new minister at church, Duke Potter, and said, "Look, I'm a fully trained professional secretary. Is there any way I can swap you some time being a secretary for my kids being able to go to Day Camp?" That's how mom got on the staff as one of the church secretaries. When it got to be the end of that summer, mom stayed on the staff. It was about another year later that Dick Vogt arrived.

Richard Vogt

Mom helped Dick do a number of different things. They developed a real close friendship on the staff. Mom would do a lot of his secretarial work early on. She also would tell him off. She would tell him if he was out of line or if he was being too radical - she would tell him some of those things. Dick would come over to our house occasionally for Sunday dinner. One of the guests he brought with him was a wonderful tenor named Seth McCoy. It was the first time that I had ever gotten to know an Afro-American person. Seth became Uncle Seth to all of us in the Junior Choir programs. He was such a wonderful, jolly person. He later made his debut at the Metropolitan. But at the point that Dick brought him up and had him start singing, Seth was a postman in New York City. He was struggling and taking care of his mother in a little apartment in Harlem. Dick realized that this man, who he heard sing in one of the New York churches, had just incredible talent. It was Dick who developed Seth's career. After a couple of years, we were very lucky when we could get Seth. Seth always would come back every time we did Noye's Fludde and Seth was always the elephant. Seth was enormous and that elephant head was made for Seth McCoy.

One of the first things that Richard did, even before doing the first Noye's Fludde, was he bought the Palmer hand bells. The Palmer family had left money in memory of a member of the family who had died, and Richard knew that, to do some of the things that he had in his mind that he was planning out there, he needed a hand bell choir. His first feeling was that the people who should play hand bells were junior high and high school kids. So I was part of the first Palmer hand bell choir that Dick tried to teach. Now, the fact that I have very little musical sense at all frustrated Richard all the time. But he did allow me to be a part of it. That first little hand bell choir was the two Fingerle kids, the three Woodman kids, my brother and me and two young people from a family named Johnson who were the youth group advisor's kids. We formed this first little Palmer hand bell choir. It was a wonderful group.

Richard would not only teach us to play the hand bells, but at holidays, about twice a year, he would take all of us to New York City and take us to a big musical. It was with Richard that I saw the first things I ever saw in New York. I saw the revival of West Side Story at Lincoln Center. I saw a couple of other things in New York City. For the first time I saw the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and St. Patrick's. Richard was really giving us all a cultural education and sensitizing us to what it meant to love music even if you were like me; he knew I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. He was training us in all sorts of things. He was developing the four o'clock service and the symbols pageant. Different of us were taking part in that. As I grew into being a member of the youth group, Richard would have people write things for our youth group. The thing I can remember off the top of my head is that he had Alice Parker, who was such a well-known composer, write a piece called "I Shall Not Be Moved" that is dedicated to the youth group at First Congregational Church. It's now, of course, being done all over the place. But we were the ones who premiered that.

It was a wonderful, wonderful time where we could rub shoulders with people like Alice Parker. Or Clamma Dale who came and sang solos for us and then went and was Bess on Broadway in "Porgy and Bess." And Cynthia Clarey and Jake Gardner and all of those people. I was part of the hand bell choir for the first production (in 1968) of Noye's Fludde because he did train us - it took about a year - he trained this little group of kids to play the hand bell part for the first Noye's Fludde. After that I think he decided that hand bells were more appropriate for adults because he wanted all of us to have the fun of being the

animals. So I was an animal in the second (in 1969) and third (in 1973) productions. I saw Dave Brubeck there at church probably 8 to 10 times, sometimes with his sons, sometimes just Dave.

Richard had a wide variety of different friends that he would bring and he always would allow the children of the church to be a part of it. That was a great genius of his. Richard loved children. He was not particularly good with children; he was OK with teenagers, but the strength of Richard's presence with little children would frighten them. You had to understand what Richard was trying to do. If you understood that and could get your own ego out of the way, then Richard was one of the most wonderful people to work with and work for that you could ever imagine. Through the years Richard and I did not always agree, but we always respected each other. I know now as pastor of my own church, that throughout my career, much of what I do liturgically, my whole sense of worship, was built by Richard Vogt; not just musical aspects, but of my sense of worship, of how to structure a service, of what is important, of how to time things, of the way to be creative in worship. There are so many pieces that I completely can credit to Richard. And my brother, who is a musician and also a pastor, also credits Richard with having taught him everything he knows about worship. There were many, many people who came through one part of Richard's program or another and have had enormous careers because of what Richard taught us.

The 1981 British Festival was extraordinary. Richard even brought Hermione Gingold, a Broadway star to First Church for an evening and conversation. **The Tea Story:** When Richard knew that we were going to do the British Festival, he had this idea that every day at four o'clock we would have high tea in the lounge. He would have a different member of the Congregation each day be in charge of the cookies and things for the whole month of the British Festival. We would have this moment, no matter what we were doing or how crazy it was, everything would come to a stop at First Church and at four o'clock in the afternoon there would be tea in the lounge. Thinking about how he would fund this and everything else, he got a lot of different sponsors for a lot of different parts of it, so he wrote the Twinings Tea Company and said: "I'd like to do these teas at four o'clock, and if you folks could donate a few Twinings tea bags to us, I will promote Twinings Tea on our materials. We are going to do it for 30 days and so it doesn't have to be the same kind of tea, but if you want to send me a couple of little boxes of tea bags, I will promote Twinings tea."

I actually was in the office when the crate arrived. The crate was the size of a large kitchen table. It was this massive crate addressed to Richard Vogt. So we got Richard on the double. We got a screw driver and pried open the lid of this crate and there were 4,000 Twinings tea bags in the crate, every single type of tea that Twinings made. Not only did we have tea every day, but everybody who came to tea every day was given a Twinings tea bag. The promotional material, about 1,000 letters that went out about the British Festival, each had a Twinings tea bag in the promotional material. First Church drank Twinings tea for probably the next five years. It was a great, wonderful thing. Dick was just delighted. He was like a little boy at Christmas. He could not believe it. He just laughed and was just beside himself with such pleasure that they had done this.

Dick also talked Viscardi's Colonial Inn in Old Greenwich into becoming an English pub for a month. I can remember the whole church kitchen at First Church being full of women

making scotch eggs because they were something that we could not order. Angie needed scotch eggs supposedly to make this into a pub. So First Church made all these scotch eggs and shipped them down to Angie for the British pub that was in our midst for the month that we did the British Festival.

The fact that we did Noye's Fludde as a part of the British Festival was purely astounding. Noyes Fludde all by itself is hugely involving. It was the very last weekend of the Festival. And there was something every weekend. He had an English chamber orchestra that did one of the concerts, there was a big organ recital that was a part of it; it was just the best!

There were large British flags everywhere! A lot of the banners from that are still in the upper music attic.

The evening with Hermione Gingold was brilliant. It was the Saturday night of the second weekend. Richard had taken some of the platforms and put them in the center of the auditorium and put one of the chairs out of the back of the sanctuary with arms, almost like a throne. Hermione was introduced and we were all sitting around at round tables, with Twinings tea of course. Hermione sat on the platform and just talked and told stories and just was charming for about 45 minutes. Richard sent a chauffeured limousine to New York to pick Hermione up at her apartment and then return her. It was paid for by one of Richard's angels. Richard was able to talk people out of money with more finesse than anybody I have ever known. He would make these things happen. That was the biggie. Very often in programs he would list one "anonymouse" or "two anonymice" and things like that and sometimes list "Angel" in the program if people didn't want their names to be known. The British Festival was in 1981 and I was on staff by that point.

How I got involved

I grew up through the youth program at First Church and then went away to college. Like all college kids, like church – no, not going to do that. I fell out of being part of church until about a year after I graduated from college. But the thing I had stayed part of all through that time was Silver Lake Conference Center; I had been a counselor at Silver Lake all the way through. When I was back and working at Greenwich Hospital in accounts payable and payroll, it was Easter and so, yea, it was Easter and I was going to humor my mother and yes I would go to church. So I went and I was introduced to a new young minister who had just come whose name was Tom Stiers. Tom said that he had taken over from Paul Yinger and he had just become Senior Pastor and he had been the Associate Pastor and that position was open. So we had an Interim in the Associate's roll and the Interim was a young woman name Ann Suzedell. Tom said that Ann was a wonderful person, but that she didn't have any experience with youth ministry or retreats or anything like that. And Tom had heard that I had done a lot of work up at Silver Lake and would I consider teaching confirmation class with Ann; she needed somebody to do that. I felt: "Sounds like Silver Lake. OK, I think I could probably do that." That was the Confirmation class of 1976-77. I worked with them all year. I worked with Ann. She left in January to take up her full time call down in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. By that time, I was sort of scratching my head and saying, "Wait a minute! What this woman is doing - I want to do that. I don't want to just work with numbers and be part of the hospital any more. I want to do what this woman is doing and I think I can do it."

I finished out that year with Confirmation and the next year I started again teaching Confirmation with the new Associate who had been called whose name was Paul Fraser. Paul and I not only did Confirmation, but Paul said: "Come on, I need help with Senior Pilgrim Fellowship, too." And so I started doing both Confirmation and Senior Pilgrim Fellowship. By that next spring I was working 45 hours a week at the hospital and I was working about 35 hours a week at First Church. I knew that something had to give. But I had become so committed to the young people of First Church that I knew what was going to give was the hospital job. I was not paid for my church work; I was volunteering all those hours.

So I went to Tom and said: "Look. I'd like to go to Yale Divinity School, but I'm going to need a paid job. And so would you please spread the word around the Association that if anybody needs a paid youth minister, that I am qualified and I would like the job so that I can pay for going to Yale. This came because I had seen that Ann had been doing what I wanted to do, and to do that, I had to be ordained. It meant that I had to go to seminary. Basically I backed in the door. I decided that I didn't ever want to be a minister-minister, I just wanted to be a Youth Minister.

I had read the catalogs for Yale, Union, Princeton and Andover Newton. When I looked at all the different seminaries, Yale was the only place that brought together a very, very ecumenical approach to ministry. Yale has usually 30 different denominations on campus. It has the Institute of Sacred Music which is a worship and music component that I thought deepened the experience and also was tied back into the things that I had done with Richard. It was commutable. It would take me less time to get to Yale than any place else because I didn't want to give up necessarily the contact I was having with teenagers. I knew I needed to do that in Fairfield County. I was trying to balance all these pieces. Basically, it came out that Yale was the one place that I really wanted to go to.

So I told Tom. On my birthday, in 1978, I got two letters in the mail that day besides the usual birthday cards. I got my acceptance at Yale Divinity School and I got a letter from Tom asking me to take the job as part time Youth Minister at First Church. That is how I got on the staff. I started on the staff on August 1, 1978 and I started at Yale Divinity about a month later. It took me five years to get through Yale because I was working basically three-quarter time and within two years I was working full time as Youth Minister.

When I started at the church, we had about 14 kids in the youth group. Nancy Ziac was running the youth program on a volunteer basis. She had been the one who said to the church: "There was the potential for many more, but I don't have the time to do it and we need to get somebody who really can run it. Sally has been working as one of the advisors. Why don't we have Sally do some of this?". At the height of the youth program when I was running it we had about 70 teenagers because we had not only the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship, but we had a Junior Pilgrim Fellowship and we had the College Pilgrim Fellowship. Of those, about 45 at a time were in the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship. It was a wonderful time. It was a time when youth groups were something that you did. It was a time when Young Life was also popular here in Town. We offered the big liberal alternative to the conservative ministry that was Young Life.

So I went off to Yale; I started doing these things; I continued to teach Confirmation class; I was doing the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship. I was living at home. I finished Yale only \$4,000

in debt which was wonderful. Yale Divinity does not cost as much as some of the other parts of Yale. I was very lucky because just at the time that I was in my senior spring semester, one of the ministers on the staff at First Church, whose name was David Taylor, decided that he was ready to go elsewhere and try to be a senior pastor on his own. They decided that instead of doing a national search, they would move Dale Greene up to Associate and that left the opening for an Assistant Pastor and they moved me in as the Assistant Pastor and ordained me at First Church.

In the two years after I was ordained, I think we had seven ordinations and six were women. We were known as a church that raised and ordained women. The one male ordination during that time was my brother who was ordained a year after I was. Tom was responsible for the emphasis on ordaining women. Nancy Schongalla, Brenda Stiers, me, Deedee Rigg, Meg Boxwell, Faith Carmichael and a couple of others had all gone through Yale and served on the First Church staff or were friends of Tom and Brenda's. It was quite an interesting time.

Tom was a wonderful mentor. He taught me everything that I knew about administration, about the way to be a pastor. I really had the best of ministerial education. I really would credit Richard for teaching me a sense of worship; Tom for teaching me a sense of administration and pastoral presence; Dale for teaching me for how to do real pastoral care like hospital visitation and things of that nature; two people, going back a ways, Duke Potter and Herman Reissig, for teaching me what I know about preaching. All of these people were the pastors of First Church. It was a great team of professionals. I was extremely lucky. I was really surrounded by so many talented and committed professionals. So that's how I got there.

The Youth Program

Young people have always been a very important part of the way that First Church has understood itself. Having grown up in the youth program, I recognized that. The youth program had deteriorated in the years before that I came back and started working with Paul Fraser and Nancy Ziac in the mid 1970's. Once I was ordained, and was ordained with a major component of my time being the youth program, I tried to get the youth program structured in such a way that it would do the things that historically had been important for the church. We had a four-focus youth program. We focused on Worship, Mission, Fun and Fellowship and Education. We tried to spend about a quarter of our time in each of those areas.

The Team of Advisors

As I talk about the youth program, I really need to talk about the people who made it possible. While I was the one with the responsibility for the youth program, we were a team right from the very beginning. And we were a team with many members. The team began with Paul Fraser, Nancy Ziac and me. And at the time, Nancy and I were both volunteers. We developed a program that was new to the church; it was a new concept of the fellowship group that would meet every Sunday night and we called it the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship. The name came from the Paul's desire to regularize our youth group with the other youth programs of the United Church of Christ. Historically the name for those youth programs has been the Pilgrim Fellowship.

So we started and we had the feeling that we wanted to have those of us who were advisors also be members of the group so that the young people would feel that they were equal with us and could help make the decisions as well. After Nancy Ziac left the program in about 1979 or 1980, we recruited other advisors. The next team, Paul Fraser was still the Associate Pastor and was doing a lot of the work. I had come on in 1978 as a paid youth minister, but we recruited Charlie and Linda Hotetz, and also Lynn and John Lehman and Rick Woodman as advisors who could work with us, help transport kids, be there on Sunday nights. After the Hotetz's left the program in about 1986, Brad and Susie Craig came on as part of the advisor team. Shortly after Brad and Susie came on board, Rick married Carolyn Paulus and she also became an advisor. We were then joined by Bobby and Barbara Fortunato, later by Phoebe Griffith and Joe McBride, by Bill Bausch and Betsy Kreuter, and Ginny Breismeister who actually ran the SPF Task Force.

This sounds like a lot of advisors, and it was. Usually there were at least eight adult advisors in the youth room for an SPF meeting on a Sunday night. That was really important. It was really important that there be lots of different people with different styles who could relate to the young people. If young people did not relate well to my style, maybe it would be Bill Bausch's style that would catch somebody's attention. Also we came with a many different skills and abilities. Bill and Brad Craig, of course, are excellent carpenters and know construction and they could help the young people do certain types of projects. People like Bobby Fortunato and Carolyn Paulus could help when we wanted to do something musical. Phoebe Griffith and Joe McBride were much more into nature and animals and science and did wonderful things there. Betsy Kreuter and Bill Bausch had the canoes and knew about that. So we built a team of advisors that was a steady group of people. That's one of the things that I am most proud of. We were a friendship group unto ourselves. We would have good parties as the youth group advisors. Because we were there, we were in place, we were a steady, constant presence, we gave the young people who came through the program a great sense of security. It wasn't like hiring a seminarian new each fall where you didn't know whether that person would be back the next year. We were there and were constant and most of us who were the advisors were together from about 1986 - 1988 right through to 2003. That is a long stability for a group of youth advisors.

Another thing that was wonderful, starting in the mid 90's, some of our very early kids who had been through the program returned to Greenwich after college and began to be advisors. Some only came for a short while, maybe a semester when they were between college and graduate school. Others moved back to the area and really became first junior advisors and then advisors and part of the team. I think about people like Annie Sharfenstein, Clem Lepoutre, Holly and Laurie Tubbs, Pam Sheehy, Marcia Weil, and later on, around 2000, Will Bonnell and Devon Simpson. These were very important role models for the young people who were in the program because they showed that it was possible to leave Greenwich, to go away to college and to come back and again find life in Greenwich. I think that we offered that in a way that probably was not offered anywhere else in town. That was a very important part.

That is a considerable list of people – probably I've named 25 different adults. All of those people made a commitment to being with the SPF as equals. When we would get together, everybody sat on the floor together, everybody sang together, everybody did the Easter Sunrise service together. I'll talk about some more of those things as I go through the

different areas that the youth program was composed of. In every part of it, it was this team, this family, all doing things together.

There was another part of the team. If you think of the youth members as being one part, the adult advisors being a second part, there was a very important third part of the youth team and that was the Task Forces. Both the SPF, the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship, and our Confirmation Class were backed up by adult Task Forces. Lynne Lehman, and then later Ginny Breismeister, chaired the SPF Task Force. And a parent from each class chaired the Confirmation Task Force. The SPF Task Force also stayed in place for years and years. I can remember that for probably fifteen years we had Easter breakfast at Ginny Breismeister's house. That was a fixed event in our year. And those Task Forces backed up not only with tactical help, but also with being a group that could take a look at the program and make sure that we were going in the direction that the Church wanted us to go. It was a very important philosophical think tank for me to have with parents to make sure that we were doing the things that the parents would want us to do.

Instead of going chronologically, I'd like to take the four emphases of the youth program by area because each of those areas developed in a very different way.

Worship & Shows

Worship is the one that probably has the oldest roots. From before I was in Youth Fellowship, in fact as early as probably the late 1940's or early 1950s, the youth program at First Church has been identified with doing the Easter sunrise service at Greenwich Point. When I took over the youth program and started running it, I needed to reclaim that. There had been a couple of fallow years when we had given it over to Presbyterian Church in Old Greenwich because we didn't have enough of a youth program to really run it. They had had their time with it and they were done. So we quickly reclaimed it. Paul Fraser had a similar vision to mine that we needed to do that, that we needed to have that to be our service. We still owned the big cross that had been used down at the Point starting back in the early 1950's. Paul and I decided that one way that we could catch the attention of the community and the interest of our young people was to carry the cross through Old Greenwich on Good Friday. We took our little team of about 20 kids at this point - in the early 80's, before I was ordained - we got the cross - and that cross is heavy; it weighs about 75 pounds - and we challenged the kids to carry the cross down to the beach, lock the cross in the beach house, and do a service on Easter Sunday.

One of the things that really made it come alive is that there was a young person who was in our youth group at that point - the youth group was pretty musical - named Bobby Fortunato. I said to Bobby: "Hey, look - good music will pull the kids together, will pull them down to do this." He was about 15 - 16 years old and was just starting to play the guitar. So we decided that we were going to pull off this first service. And we did. Afterwards, it sort of pulled us toward thinking that we had a lot of young people who are really into music. Maybe we could take what was evolving out of the worship life of our youth group and maybe we could put on a show.

I'm putting the shows in with the Worship component because that is where they belong because there was a strong worship component to each of the shows that we did. We started having times that we did music in all of our different youth group meetings. Paul Fraser played the guitar; Bobby played the guitar; Holly and Laurie Tubbs played the guitar.

A lot of our kids had been in the special music programs at the high school. So we started having music be a way to worship on Sunday nights. We were singing a lot of the same songs that Young Life was singing. We had the Young Life songbooks. That was all very important to us. Then in 1980, we decided that we would try to write a show that would take a lot of these worship songs that we had been learning and have an evening sort of like a variety show. So we wrote a show called "The Rainbow Connection." "The Rainbow Connection" was the first of the shows that we did. We did shows at the start for three years running. We did "The Rainbow Connection," then we did "Happiness Is," and then we did "Through Children's Eyes." They were all written by our group. The kids would choose music that they wanted to do, skits they wanted to do, and give me a list of all of them and I would massage them into a format that would make a show and I would usually write a continuity so that it would make sense to an audience.

After "Through Children's Eyes," we started doing a show every other year because the shows took a huge amount of effort. It meant that each young person coming through, being a senior high student with the church, would have at least two opportunities to be on stage. The reason that I wanted the kids to have that opportunity was that music and theater here in Greenwich are done on such a professional level that most kids never have the chance to perform. What I wanted to do was to offer any child who had any inclination that they would like to try being on stage, to give them that chance. I knew that there were going to be kids who could not carry a tune in a bucket, but I hadn't been able to carry a tune in a bucket. To have a chance to be on stage, to have a chance to try out performing, is huge. It's a huge confidence builder. We took kids who couldn't sing and said you're a member of the chorus. We took kids, even some of whom had learning disabilities and everything else, we found things so that every member of the SPF who wanted to be, was on stage.

From 1980 and "The Rainbow Connection" up to the last show I did which was "Joseph and Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat" in 2003, I think we did 16 or 17 shows. Most of them were these musical reviews. There was "Seize the Day," "The Next Step," "The Best of Friends," "Homeward Bound," "Walk Forever by My Side," and others, all shows that we basically wrote. The shows that we actually bought rights to and did, the full musicals, we did "Godspell" three times in 1986, 1992 and 2000. Then we did "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown." I had always wanted to do the Andrew Lloyd Webber show "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat," but "Joseph" takes sixteen male voices. I had been watching the program and thinking that it ever happens and I can see the sixteen male voices, we're going to do it. There are some good women's parts in there too.

It was only the year I left that suddenly I looked at the youth group and thought, "There they are!" One Confirmation class had come through with Jack Davidson, John Sood, Yoyo Zhang, Lucy Hoffman, Tom Oppedisano and about four other young people who sang. And the class right after had Dylan Rose, and a couple of other kids - there they were, there were the sixteen male voices. The way I felt was that if each generation of kids coming through, if we did "Godspell" once, "Godspell" is a fabulous vehicle for a youth group because it teaches everyone associated with the show almost the complete text of the Gospel of Matthew. The kids who have been in "Godspell" never forget it. I know Jack Davidson credits it as part of his ministerial training. I know Craig Breismeister does. It is just something that is hugely important to the kids who were part of the on-stage cast - and the rest of everybody working in the show. That's what I mean about how it is worship as

well as performance. So the shows were huge; they were great. We started out in order to have costumes, we'd silk screen tee shirts. We'd have everybody wear white jeans, white turtlenecks and then these tee shirts on top. It was the only thing we could afford, and it was sort of like, OK, that's how we're going to do it. What the shows did was to provide the funds we needed to start doing the mission trips.

Mission Trips

The first mission trip I took with the kids was in 1980 to West Virginia, to the Appalachian South Folklife Center. It was a wonderful trip. We did Appalachian South two different times in 1980 and 1984. But then, as we got to 1986 and were looking at another mission trip, I really had a sense that I wanted our kids to realize that there were desperately poor people right here in New England. I didn't know what to do or how to find a really good place to go. Between our two trips down to West Virginia, we had done something at St. Luke's Community over in Stamford. We moved into the chapel over at St. Luke's Community and we did a lot of painting projects and stuff for them over the course of a weekend. But I thought there must be something like Folklife Center in New England.

So I called the Homeland Board of the United Church of Christ and asked: "What do you have in the New England region?" They said "We've just gotten a videotape in from something called H.O.M.E. Let us send it to you." I got the videotape which was called "With Hammers, Paint and Love" and watched it and thought, "We're going there!" In 1986, fourteen of us, four adults and ten teenagers, went to Maine for the first time to H.O.M.E. We went for 17 years running while I was there and they went several times after I left. The H.O.M.E. trip really became a focus of the SPF year. It drove us into doing other kinds of fundraising besides just the shows. It became almost the most special thing that we ever did. I remember asking the kids one year if it was more important to do a show or more important to go to H.O.M.E., and it was immediate: we go to H.O.M.E. It focused our energy, our attention. The fact that the H.O.M.E. community then started bringing the crafts show down so that we would see folks from H.O.M.E., we would see that familiar pottery, the wood things and the quilts and everything in November. We would then go to H.O.M.E. April vacation for 17 years running we went to Maine for the week of April vacation. We had our kids giving up trips to Europe, giving up trips to the Virgin Islands, saying we can't not be there to go to H.O.M.E. The biggest trip we took to H.O.M.E. we had about 35 go. Most of the time it was around 25 to 30 who would go. That was just incredibly important.

When First Church decided to become a part of significant mission events overseas at the time that we did the One Great Hour of Sharing offerings each year, I was sent initially to Honduras. In January of 1986 I went to Honduras and did research and vowed to never, ever to go to that country again; I was scared out of my mind, I was sick, Honduras was in the midst of the Central American wars, it was terrible. But we started being in international missions. The next place that I went in 1988 was to Turkey. Our focus of that program was the Turkish Development Foundation based in Ankara. The next year I took back a team of six of us, one of whom was a teenager. We went to investigate for the missions part of the church. That teenager was Bjorn Wisecup.

The next project that we went on after Turkey was to Budapest, Hungary. This time a lot of the kids said no "one kid" this time – we are all going. So we did the first overseas mission trip with the youth group. About 20 kids and advisors went to Budapest for the week that included New Years from 1994 to 1995. This was after the collapse of the Soviet Union and

the churches were starting to get their buildings back. There are other parts of the church that could tell the mission stories about why we went to these different places. We did a painting project at a children's hospital. We also gave our kids a chance to see a developing country at a point when it was coming back from Communism and hear the stories of the people.

It was about two years after that the church decided to go back to Honduras. Basically they told me that I needed to go back to Honduras because I had been there before. I was not really happy with this idea, but I went and found that things had changed quite dramatically and that I could feel safe in Honduras. It had been the fact that Honduras was in the midst of the Central American wars that had made it so devastating before. After the first trip, I became committed to taking our kids to Honduras. The reason was that our kids grow up in a place of such privilege and surrounded by such wealth, I felt that they needed to be sensitized to what the rest of the world really was like, the fact that they were growing up in Never, Never Land. Basically, with the privilege of growing up in Never, Never Land comes the responsibility of being citizens of the world and working for change, dramatic change. The only way to give them a sense of that was to take them there. This mission came from me, from our church, from the larger UCC. I think that because I grew up in this town, I realized the fact that young people could grow up without a sense of values that could make them world citizens. I felt this responsibility very deeply, that we had to go overseas.

We did six trips to Honduras with the youth program. My last time I went with the kids was 2003. There was one year that we did not go to Honduras because, when I met with the Confirmation Class that started in September 1999 (they were confirmed in the year 2000), it was such an exceptional class, a dynamite class, that I knew when they walked in on their first day that they were going to be the leaders of the youth program for the next four years. I said to them: "You decide. Any place in the world that you want to go, we'll go. Where would you want to go?" They said we want to go to the Holy Land. And I said: "OK, then we'll go to the Holy Land." We started raising money. It was an interesting thing as they decided they wanted to go, pretty soon their families were saying that we're going too, and then other people in the church began to say we're going too. Tom Stiers and Susie Craig were the leaders on the bus of adults and I was the leader on the bus of young people.

That trip turned into the Holy Land trip in 2000. Seventy-nine people from First Church went to the Holy Land (only Israel). Two buses, it was a magnificent trip. We were in a period of grace there in the Holy Land that was caused by the fact that the Pope was going to visit for Lent and Easter for the Millennial Year. It caused a complete calm in the Holy Land. The whole Holy Land realized that they stood to gain enormously from being tourist sensitive at that time. It's still not possible to go back even now. One bus had thirty teenagers and ten adult advisors. It was life changing for all those kids who went. Several of those kids have gone into the ministry. Many of the others are active in churches even though they now are in their thirties. They got it! It was a great moment of both education and worship and faith development.

Confirmation

Another thing that I thought was very important about the youth program was our Confirmation program. Our Confirmation program was unique. We did not just take a packaged program and have it be something that we would buy the curriculum and do Confirmation. Starting back in the late 70's / early 80's, I had the feeling, and had it in

discussion with Tom Stiers and Paul Fraser that Greenwich kids would not relate well to things that were packaged for the entire country. There were particular concerns, there were particular abilities, and there was much more of a diverse population here in the area such that it was really important that we deliberately address Judaism, Islam, that we address both Biblical history and also the components of faith and with a large component of mission and service and outreach to make our Confirmation program really ready our kids for adulthood at First Church.

So with Tom's permission, I began to design a Confirmation curriculum for First Church. Then, as Meg Boxwell Williams joined the staff in 1982, she was all about that as well. She had extensive training in worship and liturgical theology from not only Yale Divinity School, but Yale Institute of Sacred Music. We really began to fine tune and create a program that I would say was really set by about 1983 or 1984, a program that we then continued, with modifications each year, right through the time that Meg left the staff in 1987 and through to all the time the Susie Craig was then first in Meg's position and then as Assistant or Associate Pastor. There always would be two of the pastors teaching Confirmation with one or two lay advisors. The pastors I taught with included Meg and Susie, Dale Greene, David Taylor, Tom Stiers, and Bill Federici. The person who really was the rock as far as a lay advisor was concerned was Rick Woodman. Rick has been teaching the Confirmation program at First Church probably now for well over 25 years. That is a very important function because he brings a deep love of the congregation and a lot of experience to his work with Confirmation.

As I think about each year's Confirmation class, one thing that was really important was that we were able to adapt the program to the particular needs of each class as they came through. You don't teach a class of 40 the same way you teach a class of 15. You don't teach a class of sports enthusiasts in the same way you that teach a group that are largely into the arts. So in the first couple of weeks of each Confirmation year, we would almost do diagnostics - sort of like: OK, how much Bible do you know? What do you like to do in your spare time? What are the questions that are bothering you? What keeps you awake at night? Then we would sit down and very deliberately say, OK, this piece isn't going to work with this class. But we've got this piece; remember this piece came from two years ago and let's move that in and let's try that. Or: this is a group that really knows each other; we don't need to do much group building with this group. Gosh, this is a group that comes from four different high schools; we need to very deliberately do two weeks of group building before we try to talk about anything that has significance. It came to the point that, what we found, was if we did Bible 101 in the Fall semester and then we addressed faith issues in the Spring semester, we could give confirmands the background on which they needed to express those faith issues and then we could move them toward finally a Spring retreat where they would write a Statement of Faith.

Silver Lake Retreats

Retreats were always an important part of the Youth Program. We went to Silver Lake two or three times each year with the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship and the young people also went with their families on the All Church Retreat. Silver Lake was vital to all of the work we did, and especially to the Confirmation program. We would have two retreats during the year. In the Fall there would be a retreat up at Silver Lake for a weekend where we asked each young person to come with one of their parents. That retreat was called Jesus of Nazareth and it was an intensive plunging of the group in to the life of Jesus Christ for the weekend.

We did trivia games. We did role plays. We did a Jeopardy game that was totally around things that were out of the Gospel of Mark. We also used as a resource the Franco Zeffirelli movie "Jesus of Nazareth" which is seven and a half hours long. We probably showed a good five hours of it to both parents and young people. That was how we were able to know that our young people who had been through that retreat, and that retreat was mandatory, they knew what the life of Christ, what the story was. And then we could go on from there to "OK, now what is your faith?"

Then in the Springtime, we would do a second Confirmation retreat that was called "What Do I Believe?" It was on that second Confirmation retreat that each young person would write their statement of faith. We had an outline and we also had stimuli to get them into the mind set so that it would be easy for them to write. An example: when the question that we asked them to write on was "What do I believe about God?", before we did that we showed them the movie "Oh God" with George Burns. It was amazing how that jumped them into: "I can think about God. If George Burns can play God, I can think about God". Or when we had them write about the Holy Spirit, we used the clip from "Return of the Jedi" of the Star Wars movies where Yoda is defining what the "force" is. And we said to them that the force to a Jedi is like what the Holy Spirit is to a Christian. And they got it. That was a big part of how we did the Statement of Faith retreat.

Those two retreat weekends were just hugely important. We would meet with the Confirmation Class starting the first week in October. We would meet every Tuesday night up until the first week in December. Then during December they did a mission project where they had a bake sale and they raised money and bought poinsettia plants and then each young person in the Confirmation Class delivered a poinsettia to one of our shut-ins with a parent with them. If parents couldn't go, I went with them because I didn't want any of our kids to walk into a shut-in situation, a nursing home situation, all by themselves. We had briefed the kids on questions they could ask. The best one was to just sit down with the older person and say "What was winter, what was Christmas like for you when you were a child?" When we got the group back after Christmas, we always asked them: "What did you hear?" They heard wonderful stories. They heard stories of a sleigh running up and down Sound Beach Avenue and all sorts of wonderful things. Also about the Church early on in the century. That was another important part of the Confirmation program.

We made a lot of Confirmation Sunday. It was always on Mother's Day in May. The young people were confirmed by the laying on of hands. On the Jesus of Nazareth Confirmation retreat in the fall, we had each of the young people do a felt square with their name and symbols that related to what their life was like, a soccer ball, a guitar, paint brush and tablet, something that represented them. And then we took those squares and we built them into a big banner. That banner hung in the Youth room for their year of Confirmation and then was in Church on Confirmation Sunday.

The Jerusalem Cross

The other thing that was an important, kind of mark of identification for the whole youth program, that started right with when they were confirmed, is the Jerusalem Cross. The Jerusalem Cross is bronze and hangs on a string around someone's neck. It is one large cross in the center surrounded by four small crosses. The symbolism is that Jesus Christ is Lord over the four corners of the earth. Or that the story of Jesus Christ is told by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I've heard it told both ways. Young people who had already been

confirmed gave the Jerusalem Cross to the new Confirmands as they were confirmed. It was a way of welcoming the new Confirmands into the fellowship of being in Senior High, being part of the Senior Pilgrim Fellowship. I know that most of our Confirmands still know where their Jerusalem Cross is. That was a mark of pride; of "I now have my Jerusalem Cross as well."

So Confirmation was a very important part of the youth program. It was a very important part, I think, of something that made being a young person at First Church a very special thing. As I talked earlier about the fact that there were four areas of the youth program, this is really the area of education. This is the education that our young people all received in Confirmation that was really key to the whole ethos of the youth program. They all would gripe about having to sit through the five hours of "Jesus of Nazareth." Older kids would tease the younger ones when they came back from their retreat about: "And how much of Jesus of Nazareth did you see?" They all are grateful for it. They all, as they think back on it, are grateful that they had that intensive experience.

The Statement of Faith

The other thing that Meg and Susie and David and several of us had to do battle over with different generations of the church committee and even Tom at times, is the fact that if one of our young people.... well, first of all, let me start back a little bit. On the very first day of Confirmation Class, I would say to the young people, if at the end of the process you are not ready to be confirmed, I will go with you to your parents and we will work it out. I will not confirm you just because they want to have you confirmed. This has to be your decision. It is your first decision as an adult. It comes before you get a driver's license. It comes before you graduate from high school. But if the church is going to call you an adult, you are going to make this as an adult decision.

So there were all sorts of folks who went through our Confirmation program. When they wrote their statement of faith there were a number of them who struggled over the years with the statement "I believe in God" or "I believe in Jesus Christ." We worked with young people to find ways to express that belief. But if a young person said to me: "I really want to be confirmed. I believe in what this church is all about, but I cannot say "I believe in God" or "I cannot say I believe in Jesus Christ," I would go and do battle because I felt that that young person should be confirmed. That is against what most of my peers would probably say to do. But I have always felt that, if we could keep young people feeling an ownership, feeling at home in the church, feeling that they were not in any way judged by the Church or in any way excluded by the Church, but instead were welcomed.....Really, if you scratch very hard at most of the adults sitting in the pews, you're going to find that there are lots of people there who have those doubts. But you have those doubts at different times in your life. The fact that as a ninth grader who is also studying evolution in science, that you've got those doubts, is no reason to exclude that young person and make them feel apologetic, or make them feel awkward in the face of their family or their peers. So that is a place that I could be criticized, and where I know that there would be a lot of disagreement with me, but that is just a place where I felt I needed to go. There was a time in the 90's when that was not a popular philosophy. I sometimes had to work with the young person to find ways to express God that was something that they did believe in - such as: "If God is love, then I feel that God," and that statement could stand as a belief in God. Meg was instrumental in coming up with that philosophy with me. Susie also supported that philosophy. Rick supported that philosophy. We did sometimes find that there would be a pastor or two on

the staff, especially a couple of part timers that came in different times, who did not support this philosophy.

The Velore, India Connection

In talking about the trips, which really formed the end of the first part of what I've been discussing in this oral history, I talked about some of our travel to Honduras and to Turkey and maybe we need to say some things in a more ordered way. At the point that I joined the staff, and before that for the period of the 1960's and 70's the church had been moving ever closer to a more committed mission program. I think that part of that came from the fact that Duke Potter, who was the pastor beginning in about 1964-65, had been born to missionary parents in Velore, India. He was born at the Velore Christian Medical College, which is part of the church of South India. His father's middle name was Marmaduke and that's where he got the "Duke" Potter. His father and mother were missionaries who were assigned to that part of India. So our church became one of the stateside supporters of the Velore Women's Christian Medical College, which is still a significant and running operation. Charlie Fish and his wife, First Church members, were also associated with Velore because Charlie's wife's sister was Dr. Ida Scudder. Ida Scudder was the niece of the Ida Scudder who had founded Velore Christian Medical College.

Pat: Yes, we have two oral histories on Ida.

International Missions

Sally: So that's your tie-in to how we got involved in international missions. It started with that contact with Velore. So then as Dr. Ida, who was the niece retired and moved to Greenwich to live with the Fishes, and was very much involved with the church when I came on board in the 70's, there was the desire on the part of the congregation to do more. They realized that we had a unique opportunity, given the affluence of the Greenwich community, to do more in the area of mission. "One Great Hour of Sharing" is an offering in the United Church of Christ which is historically done in the Lenten period. First Church had always taken the offering and I'd say the average was about \$3,000, which was considered a nice gift to go to Church World Service through the United Church of Christ. Tom Stiers, working with some of the benevolent stewards who were active in the mid 1980's decided that we could do better.

Water Well in Togo - 1984

Tom went into New York to 475 Riverside Drive, which was the office building that was used by all the different denominations, especially with their worldwide mission operations. The building was called (nicknamed) "The God Box". That was where the offices of the Board of World Ministries of the United Church of Christ were headquartered. Tom asked if there was a particular project that needed to be done somewhere in the world that we could take on. We were told that they needed a well drilling rig in the country of Togo in Africa, and that it was going to cost \$50,000. Tom came back and asked the church to make the commitment to, over three or four years, come up with the \$50,000. They did it. The well drilling rig worked in Togo for about 20 years, to my understanding. Drilling water wells so that the women did not have to lug water, some of them five to ten miles a day. It really improved the quality of life.

Honduras - 1986

At the end of that, Tom wanted to jump us even further. (None of our people went to Togo.) He felt that we had even more potential than 10 or 12 thousand dollars a year. So he went back down to The God Box and this time came back with the fact that there was a program in the country of Honduras that he thought was worthy of support and that one of our UCC missionaries was there in that country and her name was Dr. Joyce Baker. He felt that it would be advantageous for one of staff to go down to be able to interview Dr. Baker and to take pictures. Well, I was the photographer on the staff, so Tom just basically determined that I was going to go to Honduras. And I went kicking and screaming. I did not want to go. I was terrified - I had never been in a third world country although I had done quite a bit of travel. Honduras was right in the middle of the Central American wars. Tom found that a church in Silver Spring, Maryland, was taking a group of 15 down to see Dr. Baker and to see the different projects around the country, and he attached me to this trip. I was volunteered. I didn't know any of them and was pretty much all by myself. They were pretty much a closed unit. So it was not the happiest of trips. But I went, I am now very glad that I went, I have never been so sick in my life and also I was terrified the whole time I was there because when our vans were stopped, we were pulled off of the vans and these 16 year olds with big black machine guns stood there keeping us under guard while our van was torn literally apart before we were allowed to go further. It was a rugged, nasty time in Honduras.

But I also saw the feeding program. I saw the starving kids. I learned that 83% of the children in Honduras were malnourished. I saw the Cever Training School out in the Yoro Valley where they were trying to teach car mechanics and furniture construction to give some of these families any chance of more than mere survival incomes. The whole group of us went up into the Salvadoran refugee camps on the border with El Salvador. The camps were being run by the United Nations high commissioner on refugees. We had to leave all of our passports and all of our money and everything down at a way station and it was known up in the camps that none of the visitors had anything on them. If that had not been the case, we would have been killed for our passports. The camp was up on a plateau. We got there by school bus. Our money and passports went into little plastic bags. I have never been so terrified in my life. "OK, that's it, I'm never going back to the United States, that's the end of that." Several times during that trip I felt I wasn't coming home.

But - I saw a huge need and in talking to Dr. Baker I heard her very clearly say, "We need a new medical clinic in the town of Pinalejo." She showed me through the old shed that was acting as one of the two clinics that she was running and sure enough, it was horrible. I came back and said to the church they have the design down in Honduras for something that they'd like to do. First I was told, "Not this year." However, we did decide to fund the Cever School and a couple of other programs to the tune of \$30,000.

Tom took the next trip the next year and his group raised about \$30,000. I said I would not go back. When I got back here, I said I would never go to that God-forsaken country again in my life. It took me ten years to return. The first time I went had been in 1986. In 1995 the church was again looking for a new mission project. In the middle, we had been to Turkey and Zimbabwe. I didn't take all these trips - I took the trip to Turkey, Tom took the trip to Zimbabwe, and we had done Budapest, Hungary. We did projects in each of those places all under the banner of One Great Hour of Sharing. We were raising some pretty significant money, all about \$30 - 35,000 a year. This was a huge jump ahead for us.

In 1995 the Church Committee was discussing where to go next. We were offered three projects in the Middle East. One was a YMCA, one was a Palestinian resettlement project and the other one was something in Egypt. In listening to these things that were nice but were not life threatening, I realized that I had been seriously bothered by my memories of the starving children in Honduras. And I sat there thinking, "If I bring this up, I'm going to have to go back to Honduras!" And I thought I can't go back, but I also thought I can't live with myself if I don't tell them what I was about to tell them. So I stuck my hand up and said, "OK, folks, you've got those three projects, but if we really want to do anything that is **truly** going to change lives, we're going to go back to Honduras." 20 minutes later we had voted that we were going back to Honduras and I was headed back with a group of five volunteers who wanted to see what we could do. That group included Dr. Stu McCalley and Wendy Reynolds, two of our benevolent stewards around that time.

Honduras - 1996

We went back in February of 1996 and I met up again with the woman I had met 10 years before – Dr. Joyce Baker. She again took us to Pinalejo and they were still using the shed as the medical clinic. She said, "The one thing we need is a state of the art medical facility here in Honduras, and this is where we need it. Here are the plans – we've had plans drawn, but these plans will cost \$65,000 and we don't know where we would ever get the money." We rolled up the plans and we brought them back to First Church and in 6 weeks we had raised \$65,000! The clinic was built and it was almost completed by the time we then went back the next year with medical supplies for Pinalejo. We did some other projects that Joyce had identified, but it was about two years following that she said, "OK, now we've got a state of the art medical facility on one side of the country, but we need one in the Yoro Valley up in Subirana.

So we went to Subirana. We had taken a group of our teenagers the year before and they had done work projects in the final stages of the building of the Pinalejo clinic and then we went to Subirana and the church raised \$75,000 for the Subirana clinic and in the years that followed we began, every other year, to take a group of our teenagers from First Church down to work in Honduras. That was an amazing life changing experience for them. During the years after building Subirana, we also built two medical hostels in San Pedro Sula for Dr. Baker so that she could diagnose someone out at one of the clinics, and she could see that they went in for treatment at the government hospital. There was a lot that we did with Honduras.

Hurricane Mitch - 1998

In 1998 one of the young people who had gone to Honduras with us early on, Jamie Rutherford, decided that she wanted to do an internship with Dr. Baker. So she went down to work as a mission intern with Dr. Baker and on October 31, 1998 Hurricane Mitch hit. The most amazing things started happening at First Church. The way we heard about what was happening was that Jamie had a satellite telephone and was able to call us and told us that it was awful and that she had given away all of her clothes and that she didn't know what she was going to do because she had three eggs and there were 600 people in the mission compound and they had no food. The next day was a Sunday. In church we said we have just heard from Jamie and this is what is going on and we need two things. We need money and we need volunteers who will courier medical supplies and food down to Honduras. By the end of the week we had \$103,000!

Tad and Pat: Whew! Oh my word!

Sally: We had a team of eight people who were willing to help us translate some of that money into what were called Map Boxes from Map International, and each person could carry two Map Boxes instead of suitcases into this absolutely destroyed country. Some of the people who went were Paul O’Gorman, and Bobby and Barbara Fortunato. They also had backpacks on so they could carry as much medication as possible. In the weeks following we heard that the Maine Conference (and I was not associated with Maine at this point) had made a deal with the Dole Fruit Company that they could put a container or two on one of the Dole Fruit ships and that they could take needed clothes and medical supplies and everything in these containers. This was about in December. So we called the Maine Conference and said, “We have a strong connection with Honduras. If we bring boxes of clothes up, will you put them in your container?” We were told, “Absolutely – we’ve got these two semi-trucks that are going to go and be loaded onto the ships and they didn’t know how they were going to load them with goods. I went off on a Christmas retreat with the Youth Group.

The call had been put out at church that Sunday that we were going to collect clothes for Honduras in the auditorium and that we were going to pack them that night. I remember getting back to church (and since this was my idea, I was the one who was going to have to figure out how to pack all this) and I walked into the auditorium and I thought **life had ended!** The auditorium was **absolutely packed** with clothing and we had no idea how we were going to translate that into packed boxes. The kids and I stood there and thought first, “This is a miracle” and second, “We don’t know how to handle this miracle!” The kids and I set up our 8-foot tables around the room, moved all of the clothes into the center of the room, then sent a team of people out to all of the moving companies and U-Haul rentals to buy packing boxes. We put the boxes at each of the tables and then put out the call that anybody who could possibly come help, was to come to church that Sunday night. We put labels on the front of each of the tables saying what was going to be packed at that table: shirts, children’s clothing, etc. In about three hours 109 boxes full of clothes were packed and were put on the stage. A team came back the next day and loaded the boxes into the two largest rental trucks that U-Haul had that we rented. Paul O’Gorman drove one of them and Susie Craig drove the other one up to Woodfords United Church of Christ in Maine where the semi-trucks were waiting. Our boxes filled about 2/3 of one of the semis. It was pretty remarkable. So our connection to Honduras was huge. We had an amazing, positive long-term mission relationship with Joyce Baker and it did an awful lot of good. It continued until Joyce retired.

All the other staff members led trips to Honduras, too, at different times. It was all of First Church feeling this huge commitment feeling some of our good fortune and helping out the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The only country that is more poor is Haiti. In the ten years that I had been away from Honduras, huge development had happened, so there were safe places to stay and decent food to eat. The Central American wars had ended, so the military presence was not as aggressive. It made it possible for us to take our young people and adult mission teams so that we could be “hands on” in this international mission work.

Pat: Fantastic! Thank you **so much**, Sally.