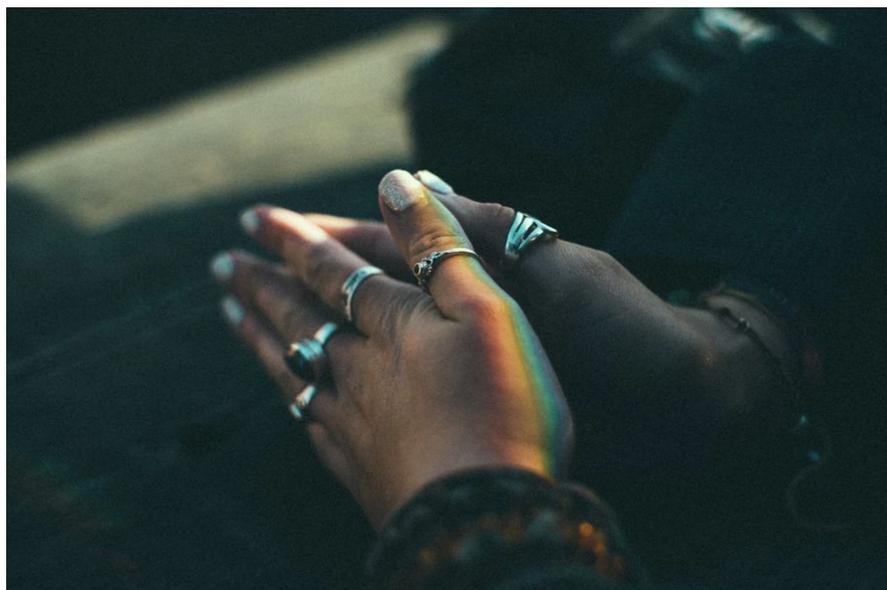


# TIDINGS

Epiphany & Lent 2019

*Sacred Listening:*  
Hearing God, Ourselves, and  
Our Neighbors



*A publication of*  
**First Church of Christ, Congregational**  
United Church of Christ  
190 Court Street, Middletown, CT

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FOR YOUR MEDITATION</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>MINISTER'S NOTE</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>CHURCH LIFE UPDATES</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>EVENTS</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>ANNOUNCEMENTS</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>CONGREGANT CONTRIBUTIONS</b> .....	<b>25</b>

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**Moderator**, Karl Scheibe  
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**Deacon Co-Chairs**, Anthony Moran & Julie Hurlburt  
**Deacon Rep. for Exec. Committee**, Gabriela De Golia  
**Trustees Rep. for Exec. Committee**, Trevor Davis  
**Office Manager**, Kortney Balsamo

**Upcoming Executive Committee Meeting Dates:**  
Thursdays 12/20, 1/17, and 2/21 at 6:30 PM in the Memorial Room

***Wish to share an announcement?***  
Please send it to Kortney Balsamo, our Office Manager, at  
[firstchurchucc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:firstchurchucc@sbcglobal.net) by Wednesday each week  
so she can include it in the weekly bulletin.

## For your meditation

“Instructions for living a life: pay attention, be astonished, tell about it.”

- Mary Oliver

“Breathing in, I see myself as a flower.

Breathing out, I feel fresh.

Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain.

Breathing out, I feel solid.

Breathing in, I see myself as still water.

Breathing out, I reflect things as they are.

Breathing in, I see myself as space.

Breathing out, I feel free.”

- Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh

“Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- 1 Thessalonians 5

“Awaken to the mystery of being here

and enter the quiet immensity of your own presence.

Have joy and peace in the temple of your senses.

Receive encouragement when new frontiers beckon.

Respond to the call of your gift and the courage to follow its path.

Let the flame of anger free you of all falsity.

May warmth of heart keep your presence aflame.

May anxiety never linger about you.

May your outer dignity mirror an inner dignity of soul.

Take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention.

Be consoled in the secret symmetry of your soul.

May you experience each day as a sacred gift woven around the heart of wonder.”

- “For Presence” by John O’Donohue

“Stay awake.”

- Jesus to his disciples, Matthew 26:41

“Because the holy spirit is continually at work in each of us, pushing us toward wholeness, the process of healing is like removing the sticks and leaves from a stream until the water runs clear. If we simply get out of the way of the Lord’s work in us, we can trust that we are being led to the particular kind of wholeness God wills for us.”

- *Stretch Out Your Hand* by Tilda Norberg and Robert Webber

“Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.”

- Exodus 20: 8



## Minister's Note

Welcome to our 351st year of local church ministry! Maybe 351 does not have the same ring, weight, or significance, but it does not make this year any less sacred. One more year, day, moment on this precious earth is a gift from our divine creator. What good shall we do with this year?

With the newness of the year upon us, this is a wonderful time to create intention. I have been wondering about themes for us as a church this year. Some words that have been coming up for this year are: listening, stillness, re-centering on God, poetry. What if this were the year of listening?

I am thrilled about 2019 as year of reset and recentering for myself and for our entire congregation. I feel a deeper connection with God and with myself beckoning me. I feel God inviting us as a church to pay attention to the small moments, to the ordinary stuff, and to really receive the theological wisdom and biblical mandate of Sabbath as we share in a sabbatical year together. Mary Oliver invites us in a poem of hers to "pay attention, be astonished, tell about it." Poets have an uncanny way of making the mundane and ordinary sparkle by simply listening.

We do not need to have great hearing to truly listen. Listening happens on levels of the heart, the soul, the imagination, the body. Listening happens when we slow down long enough to pay attention, to separate ourselves from the story we are playing out and become observers of all that is around us and within us.

When we listen and pay attention, something else can break open with us. Slowing down brings us right into the present moment. We hear the creaks of a house, the breathing of a person near to us, the chirping of birds... Things that are usually background noise. Somehow, we notice the curl of someone's smile that we never quite noticed before; somehow, we notice a softening in our heart towards something or someone who evoked rigidity in us before; somehow, the small act of sipping water becomes a miracle simply because it is clean. "Wow, how incredible, astonishing, remarkable, amazing, wonderful," we might say with our soul. Be astonished.

A light is not meant to be kept under a bushel, but indeed to shine! We can share our joy, our experience, our voice. Expressing joy or astonishment takes vulnerability, but it can become a practice. When our child-like wonder



comes out, we expose ourselves to rejection or curmudgeonly judgment; but we also allow people to really see us and connect to those around us on a level of  $\chi \alpha \rho \acute{\alpha}$ ; joy, delight, gladness in Greek. “Pay attention, be astonished, tell about it.” In many ways, this is the work of Sabbath.

With 2019 as a Sabbatical Year, where I will take wonderful, fun, and nourishing time away from the church, the purpose of sabbatical is to enhance our mutual ministry, for us to learn from the world and from God while we are apart, and then for us to share the gifts of what we have learned when we come back together. And even more, a gift for us this year is to receive the wisdom of Sabbath.

As I step aside from the excitement of planning my particular sabbatical, I pause to explore with you the meaning of Sabbath. While a sabbatical for a church and pastor is meant to renew the pastor’s vocation for mutual ministry, the Sabbath in general is woven into the very fabric of creation.

In Genesis, God created the world in six days. Creation begins with six incredible days of creating life and naming life, and proclaiming the goodness of it all. God named the light Day and the dark Night on day one, and went on to form and create through the pulse of evolution every grain of sand, every blade of grass, every potentiality for life as we know it. You and I were created in those six days in some ways; the blueprint for all life began then. We can imagine all of creation fired up to keep creating and energized to see what new life and new forms and new names day seven would bring. We can imagine life continuing to pulse and flow and work through matter. What will day seven bring, after all this goodness and glory? And the surprised worker-bees of creation were given this wisdom from God: rest. Stop. See how good it is. Enjoy it. Delight in creation, in each other. Sabbath creates an opportunity for humans and all of creation to refrain from doing and step more deeply into being. Indeed, rest is knit into creation itself.

To our American culture, informed by the Protestant work ethic, the concept of rest or Sabbath is antithetical and may seem frivolous. We as Americans are internationally notorious for high stress rates and a work-ethic that sometimes gives us heart disease. Often when I stop to pause, to listen, to still myself, to pay attention, I get my best “to-do” lists! How productive. But this is just not getting the point; it is missing the mark really dramatically. Sabbath is a pause from productivity. The *New Zealand Book of Common Prayer* has a beautiful evening prayer that reminds me of this mandate, “What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done; let it be.” Sabbath is not meant to make us more productive, but to allow a sacred pause. Like a rest in a musical composition, a beat between two notes that gives the whole piece of art, breath, spirit, life.

In the Ten Commandments, along with very serious rules like not murdering, the Fourth Commandment says, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” This is not a casual, “if you have time in your busy schedule to take a few breaths”-type of commandment. Sabbath is up there with ‘thou shalt not murder,’ leading us to believe observing the Sabbath is a matter of life and death. We know that stress is one of the leading cause of disease in our nation, yet we worship the culture of being

busy and run ourselves ragged. Keeping the Sabbath holy might be the best spiritual medicine God could offer. It is the only commandment that begins with “remember,” as if God knew we would likely forget.

In the book of Exodus, Sabbath is not only reserved for the privileged people, but also the servant class of people rest on the seventh day, the animals rest on the seventh day, and even the earth itself is given rest. This rhythm of seven is carried out into the concept that every seven years the land, on which the community of Israelites were so dependent, was given a complete year long rest. Every seven cycles of seven years was the year of Jubilee where all debts were canceled, all prisoners and enslaved people were set free. Sabbath times seven means liberation for all. Imagine what this would do for the student debt crisis in our nation. Imagine the life that God could breathe into our world if we kept the Sabbath holy.

Jesus sometimes gets in trouble for healing people on the Sabbath; the laws around what we can and cannot do on the Sabbath during Jesus' time were strict and rigid. Leave it up to humans to make abundant rules around rest! In Mark 3, Jesus enters a synagogue and all eyes were on him to see if he might heal a man with a withered hand. Knowing this, Jesus said, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored." Jesus shows us that there is no right way to enter into Sabbath or connect with God, but that the purpose of Sabbath is to save life, to enhance what is life giving.

What gives you life? What makes your heart sing? Go and do that.



## Sabbatical Part I, March 2019

During my Sabbatical time I want to invite to you join me in a devotional practice over the time of Lent, some of which we will be apart and some of which we will join back together. I am curious about the interplay between contemplative prayer and social justice. I will be weaving these two areas of soul-work together with curiosity on my Sabbatical Part I by visiting two places that knit social justice and contemplative prayer together effortlessly: The Center for Action and Contemplation in New Mexico and Iona Abbey in Scotland. As I enter into these places that weave together contemplative prayer and social justice, I plan to read the books *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo and/or *Dear White Christians* by Jennifer Harvey. I invite you to do the same.

First, contemplative practice: if you already have one, I'd love to hear about it. I invite you to take a Sabbath moment each day, and maybe at least one Sabbath day each week. I will practice contemplative prayer and I want to invite you to do the same. Each day I invite you to take 5 minutes to light a candle and abide in God's love. I'll do the same. Contemplative prayer knows that sometimes finding the right words can feel like effort. Instead, holding one word or a feeling or an image in your heart, such as abiding in a beam of light, holding the burning heart of Christ in your chest, chanting the word "God," "Jesus," "Love," "Peace" or "Shalom," in your mind as you rest in stillness. You can expand on this practice, take it to 15 minutes, or enter in your own practices of stillness. I want to cultivate deeper listening to the heartbeat of God.



After some travel in the beginning of March, I will be attending a spiritual conference at the Center for Contemplation and Action in Albuquerque, New Mexico titled "The Universal Christ: Another Name for Everything," lead by Father Richard Rohr, John Dominic Crossan, and Jaqui Lewis. I invite you visit the Center for Contemplation and Action website ([cac.org](http://cac.org)) to learn more, and I would highly recommend signing up for the Daily Devotionals that Father Richard Rohr offers. A book, *The Universal Christ*, will be published after this conference, and I would welcome the opportunity for a

book discussion in 2019 around this text.

The second major spiritual development adventure and pilgrimage will find me journeying to the island of Iona in Scotland at the end of April. This time is not technically sabbatical, but is my two weeks of contractual spiritual retreat. I received a scholarship to attend a pilgrimage through the organization Heartbeat: A Sacred Journey Towards Earth's Well



Being. My pilgrimage week will be lead by J. Philip Newell, one of the leading theologians and historians of Celtic Christianity. To learn more visit <https://heartbeatjourney.org/pilgrimages/>. I will be reading Newell's classic, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality*, in preparation for this pilgrimage week. Please consider reading along as a way of joining me for this pilgrimage. I'd love to have a conversation about this book upon my return.

What a joy and privilege to have this month's time before Easter and then a few weeks following. I look forward to listening to the spirit and hearing from God and Life about Sabbatical Part II in the fall!

Blessings,

*Rev. Julia Burkey*

Reverend Julia Burkey  
Senior Minister

# SABBATICAL UPDATE

*By Dr. Karl Scheibe, First Church of Christ in Middletown Moderator*

At its monthly meeting on December 22, 2018, the Executive Committee of First Church reached a decision on the basic outline of a sabbatical plan for Julia Burkey for 2019. We had devoted discussion to this topic in previous meetings and had the opportunity as well to talk about various options for the sabbatical plan with Julia and with other members of the congregation.

After these discussions, we were able to endorse unanimously a plan for her sabbatical with the following features:

The sabbatical we propose would be split into two segments: March 1-31 and September 18-November 20. This plan would include 14 Sundays, for which pulpit coverage would be required. It would allow the pastor to be present at Easter and the church's annual meeting, to be held in May.

The Executive Committee is enthusiastic about the positive value of this sabbatical for the long-term welfare of our congregation and our minister. The plan will require careful planning and full communication about programmatic implications and financial requirements. Many of these details are already being discussed and prepared.

The Executive Committee is confident of our ability to meet the organizational and financial challenges of the sabbatical plan. We are pleased that the Congregation has endorsed this plan at our midyear meeting.



# PASTORAL CARE DURING SABBATICAL TIME

During Julia's absence over the sabbatical period, Jim Silver and Steve Crabtree, both former ministers, have made themselves available for the congregation's pastoral needs. Please see below for their contact information and the areas they have offered to provide services in.

Lori Orend is also coordinating the Deacon Care Team and is happy to connect deacons to congregants who wish to receive visits, prayers, and other forms of care.

**Steve Crabtree** - *primary contact for funerals*

860-508-1700

[crabtree\\_steve@hotmail.com](mailto:crabtree_steve@hotmail.com)

**Jim Silver** - *available for pastoral care, after-church prayers, weekly appointments, emergencies; secondary contact for funerals*

860-632-7279

[revjs13@sbcglobal.net](mailto:revjs13@sbcglobal.net)

**Lori Orend** - *coordinator for the Deacon Care Team*

860-754-6680

[loriorend@comcast.net](mailto:loriorend@comcast.net)



## “MAHOGANY FOR U.C.C. MINSTER!”



On Sunday Feb 10th at 4pm in our First Church in Middletown sanctuary an Ecclesiastical Council gathered from the Middlesex Association of the Connecticut Conference to represented the whole United Church of Christ. The purpose of the Ecclesiastical Council provided a final step after many interviews conducted, papers written, paperwork submitted, evaluations completed, to vote on Mahogany S. Thomas for "privilege of call." Rev. Mahogany was ordained at the United Community Cathedral in Columbia, MO on May 20, 2017th and after hearing her stunning presentation and asking her questions, the gathered body of the Ecclesiastical Council unanimously voted to approve Mahogany as having full standing as an ordained UCC minister! What a joy!

*“Rev. Mahogany, we are so grateful to accompany you on this part of your journey and we are so grateful you have chosen First Church in Middletown to love on our youth and our whole church. Thank you for saying YES to God and giving us all a chance to say YES to you!” - Rev. Julia Burkey*

*“Looking back on Sunday, February 10th, I am still in amazement from the overwhelming love, support, and unanimous vote to honor my ordination in United Church of Christ. My heart is overflowing with immense joy and gratitude for the movement of God’s Spirit, and it is my honor to serve as an ordained UCC minister! This journey could not have been possible with your radical hospitality, love, and support. In fact, my discernment to seek ‘privilege of call’ was deeply rooted in my love for First Church and serving God’s people. Thank you, First Church, for allowing me the opportunity to share God’s love with each and every one of you. Thank you for loving me and supporting my decision to create home in the United Church of Christ. May we continue to serve and love God together, knowing there is always more space.” - Rev. Mahogany Thomas*



## "GOT BYLAWS?"



At the last Annual Meeting on May 20, 2018, the congregation voted to revise our bylaws after members of the previous Executive Committee made proposed edits to them. A sunset provision was included in this vote, which stated that unless reapproved in May 2019, the new bylaws would be reverted back to their previous version.

Since then, the current Executive Committee has been working diligently to further finesse and strengthen our bylaws in anticipation of the sunset provision deadline. To get the entire community involved in this process, a newly edited version of the bylaws was distributed at the latest Mid-year Meeting on January 27.

Even if you missed the Mid-year Meeting, the edited bylaws are available for you to review. You can access them in the following ways:

- Download a copy at <http://bit.ly/FCCbylaws>;
- Request a digital copy by emailing our clerk, Kari, at [karibethsullivan@gmail.com](mailto:karibethsullivan@gmail.com);
- Hard copies are available in the church office;
- Request to have a hard copy mailed to you by calling the office at 860-346-6657.

Once you're able to review the edited bylaws, share your thoughts and suggestions at the April 28th Second Hour or by emailing Kari by April 28th. Proposed changes will then be reviewed by the Executive Committee at the May 16th meeting and then with the full congregation at the Annual Meeting on May 19th, during which the revised bylaws will be voted on.

If you need large print copies, someone to review the bylaws with you, or any other assistance, please reach out to clerk Kari.

# OUTREACH UPDATE

First things first. Thank you all for being so generous during the Christmas season! Together, we fed and clothed people AND made two families' Christmas mornings so much brighter. We always look forward to coordinating the congregation's Christmastime outreach and we couldn't do it without you.

2019 is already proving to be a busy year. In January, First Church donated \$250 to the Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship Committee of Greater Middletown, an organization that awards scholarships to local students every year.

Want to get involved in the next few months? We have many opportunities!

- On February 24 and March 24, we'll be serving breakfast at the St. Vincent de Paul soup kitchen. We're always looking for people to bring food and help serve; please contact Vickey Allen at [vickey.allen@gmail.com](mailto:vickey.allen@gmail.com) or 860-214-9159 or find any member of the committee during Coffee Hour to sign up!
- Help fill the Amazing Grace Food Pantry by contributing to our annual Lenten food drive! Once the holiday season is over, food pantry shelves are pretty bare. March is the perfect time to help Amazing Grace feed our neighbors.
- On March 31, First Church will be participating in One Great Hour of Sharing. Churches around the country will be collecting a special offering for the UCC Disaster Ministries, allowing our denomination to help those affected by emergencies both national and international. To learn more about One Great Hour of Sharing, you can check out [www.ucc.org/oghs](http://www.ucc.org/oghs).
- On April 7, we will once again host the Gilead Community Services' Road Race registration and meal. Gilead provides support for people suffering from mental illness. We are grateful for Curt Weybright's continued leadership on this opportunity. Please contact him at [curtis.veybright@comcast.net](mailto:curtis.veybright@comcast.net) for more information!

Lastly, we'd love to draw people's attention to an opportunity to help St. Vincent de Paul by shopping online! On St. Vincent de Paul's homepage ([svdmiddletown.org](http://svdmiddletown.org)), click on "Our Greatest Needs Right Now." On that page, they have a link to an Amazon wish list. You can have items shipped directly to them by purchasing through the list.

Thanks again for all of your help, and we look forward to continuing our community outreach during the next few months!

In peace,

*Vickey Allen, Linda Choser, Cheryl Fogg, Julie Hurlburt, Jen Ide, Sharon Lundell, and Janice Palmer*

## NAME TAGS UPDATE

Praise the Lord! Name tags are here! Please wear your nametag every week, and please take a moment to write down the pronouns you want someone to use when referring to you in the third person.

Examples of personal pronouns:

- She/her/hers: Shari is a musician; she plays the organ.
- He/him/his: Sometimes, Karl plays his oboe during service.
- They/them/their (singular pronoun): Alex loves to sing. If you're starting a choir, make sure to ask them.

We ask that you include your personal pronouns on your nametag because it creates an atmosphere of inclusivity. By having everyone write their pronouns on their nametags, it helps us avoid assuming anyone else's gender. For more information, check out [www.mypronouns.org](http://www.mypronouns.org) for a more detailed explanation and links to other resources.

This is going to be a very imperfect process; please forgive us for lost or delayed name tags! If you'd like to help with name tags, please contact Vickey Allen ([vickey.allen@gmail.com](mailto:vickey.allen@gmail.com)) or Suzanna Barrett ([stamminen@wesleyan.edu](mailto:stamminen@wesleyan.edu)). We'd love the backup!



## VISION INITIATIVE UPDATE

Interested in helping our congregation live into our vision beyond our walls? Join the Vision Initiative Team! Contact Vickey Allen at [vickey.allen@gmail.com](mailto:vickey.allen@gmail.com) or 860-214-9159 to learn more and help our congregation listen to God's call!

# VISION FUND UPDATE

The Vision Fund had a good first year in 2018. We ran a successful fundraising campaign where over 100 donors pledged money over the next three years. We celebrated over \$635,000 in pledges last June.

In the summer and fall, we got some key projects done. See below for the highlights:

- Total pledges now exceed \$643,000 and we had received over 50% of pledges in actual donations by 12/31/2018.
- We have a pool of funds for projects going into 2019 of over \$100,000
- Pipe Organ refurbishment was completed successfully
- Pew removal and cutouts for accessibility have been completed, including relocation of the baptismal font.
- Sanctuary carpeting project has been completed.
- Mahogany's position was funded by the Vision Fund in 2018 and will continue to be funded in 2019.

Plans for 2019 include:

- Power door openers for the side entrance and one of the Court Street entrances.
- Enhancements to the sanctuary sound system.
- Possible construction of an accessibility ramp to the Court Street entry.
- Planning and discussions are ongoing, focusing on our Outreach project
- Exterior maintenance of the woodwork and stained glass windows, OR, refurbishment of the elevator.

These important projects would not be possible without the generous support of the congregation. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

We will also be replacing the pew cushions in the sanctuary this winter. This project will be funded by endowment funds donated by the Bee and Missionary Society in 2012 for capital projects. Many thanks to the ladies of the Bee and Missionary Society!

Pledging and collection of pledges continues through June of 2021. If you are interested in being a part of the Vision Fund, there is still time. Please contact Jim Miller at [jpmiller143@comcat.net](mailto:jpmiller143@comcat.net) or call 860-604-2744.

Sincerely,  
Jim Miller, Vision Fund Treasurer

# ACCESSIBLE TO ALL “A2A” UPDATE



The A2A Team has been busy lately! Projects that were recently completed include:

- Getting parts of our sanctuary pews removed to give space for wheelchairs
- Placing choir anthems and special music words in our bulletins for those with hearing difficulties
- Displaying signs which indicate restrooms for those with disabilities
- Displaying signs for parking spaces for those with disabilities on the side of our building
- Putting white reflective tape on pulpit steps to help those with visual issues

More projects are underway, including:

- Power-assisted doors in the foyer at the side of the building
- New audio system and devices to assist those with hearing loss. We are proceeding with pricing but waiting on information about grants to help us with financing.

If you would like to get involved with A2A initiatives, please reach out to any of the team's members, which include Melissa Hein, Julie Hurlburt, Pam Miller, Marya Pyrek, Jim Silver, and Curt Weybright.

## LGBTQ+ MINISTRY UPDATE

The newly-formed LGBTQ+ Ministries Team is in need of members who are interested and committed to helping the group's mission of planning and holding space for LGBTQ+ events and activities, as well as making First Church more inclusive than it already is. The group is currently working with the LGBTQ+ Advisory Committee of the City of Middletown to hold a pride event in Middletown over summer! If anyone is interested in joining, please email or see Deacon Anthony at arjmoran@gmail.com. We ask for your prayers as we formalize this group.



## DEACON UPDATE

Deacons are currently preparing for the first month of Rev. Julia's sabbatical, which will take place during the entire month of March, as well as the beginning of the 2019 Lenten Season, which starts with Ash Wednesday on March 6th and ends on April 14th.

We would also like to remind the Congregation to please use our church's lay leaders, including the deacons, as resources during the Sabbatical period to help put less stress on our beloved Office Manger, Kortney. Deacons are ready and able to assist the congregation during the period while Rev. Julia will be away. Three deacons (Anthony, Gabriela, and Linda) will be preaching during the month of March, while other Deacons will be preaching later on during the sabbatical period in the fall.

We look forward to serving you throughout this exciting sabbatical year!

## WOMEN'S RETREAT UPDATE

Thirty-three women from First Church of Christ community were blessed to gather at Silver Lake Conference Center the weekend of February 2nd for a series of experiential teachings on Christian healing prayer. Reverend Sarah Vetter facilitated workshops that included scripture study, guided meditation, journaling, discussion, and healing prayer. Using the book *Stretch Out Your Hand*, we discussed what Christian healing prayer is and what it is not. We also enjoyed the lovely grounds of SLCC and the wonderful meals prepared by Chef Lynn.

The retreat is a wonderful way to connect and deepen relationships, and we look forward to continuing this new tradition next year. If you would be interested in helping to coordinate the 2020 retreat, please contact Suzanna Barrett at [stamminen@wesleyan.edu](mailto:stamminen@wesleyan.edu).



*2019 Women's Retreat participants*

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS



## **Sabbatical Part I**

### **February 24th: Rev. Julia's last Sunday before Sabbatical Part I**

Rev. Dr. Jay Terbush preaches and helps us bless our church for the coming journey. Rev. Julia will be on Sabbatical all of March and then after returning for Easter will be away for two weeks after Easter.

**March 3rd:** Rev. Susie Townsley, Associate Conference Minister of Change and Innovation preaches. During our 350th celebrations Rev. Susie Townsley caught wind of our celebrations and Truth & Reconciliation work and asked how she could support and participate in our church. Julia encouraged her to come be with the community and offer a message during the first month of sabbatical!

**March 6th, Ash Wednesday:** 7pm service at First Church, led by First Church Deacons

**March 10th, first Sunday of Lent:** Our beloved Rev. Mahogany Thomas will preach, newly minted as an official clergy person in the United Church of Christ after her Ecclesiastical Council on Feb 10th. We are so blessed to have Rev. Mahogany share in ministry with us and her preaching is outstanding!

**March 17th:** This is the first of our Deacon led worship services, where Deacon Anthony Moran will offer a message for St. Patrick's Day.

**March 24th:** Rev. Susie Townsly is back with us in the pulpit.

**March 31st:** Deacon Gabriela De Golia preaches.

**April 7th:** Rev. Julia returns to the pulpit, fresh from New Mexico since attending the Universal Christ conference at Father Richard Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation

### **Holy Week**

**April 14th, Palm Sunday:** Jesus Marches into Jerusalem

**April 18th, Maundy Thursday:** Healing Prayer Service, 7pm First Church, given the commandment to love

**April 19th, Good Friday:** 7pm service at South Church, Jesus is crucified

**April 21st, Easter:** Christ is Risen!

**April 28th:** Deacon Linda Choser will preach, as Rev. Julia begins two weeks of Spiritual Retreat time after receiving a grant to take pilgrimage to Iona Abbey in Scotland. We will also have a Second Hour dedicated to going over the revised bylaws before our Annual Meeting.

**May 5th:** Rev. Doug Clark, retired local UCC minister, will preach

**May 12th, Mother's Day**

**May 19th, Choir Appreciation Sunday & Annual Meeting**

**June 9th, Pentecost, a celebration of the Holy Spirit**

**June 15th, first Annual Middletown Pride!**

### **Summer Worship**

**July worship at South Church, August worship at First Church**

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

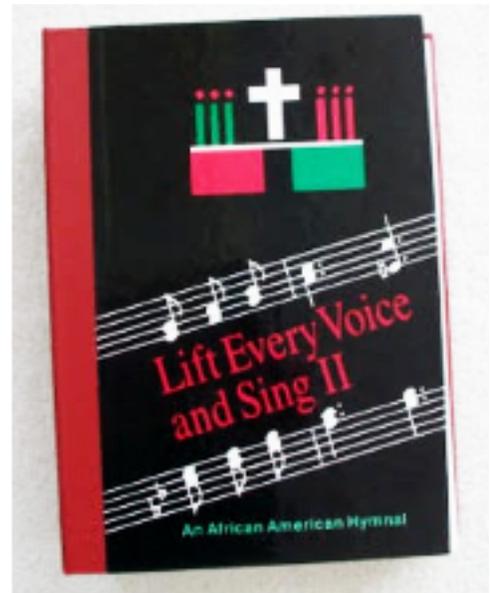


## DEACON CARE TEAM

Do you know someone in the FCC community who could use a prayer, a phone call, a friendly note or supportive visit? If so please contact Lori Orend at (860) 754-6680 or email at [loriorend@comcast.net](mailto:loriorend@comcast.net). As the coordinator of the FCC Deacons' Care Team she will "dispatch" one or more of the deacons or a deacon affiliate to the call. You can also make the request to Julia or any of the deacons. Please do not feel shy about making requests on your own behalf!

## NEW HYMNALS FOR THE CHOIRS

The hymnal *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* has been purchased for our Senior Choir and Celebration Singers. This popular collection of 280 musical pieces from both the African American and Gospel traditions has been compiled under the supervision of the Office of Black Ministries of the Episcopal Church. It includes service music and several psalm setting in addition to Negro spirituals, gospel songs, and hymns. The title refers to the hymn "Lift Every Voice and Sing" which is often referred to as the Black National Anthem, is a song written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson in 1900 and set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson in 1905.



## GROUP SERMON for Choir Appreciation Day (Sunday, May 19th)

Church comes every 7 days, like a drum beat, a heart beat, a pause between notes to stop working and cease from doing and receive the love of God and worship God. Our choirs and music minister guide and lead us in worship each Sunday. This spring, we want to have a Choir Appreciation on Sunday, May 19th to appreciate the role of music in worship.

### Group Sermon -- submit a story to be shared with the congregation!

Please submit 250-500 words no later than May 5th to Deacon and choir member Gabriela De Golia at [gdegolia@gmail.com](mailto:gdegolia@gmail.com).

- **Prompt for choir members:** *share a funny or meaningful or spiritual story/experience about being in the choir.*
- **Question for the congregation:** *How has music of First Church affected you?*



## **THE PRODIGALS, a one-man lecture-performance**



**Date:** Sunday, February 17th, 2019 from 4-5:30 PM

**Location:** The Buttonwood Tree, Middletown, CT

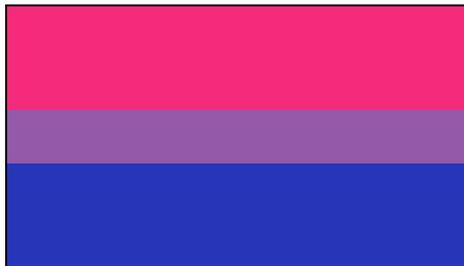
Come see a one-man play with biblical themes, written and performed by our very own William H. Foster III!

Professor Foster has been a writer since the age of eight and was first published at the age of twelve. Poet, essayist, filmmaker, playwright and short story writer, he has published 10 plays and 13 books. His writing has appeared in a number of national publications, including *Shooting Star Review*, *Seacoast Magazine*, and *Essence Magazine*. He received his B.A. in Journalism from the University of Massachusetts, and his M.A.L.S. in Writing from

Wesleyan University. Professor Foster has performed his original poetry throughout New England and across the country. In 2007, he presented and performed at the International Conference on 20th Century Poetry in Wuhan, China.

## **BISEXUAL+ DISCUSSION GROUP**

A Bisexual+ Discussion Group is held every fourth Wednesday of the month at 6:00 p.m. at First Church. All are welcome who identify as bisexual, pansexual, queer, fluid, or anyone who is not in the LGBTQ community and wishes to learn more. This is for people ages 18 and up and is led by our Minister of Music, Shari Lucas, who is openly bisexual. So often bisexuality is misunderstood and not discussed, even within the LGBTQ community. All discussions remain confidential. **Upcoming meeting dates are February 27, March 27, and April 24.**



A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO THE AMAZING SINGING SENSATION

# ARETHA FRANKLIN



TERESA WRIGHT



LINDA RANSOM

## *Aretha & Me* *Theresa*

ACCOMPANIED BY A 10-PIECE ENSEMBLE AND CHOIR  
**SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 2019 AT 8PM**

**TICKETS AVAILABLE**

[HTTPS://ARETHACONCERT.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://arethaconcert.eventbrite.com)

**FIRST CHURCH SANCTUARY**  
190 COURT STREET, MIDDLETOWN CT 06457

EMAIL CONTACT: [INFO.LINDARANSOM@GMAIL.COM](mailto:INFO.LINDARANSOM@GMAIL.COM)

SNOW DATE: (-SATURDAY, MARCH 23, 2019 (IN THE EVENT OF UNSAFE TRAVEL CONDITIONS, TICKETS FOR MARCH 16 WILL BE HONORED ON THIS DATE))

# CONGREGANT CONTRIBUTIONS

## **God Can Help Us With Our Most Urgent Responsibility**

*By Lyn Shaw*

The Institute for Public Policy Research, the UK's leading progressive think tank, recently released a forty-four-page report entitled, "THIS IS A CRISIS: Facing Up to the Age of Environmental Breakdown."

I've spent years considering how the mission of First Church intersects with catastrophes, whether they involve human rights, racial justice, fair trade practice, the abuse of children, and war. Clergy and members of our own congregation are bold, guided by the light of the Gospel. After over forty years in this place, I strongly believe that in 2019 each of us can take the lead in bravely confronting the particular catastrophe of the climate crisis.

Although we're no longer able to prevent the threat of climate change, our actions -- within networks of friends and family and in the political arena -- can mitigate its effects, keeping the earth sustainable and habitable for our children and grandchildren. God is still speaking, standing beside us even as we face the greatest challenge in human history.

I wish to share some pieces from the summary section of the paper:

- "Vertebrate populations have fallen by an average of 60% since the 1970s."
- "More than 75% of the Earth's land is substantially degraded."
- "Since 1950 the number of floods across the world has increased by 15 times, extreme temperature events by 20 times and wildfires sevenfold."
- "Since the mid-20th century, 30% of the world's arable land has become unproductive due to erosion; 95% of the Earth's land areas could become degraded by 2050."

These realities are daunting. They can make us want to whisper to ourselves that we are afraid. Perhaps we may think that, if unmentioned, the issue will "go away." Magical thinking, even at our ages! But are we not told, "do not be afraid," many times over in the Bible? Is that how our faith can help us now? I think so.

**Evening Prayer from A New Zealand Prayer Book**

*Offered by Ginny Houghtaling*

Lord,  
it is night.  
The night is for stillness.  
Let us be still in the presence of God.

It is night after a long day.  
What has been done has been done;  
What has not been done has not been done;  
Let it be.

The night is dark.  
Let our fears of the darkness of the world  
And of our own lives  
Rest in you.

The night is quiet.  
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,  
All dear to us,  
And all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.  
Let us look expectantly to a new day,  
New joys,  
New possibilities.

In your name we pray.  
Amen.





## BENEDICTION

***Go out into the world in peace.  
Have courage.  
Hold on to what is good.  
Return no one evil for evil.  
Strengthen the faint hearted,  
Support the weak,  
Help the suffering,  
Honor all persons.  
Love and serve the Lord,  
Rejoicing in the power  
Of the Holy Spirit.***

***Amen.***

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