

TIDINGS

Lent 2020



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

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Ministers, The Whole Congregation

Senior Minister, Reverend Julia Burkey

Music Minister, Shari Lucas

Minister of Youth & Families, Reverend Mahogany Thomas

Moderator, Suzanna Barrett

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Clerk, Vickey Allen

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Deacon Rep., Linda Choser

Trustees Rep., Trevor Davis

Office Manager, Kortney Balsamo

Past Moderator, Karl Scheibe

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL

190 Court Street, Middletown, CT firstchurchucc@sbcglobal.net

860-346-6657 / www.firstchurchmiddletown.org

Upcoming Executive Committee Meeting:

Sunday, February 23rd, 11:45 am, Memorial Room

Upcoming Congregational Meeting:

Sunday May 31st, 12 pm, Parish Hall

Wish to share an announcement? Please send it to Kortney Balsamo, our Office Manager, at firstchurchucc@sbcglobal.net by Wednesday noon for inclusion in the weekly bulletin.

MINISTER'S NOTE

“Wholehearted living is about engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness. It means cultivating courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think, ‘No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough.’

It’s going to bed at night thinking, ‘Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn’t change the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging.’”

Brené Brown, “The Gifts of Imperfection”

“There is no New Year resolution that, if kept, will make you worthy of love. You, as your actual self, not some made-up ideal self, are already worthy.”

Nadia Bolz-Weber

Jesus was a healer. His healing actions brought comfort to hurting bodies and brought hope in the face of oppressive systems. Sometimes his healing looked like street theater, as he acted out dynamic parables along the roadside. Other times Jesus’ healing was as subtle as a woman brushing up against him in a crowd or the beautiful internal work of coming home to the love of God. Always, Jesus offered hope to the poor and oppressed. The church can offer healing balm to the world in the name of Jesus through creating space with worship and beyond. Healing looks like knowing God in the wholeness of our human experience, in our joy and grief, and never giving up hope that we can transform the world with Love through God. Miracles of healing happen all around us, and we are called to align ourselves with the flow of the spirit in our local community.

This is why we are holding Wholeness Circles nearly every week this Lent. Time where we can come together and enter into heightened communal space and trust the healing flow of the spirit in the center of our being. This is why we are engaging the Appreciative Inquiry process with our Vision Outreach project, knowing the wisdom of the whole is profound and can lead us to great and unexpected places of service. There is much positive momentum beginning this year, such as all the wonderful events being hosted by the Fellowship Committee. You can find First Church in Middletown with folks ice-skating, out to dinner, looking at a garden show, going to the movies and so on. Because we know connection is vital and a key ingredient in the recipe for wholehearted living.

I also celebrate that we are applying for a \$100,000 grant from the state of Connecticut and a \$30,000 grant from the Community Development Block Grant. Lift up prayers of abundance! Speaking of abundance, I am so grateful, too, for our Second Mile Campaign efforts and the generosity of this congregation. Generosity is the instrument that God uses to bring about the kin(g)dom. Through acts of generosity we get closer to our identity as children of God, as we are made in the image of the most generous force in the universe. It is part of our spiritual DNA to be made generous.

Wholeness is our theme and word of the year at First Church in Middletown. Wholeness as in all of us, wholesome, all encompassing, whole hearted, whole from Old English *hal* “entire, safe, healthy, sound, genuine, straightforward,” or old German *heil* meaning salvation or welfare. Wholeness as the state of forming a complete and harmonious whole; unity.

I want us to explore the word *whole* this year because this world in its current state is designed to fracture us, designed to disconnect us from each other and from our own hearts. Our emphasis on wholeness means being in right relationship with one another and the Bible has a lot to teach about this. If you’d like to explore more on your own, I encourage you to look into some of these Biblical examples of relational wholeness. Jesus gives specific instruction about how to address conflict and how to avoid the behavior of triangulation. If someone sins against you, go directly to them and our First Church in Middletown covenant references Matthew 18:15-22 when our founders promise, “that we will watch over one another and faithfully deal with and submit to one another in case of offence according as our Lord hath commanded.”

“All this we promise carefully to perform through the grace and strength of Christ,” states our Covenant. We need each other and we know more together than we do alone; the church needs each person’s gifts and perspectives; no one has the corner on truth, and we hear this in 1 Corinthians 12-14. When we disagree with someone and need to tell them the truth Ephesians 4:1-16 talks about how we are to grow in unity and maturity by speaking the truth in love. Patience with working out solutions is encouraged in Colossians 3:12-17, that we are to bear with one another, to forgive each other, and to clothe ourselves ‘with love, which binds everything in perfect harmony.” And finally, conflict is hard, and usually we first want to avoid it, yet as God’s people we do not seek the absence of conflict but rather the presence of shalom, a peace based on justice, which can be explored in Amos 5:21-24, Micah 6:6-8, Matthew 23:23-24, Luke 4:18-19. The summary of these Biblical insights come from Alan Kreider’s book *Culture of Peace: God’s Vision ForThe Church*.

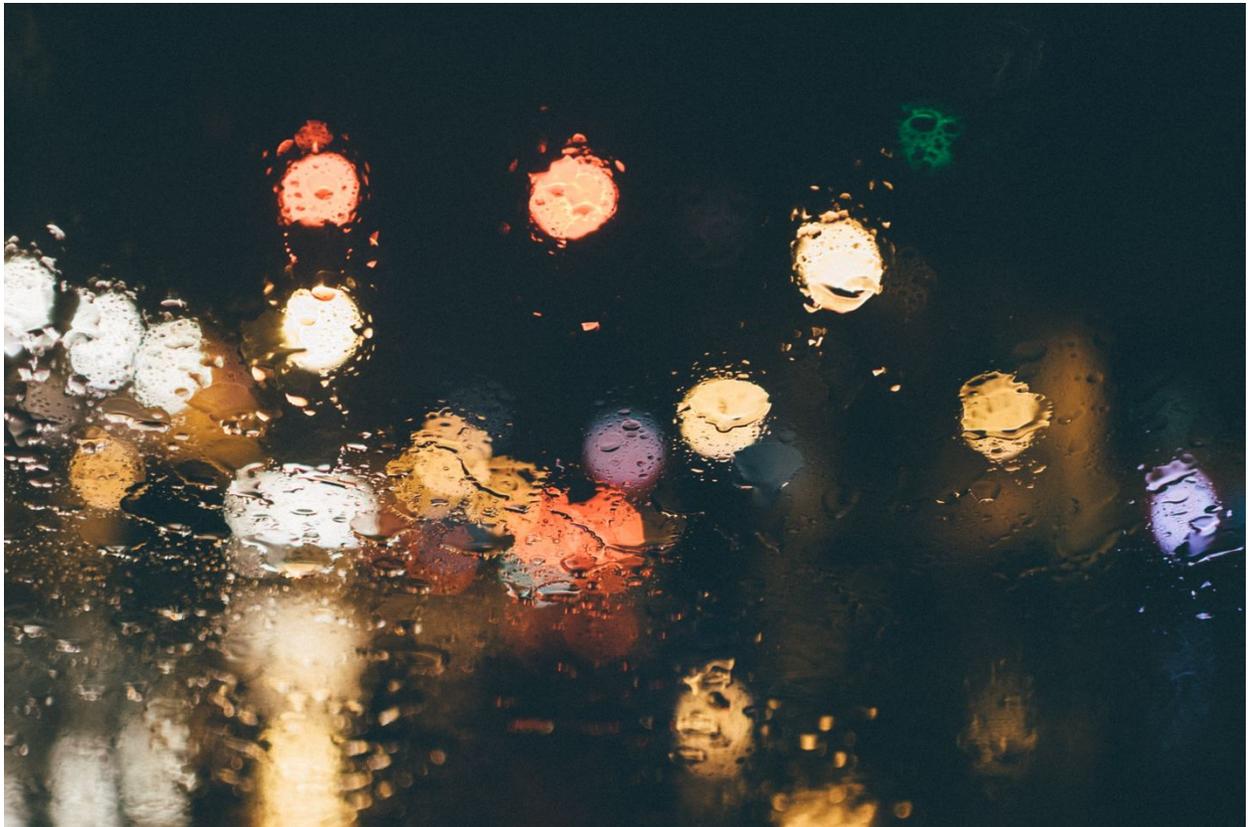
I want to emphasize that if something is bothering you or upsetting you, you can come directly to me and share. I encourage you to do this with each other as well. It is important to have this type of trust and openness with one another. We also want to welcome in the spirit of appreciation and gratitude, where we affirm the good experiences we have had and the wonderful qualities and gifts we offer. What we give our attention to grows.

Wholeness does not mean perfection, wholeness does not mean always feeling peaceful and connected, wholeness does not mean we have no needs. Rather, in wholeness, we recognize our radical connectedness to one another and to the planet and that perfection is not a goal, but rather healing is, that conflict and disruption or brokenness can sometimes lead to a deeper revealing of God’s presence. I have long recognized and admired this church’s ability to disagree in love or have open hearted conversations across difference, which I now understand as living a wholehearted communal life.

None of us are beyond the need to be loved, to feel connected. Love is a free resource we have and that the world desperately needs. From the story of Jesus' baptism, we know that even Jesus needed to know he was loved by God. Not only did Jesus need to line up like everyone else, but during Jesus' baptism something remarkable happened, and I think it is because God knew Jesus needed love to be the leader he was destined to become. And so the voice of God comes down and says, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Then Jesus became a healer. Perhaps by "being saved" Jesus invites us into wholeness with God. Jesus taught humanity a new way of being and so we wonder, what does it mean to journey in the way of Jesus in 2020?

We walk in the way of the one who needed to be loved, who needed encouragement, who lined up just like everyone else to be baptized, for this ritual of love. The fullness of what you feel as a human being; Jesus lived that too; not just the glory and the joy, but the suffering, the hardship, the homelessness, the wandering of human beings- the yearning to be loved. Let us remember this Jesus in his wholeness as we journey through Lent and reflect on who we are together, where we are going, and the particular gifts we have to offer the world.

—Rev. Julia Burkey, Minister



Worship and Special Events

Worship begins at 10 am (unless noted)

Fat Tuesday

February 25, 2020, Mardi Gras Potluck Dinner, Parish Hall, 5:30-7 pm

Ash Wednesday

February 26, 2020, 7:00 pm- 8:00 pm First Church in Middletown

First Sunday in Lent

March 1, 2020, *Wholeness & Brokenness*

Scripture Matthew 4:1-11 & Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Wholeness Circle Second Hour 11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Second Sunday in Lent

March 8, 2020, *Whole Planet: Transfiguration*

Scripture Psalm 121 & Matthew 17:1-9

Rev. Doug Clark & Rev. Julia Burkey lead worship around Creation Care

Wholeness Circle Second Hour around Ecological Grief 11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Third Sunday in Lent

March 15, 2020, *Circle Conversations with Jesus*

Scripture: Exodus 17:1-7 & John 4:5-42

Wholeness Circle Second Hour 11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 22, 2020, *Perceiving with the Whole Heart*

Scripture Ephesians 5:8-14 & John 9:1-41

Wholeness Circle Second Hour 11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 29, 2020, *Wholeness: Dry Bones Can Live*

Rev. Mahogany Thomas preaches

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14 & John 11:1-45

Wholeness Circle Second Hour 11:30 am - 12:30 pm



Palm Sunday

April 5, 2020, Scripture Isaiah 50:4-9a & Matthew 21:1-11

Wholeness Circle Second Hour 11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Maundy Thursday

April 9, 2020, Maundy Thursday 7pm South Congregational Church

Good Friday

April 10, 2020, Good Friday 7pm First Church in Middletown

Easter Sunday

April 12, 2020

Scripture: Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 & Matthew 28:1-10

Music for Easter Sunday

Special music will be presented by our Heart in Hand Bell Choir, Senior Choir and Celebration Singers. The service will conclude with the congregational singing of the "Hallelujah Chorus" followed by our Minister of Music, Shari Lucas, performing the rousing Toccata from *Symphony No. 5* by Charles Marie Widor.

First Church of Christ
Vision Summits

Save the Dates!

February 29th, 9 am-noon **Outreach**

March 21st, 9 am-noon **Youth**

April 25th, 9 am-noon **Growing**

Our Idea of Church

All summits to be held at First Church and will include lunch.
Childcare provided upon request.

Are you passionate about Outreach? Youth programs? Bringing church outside our walls or finding new ways of “doing church” inside our walls? What’s that you say? You are passionate about ALL of this? GREAT! Because in addition to maintaining and expanding the use of our building, these areas—outreach, youth, and growing our idea of church—are the focus of our current vision plan.

Everyone is invited to these mornings of discussion, discernment and planning as we live into our vision.

Wholeness Circles

Jesus was a healer. Perhaps by “being saved” Jesus invites into wholeness with God? Jesus taught humanity a new way of being, a third way. What does it mean to journey in the way of Jesus in 2020?

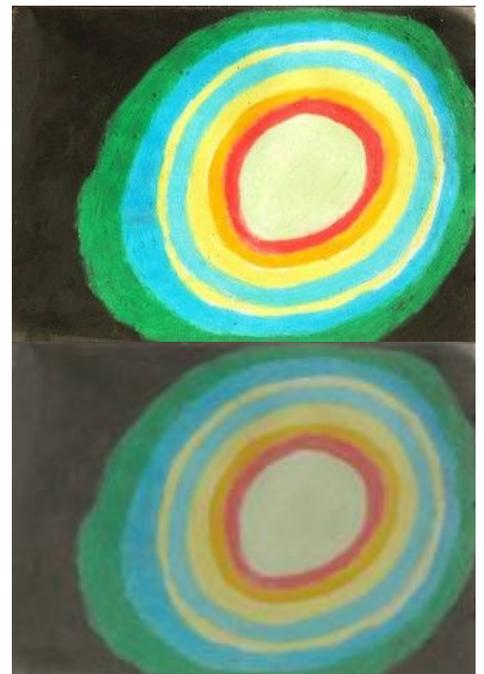
Our culture is designed to fracture us, to disconnect us from each other and from our own hearts. None of us are beyond the need to feel loved and connected. Love is a free resource from God. What we give our attention to grows. I have long admired this church’s ability to have open hearted conversations across difference, which I now understand as living a wholehearted communal life. The world needs what we authentically offer.

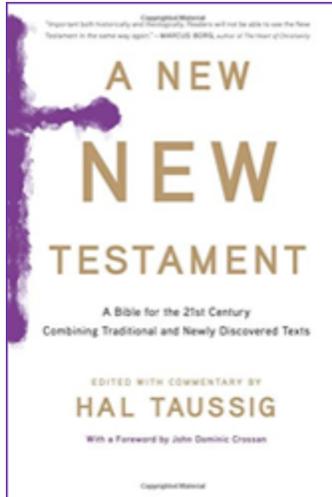
Wholeness is our word at First Church in Middletown for 2020. Wholeness as in *the whole planet, all of us, wholesome, all encompassing, wholehearted*, from Old English “*hal*” entire, safe, healthy, sound, genuine, straightforward, or old German “*heil*” meaning *salvation or welfare*. Our salvation makes us whole. Wholeness as *the state of forming a complete and harmonious whole; unity*.

Circle topics will emerge from the wisdom of the whole. If there are things heavy on your heart to discuss, bring them to Rev. Julia individually and/or to the circle and the center will hold.

Wholeness Circle Schedule

Friday February 14 th	5:00 pm - 6:00 pm
Tuesday February 18 th	11:00 am – 12:00 pm
Ash Wednesday February 26 th	7:00 pm- 8:00 pm
Sunday March 1 st Second Hour	11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Sunday March 8 th Second Hour	11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Sunday March 15 th Second Hour	11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Sunday March 22 nd Second Hour	11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Sunday March 29 th Second Hour	11:30 am - 12:30 pm
Sunday April 5 th Second Hour	11:30 am - 12:30 pm





LENTEN BIBLE STUDY

Tuesdays 5:30 pm - 6:45 pm
March 10, March 17, March 24, March 31, April 7

During these five sessions, Rev. Julia will lead a study based on newly discovered early-Christian texts. If we want to understand the wholeness of our tradition, it is worth looking at the social experimentation and the creativity of the historical early Jesus following communities, before the official canon was established and before the 'Master Narrative' of Empire took hold.

Guided by Hal Taussig's *A New New Testament: A Bible for the 21st Century Combining Tradition and Newly Discovered Texts*, we will delve into the early-Christian text excluded from the canon of the Bible, specifically "The Thunder: Perfect Mind," and read this alongside segments of the Gospel of John and Proverbs where the voice of Wisdom Sophia emerges. If the group feels strongly about other texts, we will move in those directions as well.

Reading canonical texts (books in that made it into the New Testament) next to extra-canonical or non-canonical texts (books left out on purpose, often due to patriarchal bias, not God's will) has the potential to increase our faith. The more we understand the works of Jesus and the communities who directly followed in the path of Christ, the more we can understand the Christian tradition we hold now and the Bible we hold dear, and the ways God is doing new things. These texts are not meant to replace scripture, but to enhance our understanding of the ways God can reveal God's self in the world.

—Rev. Julia Burkey

Christian Outreach

Come to the [Vision Summit for Outreach](#) on February 29th 9 am – noon at the church. A light lunch will be provided. We will share the stories and themes that have emerged from our Appreciative Inquiry interviews and begin the next phase of envisioning our shared work in the world.

[Green Envelope](#) giving for the first quarter of the year will focus on Racial justice. We made a donation to the Martin Luth king Jr. Scholarship Fund. Green Envelopes in February and March will go to [STEAM Train](#): a non-profit organization that is committed to moving generations, especially underserved, under resourced, and underrepresented populations, to careers in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and beyond.

The next St Vincent’s Breakfast is MARCH 8.

Watch for details on a Special Lenten Outreach in collaboration with Fellowship. We will share the love in Middletown by choosing several neighborhood businesses to frequent, leaving our “calling cards”.



Thank you all,
The Outreach Committee:
Linda Choser, Cheryl Fogg, Julie Hurlburt, Jen Ide, Sharon Lundell, and Jan Palmer



The Community Christmas Dinner

Fellowship An Instrument for Shaping Us As a Whole

An excerpt from *Praying to Have Fellowship with Other Believers*, by Stormie Omartian

More Than Just Friendship

The word fellowship sounded strange and “churchy” when I first heard it. It reminded me of tea and cookies after a missionary meeting or a potluck dinner in the church basement.

I’ve since discovered it’s much more than just coffee hour. The dictionary definition is “companionship, a friendly association, mutual sharing, a group of people with the same interests.” In the biblical sense, it’s even more than that.

“Fellowship has to do with a mutuality in all parts of your life,” Pastor Jack taught us. “You bear one another’s burdens and fulfill the law of Christ. You pray for one another, you love one another, you help one another when there is material need, you weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. It’s growing in an association with people who are moving in the same pathway you are and sharing with each other in your times of victory or need or your times of trial or triumph. It’s growing in relationship.”

Fellowship is instrumental in shaping us.

The Bible says that we become like those we spend time with and good friends sharpen one another just as iron sharpens iron (Prov.27:17).

Fellowship is more than attending a series social activities together. Each experience leads us down a pathway together celebrating our love for Jesus and each other as children of God.

Find some time to join in Fellowship with us in the coming weeks:

February 2020

- *Coffee Hour provided by Religious Education and the Choirs*
- *Love: The Heart of Wholeness* Dinner, Friday, February 14, 6:30 p.m., Forbidden City (following Wholeness Circle, which is from 5 to 6 p.m.) Please RSVP
- BLACK HISTORY MONTH FELLOWSHIP EVENT - NAACP Black History Extravaganza at the Russell Library on Monday, 2/17/2020 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. As it is a school holiday (President's Day), this would be a great family opportunity for our church families. We will meet back at the church at 2 pm for snacks and fellowship.
- 39th Annual Connecticut Garden Show, Hartford, Saturday, February, 22.
- Fat Tuesday Potluck, Tuesday February 25th from 5:30-7 pm in the parish hall with King Cake! Cajun-inspired dishes, mask making, beads! Fun!
- Vision Summit: Outreach Project, Whole Church Event, Saturday, February 29, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., all are encouraged to attend to help guide our outreach efforts as a whole body of First Church. Light breakfast and lunch will be available.

[FELLOWSHIP Continued]

March 2020

Coffee hour provided by TBD

- An Irish Potluck Celebration, Sunday, March 15th, 2020, 5:30 to 7 p.m.
- *Wholesome Nourishment* Cookbook Club Initial Planning Meeting, Wednesday, March 18, 6 p.m.
- Vision Summit: "Youth," Whole Church Event, Saturday, March 21, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Light breakfast and lunch will be available.

The Fellowship Committee is working on other events for February and March, including restorative yoga and another paint night. These will be announced soon!

Watch your e-mail and the weekly bulletin for event announcements! If you haven't done so already join the First Church Fellowship Group on Facebook. It's a private group that only members can see. Search for First Church Fellowship and you will find us!

It's Time for a Good Spring Cleaning!



Just like most of our homes, our beloved church needs a Spring Cleaning! This is a whole church event as it will take many hands. Trustees and Fellowship have partnered to coordinate the day!

Date: Saturday, April 4, 2020

Time: 9 to 1 p.m.

Dress/details: Work clothes, gloves, masks for dust, and a good sense of humor

All volunteers will be kept energized with nourishment from the Fellowship Committee.

Brian Custer is coordinating the actual clean-up event for Trustees. He is looking for guidance from folks that have done this before and also for those who are interested in serving on the planning team. He promises that there won't be too many meetings. Contact Brian at 860-237-2673, briancuster71@gmail.com or see him at coffee hour on Sundays.

350 +1: A Reflection on First Church's Efforts at Racial Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

"God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice. For they will be satisfied."
Matthew 5:6

On November 4, 2018 First Church in Middletown, celebrated its 350th Anniversary. As one of the oldest churches in the United States and as a former governmental entity, our ancestors in faith were complicit in slavery and in forcibly removing indigenous people from their tribal homelands. In 2017, the Truth and Reconciliation Committee was commissioned to research, document, and seek methods to atone for the unsavory moments in our church's lineage. Rev. Julia read a proclamation in which we dedicated ourselves to becoming a pro-racial justice church.

Here we are at the beginning of Black History Month, February 4, 2020 and this is the perfect time to reflect on our progress or lack thereof. Talking about Race, Eradicating Racism and Dismantling Systemic Institutional Racism, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion are all the current buzzwords for bringing more people of color into a space. As a downtown church, seeking to support the community, we first have to begin by understanding the community around us and the wounds wrought by racism. We are seeking to provide a spiritual home within and beyond our walls; and yet, we must also do no spiritual harm to those seeking solace.

Fifty-two years after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., America is still grappling with racial discrimination. "The very same issues that people are wrestling with now-police violence and unarmed African Americans being killed, people taking to the streets for affordable housing-are the same issues King was wrestling with then," says Hasan Jeffries, a professor of African American history at Ohio State University. "King's dream of equality has yet to be fully realized."

My call to action is:

- First Church collectively, as a whole congregation, actively engage in the UCC facilitated conversations on Race
- Develop a pro-racial justice mindset
- Attend Racial Justice Training workshops.
- Congregants do the internal work to unearth and heal their own implicit biases to honestly address the 800 pound elephant in the room-racism.
- Grow our understanding and practice of Jesus' central teaching: to love others as you love yourself.

As we do this, we will live into our vision of becoming a thriving, multi-cultural community of God.

With Love and Blessings, *Dionne Raines*



Children & Youth Programs

Greetings Beloved,

This month we celebrate the end of the liturgical season of Epiphany, on the hinges of the celebration of African Americans and Black History Month! Last Sunday, as we took communion, I mentioned briefly how the Communion elements laid directly on the symbol of Sankofa.

Sankofa is a West African symbol that speaks to the importance of learning from the past and bringing it into the present. As we celebrate Black History Month and move towards the season of Lent, allow us to journey together cherishing the history that we share, both individually and collectively, while also being aware of how we care and love for black and brown bodies.

Our Youth and Family Programming is off to a full start this year! We have joined with Fellowship Committee to enjoy potlucks, movie outings, and game nights! Likewise, we had a WONDERFUL game night and fellowship a few weeks ago.

The Nursery Care resumes throughout Spring for infants and toddlers. Church School continues as well and has three consistent teaching partners, who teach ages 5-10. Youth Gathering is for all youth ages 10 and up, or 5th grade and beyond to come fellowship with us as we learn about God, faith, and community.

Our Youth and Family Programming will also be hosting a Youth Visioning Summit **tentatively* on Saturday, March 21st! The summit is for all families to come and help us visualize our hope for the Youth and Family Programming in the upcoming year!

There will be nursery care available, and we are asking parents and congregants to join us in congregational feedback. More information is to follow, yet please put this date on your calendar! *Anyone interested can come!*

We also welcome three new Wesleyan students to our teaching team this Semester. Our Sunday School, Nursery Care, and Youth Group now consist of *SEVEN* volunteers this Spring! These lovely students will be with us from the end of January to early May!



Meet the Teaching Team

Name: Anna Ribeiro
Pronouns: she/her/hers
Position at First Church: Sunday School
Year and Program: First Year at Wesleyan; Double Majoring in Government and Psychology; minoring in

French Studies

Fun Fact about Anna: When I was younger, I used to train Brazilian Jiu Jitsu competitively



Name: Sadie Robb
Pronouns: she/her/hers
Position at First Church: Sunday School
Year and Program: *Junior (class of 2021), Anthropology Major*
Fun Fact about Sadie: My three favorite activities are... crocheting, hiking, and traveling the world.



Name: Luisa C. Rodriguez
Pronouns: she/her/hers
Position at First Church: Nursery Care
Year and Program: Theater & Romance Languages
Fun Fact about Lusía: I have been playing violin since I was 3 years old!



Name: Cambria Weaver
Pronouns: she/her/hers
Position at First Church: Church School
Year and Program: Sophomore; Religion Major
Fun Fact about Cambria: I am from California!



Name: Irene Westfall
Pronouns: she/her/hers
Position at First Church: Nursery Care
Year and Program: Sophomore; History Major and Data Analysis Minor
Fun Fact about Irene: I just started taking bass



guitar lessons!

***Name:** Zainab Malik
Pronouns: she/her/hers
Position at First Church: Youth Gathering

***Name:** Umi Ito
Pronouns: he/him/his
Position at First Church: Youth Gathering

**Photos not included.*

[Children/Youth Programs Continued]



We are so grateful to have their passions, talents, and care shared with us at First Church! Please *welcome them* when you see them!

Numerous activities are coming up in the Southern New England Conference, here are some opportunities for your Youth! Some of those engagements include:

- The Southern New England Youth Revival, Sunday, May 3rd, 2020 3:00 PM, United Church on the Green! The Revival Preacher is Yesenia Menendez-Sanchez of the Hispanic Community Church of Boston.
- The 2020 Maple Sugaring Youth Camp, grades 6th-8th from 3/20/2020-3/22/2020
- The 2020 Counselor-in-Training Weekend, 15/16-year-old opportunity, 3/6/2020-3/8/2020
- Several Silver Lake Summer Camp Opportunities are coming in June 2020! There are camps available for grades 4th-12th. For more information and registration, please go to <https://www.silverlakect.org/campsessions>.
- Lastly, the UCC National Youth Event is in mid-July at Purdue University. It is for children and young people who will have completed the 6th grade-12th grade. For more information, please go to <http://www.uccpages.org/nye2020/>

Likewise, I have lovely news regarding a Scholarship Fund for Silver Lake. Due to some very generous anonymous donations, we now have funding available for Youth and families interested in participating in Silver Lake Opportunities.

The beauty of ministry is the connection we receive in community with one another! Silver Lake provides excellent opportunities for growth and community engagement to enhance our hope of Youth revitalization. I hope that through the beauty of this beloved community, we are all able to have access to the educational opportunities that we need. For more information regarding the scholarship opportunities, please see Rev. Mahogany or Rev. Julia.

As always, thank you for allowing me to journey with each of you. I do not take it lightly the ability to serve as one of your pastors. May we move forward through the season of Epiphany and into the season of Lent, together, in love and gratitude.

—Rev. Mahogany Thomas, Minister



Children and Youth Calendar Winter/Spring 2020

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| February 9 | Nursery is open. Sunday School 10:15-11. No Youth Group. |
| February 16 | Nursery is open. Sunday School 10:15-11. Youth Gathering 5:30 pm–7pm |
| February 23 | Nursery is open. Sunday School 10:15-11. Youth Gathering 5:30 pm–7pm |
| March 1 | Nursery is open. Sunday School 10:15-11. Youth Gathering 5:30 pm–7pm |
| March 8 | Nursery is open (parent volunteer) Sunday School 10:15-11. (parent volunteer) Youth Gathering 5:30 pm–7pm: [tentative plan] Mindfulness Workshop with Heather McDonnell from Meriden public schools. |
| March 15 | Nursery is open (parent volunteer) Sunday School 10:15-11 (parent volunteer) Youth Gathering 5:30 pm–7pm: With Fellowship, St Patrick’s Irish themed Potluck! |
| March 20-22 | Youth retreat at Silver Lake, maple sugaring! |
| March 21
Saturday | Come to the Vision Summit on Revitalizing our Youth Programs! 9 am -noon at church. Lunch provided. We will share our ideas for structuring and supporting these programs. |
| March 22 | Nursery is open. Sunday School 10:15-11.
Youth Gathering 5:30 pm–7pm: Make cards for Easter flowers. |
| March 29 | Nursery is open. Sunday School 10:15-11. Youth Gathering 5:30 pm–7pm |
| May 3 | SAVE THE DATE! Youth Sunday @ 10 am in First Church!
Plus: Youth Revival @ 3pm in New Haven on the Green! |

How to Get Involved: Lay Leader Opportunities at First Church

Where is God calling you to connect? What are your gifts, talents and passions? And how can we help you get connected, so you can serve others in the spirit of Christ? At First Church we believe God has given each person special gifts and talents to serve.

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work." (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

The New Testament teaches us that God has poured out gifts and roles among the people. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul gives examples of the gifts of the Spirit that are poured out when the people are gathered together. They include gifts of prophesy, wisdom, healings, signs, and wonders. In Jesus we see that these gifts were not limited to the church services, but were demonstrations of the love of God when people in the community encountered Jesus and his disciples. People are healed, lives liberated from oppression. Outcasts are shown mercy, the guilty set free.

What gifts of the Spirit do you see at work in and through your life? Are there things that you do, ways that you serve, where you are especially aware of God's power and strength at work?

Each May at the Annual Congregational Meeting, a slate of volunteers for roles in the church is presented to membership for a vote. It is the role of the Leadership Development Team (LDT) to recruit and coordinate members to serve on the church's boards, teams and other roles. It takes many, many people to "get everything done" that needs to be done in the church. The LDT will be seeking positions for the Executive Committee (member-at-large, vice moderator), and vacancies in the Board of Deacons, Board of Trustees, Outreach and Fellowship Committees, Racial Justice Team, the A2A Team and many others – too many to mention here!

Now is a good time to consider a volunteer role that you might like to take on for the new year beginning at the Annual Meeting on May 31, 2020. For more information, touch base with a member of the LDT – Vicky Allen vickey.allen@gmail.com, Darcy Dickinson dickidarrn@gmail.com, or John Shaw johnfshaw@aol.com

United Church of Christ--Southern New England Conference

Super Saturday: A full day of workshops, forums, networking, worship. March 14 in Wilbraham, MA, 8 am-3:45 pm

www.sneucc.org for more details.

Super Saturday

March 14, 2020

8:00 am—3:45 pm
Minnechaug Regional High School
Wilbraham, MA

Registration Deadline: February 29, 2020
Register Today - www.sneucc.org/supersatreg

"Super Saturday is, I believe, the most important wider church community building resource available at this time."

Come Explore Workshops, Worship and More...



Trustees Update

The Board of Trustees is small but mighty! Among many other things, trustees are tasked with maintaining and securing our historic building, ensuring that our utilities, maintenance, and repairs are taken care of in a responsible and cost-effective manner and monitoring the First Church endowment.

Recent projects of the Trustees include:

- Securing a life-saving AED Defibrillator that has been located and installed in a very visible and central location next to the elevator. The next step will be training opportunities for key folks and volunteers to learn how to use it. Showers of gratitude to Jean Chatfield for writing a successful grant to the Michael Vincent Sage Dragonheart Foundation, Inc. for the funding to purchase of the AED and Brian Custer for the installation. If you are already trained on the use of the AED and would like to be included on a list of those that are trained, please see Brian Custer.
- Receiving flying colors on the inspection by the City Health Department for our amazing kitchen. This license is extremely important to have as we rent the kitchen to many groups for their activities and events. Without it, we could not rent the kitchen at all. Kudos for getting the kitchen up to par in order to achieve our renewed licensure from the city to Mary Lou Brady and Frank Green. Please note: It is very important that the rules of the kitchen be followed in order to maintain our license. If you do not know the “rules of the kitchen,” please speak with a member of Trustees and they can help you out.
- Keeping the building hopping at all times! Thank you to Trevor Davis, Kortney Balsamo, and Linda Choser for doing all that is necessary to share our beautiful church with the greater community. Futures, Inc., a local non-profit that works with individuals with disabilities has a monthly rental to use a classroom on the second floor. The Citadel Church has just began renting the Memorial Room every Sunday for their own worship. We have dancers, birthday parties, AA, and many others from the community enjoying our space. In fact, we had 22 of groups using the church in December (10) and January (12).

This takes a great deal of coordination and we thank our Trustees: Trevor, Frank, Mary Lou, Jean, Brian, and Andi (ex-officio). If this work interests you and you would like to become a Trustee, please contact John Shaw from the Leadership Development Committee.



WHOLESOME CONVERSATIONS (Behavioral) COVENANT

Let's face up to it. Although many of us would like a church to be a place where everything runs smooth as silk, the reality is that we can have disagreements in the church and even feel strongly about them. Actually, disagreements are inevitable. What two persons have ever agreed about everything? But differences of views do not have to be harmful. They can push us to find alternative solutions for issues. They can stimulate us to consider ideas we never dreamed of. The trick is to make sure our disagreements and differences don't divide us, but help us move forward as a church to accomplish our mission for God.

There are several of us who have been talking about having a "Behavioral Covenant" for the church, or as I prefer to call it a "Wholesome Conversations Covenant". With such a Covenant we promise to respect each other even when we differ; To listen and not interrupt; Give everyone a chance to talk; Speak for ourselves by using "I" messages; Speak up about any differences and not engage in behind the scenes rumor campaigns; Look to build up rather than tear down; and in general act the way we believe Jesus would want us to behave.

We are at the first steps of a "Wholesome Conversations Covenant". We need as many people as possible who are interested in such a Covenant to meet together to plan our next steps. We don't want to rush it. We want to make it clear to the congregation what we have in mind, answer all questions, and get as many people as possible on board. If you want to be part of the process to develop such a Covenant please speak to Pastor Julia or me or send us e-mails. My email address is revjs13@sbcglobal.net. You may have noticed that many of the ideas we speak of are already being used in the church such as in the Wholeness Circles" led by Rev. Julia.

We don't want our differences to divide us. We want our differences to produce a vibrant, faithful-to-God church. Above all we want to take seriously Jesus' words in John 13:34, 35: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another".

—Jim Silver

Executive Committee

February Exec Meeting

Executive Committee will meet Sunday February 23rd during Second Hour. All are invited.

Food and Drink Policy

In the bulletin

Please join us for fellowship in the parish hall, immediately following worship. Coffee, tea and refreshments are provided. The parish hall is accessible through the door at the back left of the sanctuary.

For the comfort and safety of all, please refrain from eating and drinking in the sanctuary. Exceptions for infants and small children supervised by their family, or for health reasons. Water is available from the ushers. Thank you!

In the hallway near office and in hallway near bathrooms/Memorial Room

First Church Food and Drink Policy

First Church offers a welcoming environment for all to enjoy. In keeping with our Congregational tradition, we are all ministers and stewards of God's church and it is our shared responsibility to keep the building clean, safe and welcoming to all.

For the comfort and safety of all, we ask that you refrain from eating and drinking in the sanctuary except:

- Water is always allowed and is available from the ushers, or you may bring your own water bottle.
- We welcome parents to nurse or feed infants and small children in the pews or in the rocking chair at the back of the sanctuary. The Memorial Room (accessible through the door at the back right of the sanctuary) is also available and provides a quiet venue with several couches.
- We understand that people sometimes need to have a snack for health reasons, and we ask that food is limited to pre-packaged or wrapped items that are odor free and do not leave stains.
- Worshippers may bring food and drink into the parish hall during the service. We hope to provide a livestream of the service in the parish hall soon—please stay tuned! The parish hall is located at the back of the church, near the parking lot entrance, and is accessible through the door at the back left of the sanctuary (then follow the signs).

Stewardship Second Mile Effort (Matthew 5:41-42)

At our recent Mid-Winter Congregational Meeting First Church passed our budget for 2020 and there is a bit of a deficit. We are not used to that! When it happens, we have to consider cutting programs and/or staff or taking more money out of the Endowment than we should. We would much rather branch out to the generous spirit in each of us.

Thus, we are asking folks to prayerfully consider raising their pledge for this year. Already we have raised another \$8,000 in increased and new pledges for 2020! Every gift makes a difference. New lilac-colored pledge cards are in the sanctuary and church office to use to raise your pledge, or make a pledge if you haven't already done so!

We are a community blessed with abundance. The Community Christmas dinner served over 500 people—we look forward to closing our budget gap and growing in service!

—The Stewardship Team: Mary Gould, Rhea Higgins, Karl Scheibe and Steve Crabtree

"Giving is a Breeze, with Breeze"

Did you know First Church members can give online with easy through Breeze, an online church management system? All First Church members have accounts. To access your account, you can download the Breeze App on your phone, or alternatively, go to firstchurchmiddletown.breezechms.com. From there, click "login" on the top right side of the page and type in your username and password. If you are unsure of your username and/or password, feel free to email office manager Kortney Balsamo at firstchurchucc@sbcglobal.net.

Vision Fund Update-January 2020

In 2018 we undertook a vision fund campaign and pledged \$644,312 towards our mission. Our goals include youth program revitalization, building renovations and accessibility upgrades, a special outreach project and growing our idea of church.

Pledge campaign: To date, we have received over \$644,312 in pledges from 106 families, plus fund raisers like Sips & Slates and the 350th anniversary T shirts. Based on the activity and indications on the pledge forms, the expected donations will have the following timing:

2018	\$326,892	2019	\$119,577	2020	\$146,316	2021	\$ 51,567	Total	\$644.312
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Donations: To date, we have received \$446,469 of actual contributions, 69.3% total pledge commitments. **Vision Fund statements will be sent out in January.** One donor has reduced their pledge

- 43 donors have completed their pledge (\$214,251 donated; none remaining)
- 56 donors have partially paid their pledge (\$232,218 donated; \$181,643 remaining)
- 8 donors have not begun to pay their pledge (\$16,480 in pledges)

Cash on hand: The Vision Fund has on hand **\$171,155** for projects. Most of these are invested in a money market fund within the church endowment. The remainder is in the church Liberty Bank checking account. I continue to balance the Vision Fund accounting to the church general ledger in Quickbooks. The treasury group has been helpful with the reconciliation process.

Projects: Vision Fund Building

Committee last met in March. There are currently no active projects. The current focus is on grant applications. We have met with the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office about grant funding. Ann Faust is working with us to complete grant applications through this program. Suzanna Barrett is helping with coordination on grants.

Income	12/31/2019	Budget
Pledges	\$ 644,341.78	
Donations	\$ 446,468.65	69.3%
Expenses		
Admin & Planning	\$ 36,769.01	\$ 37,000
Youth Programs	\$ 56,347.18	\$ 90,000
Access to All	\$ 48,035.37	\$ 167,500
Arts and the Sanctuary	\$ 134,161.67	\$ 135,000
Exterior Maintenance	\$ -	\$ 175,000
Outreach	\$ -	\$ 55,000
Under/(Over)		\$ 8,000
Total Expenses	\$ 275,313.23	\$ 667,500
Liberty Checking balance	\$ 11,213.58	
MM fund Endowment account 024111	\$ 159,941.84	
Interest on MM	\$ 527.52	
Total Vision Funds	\$ 171,682.94	

The grant writing team met in August and has started a process that will hopefully result in our church building being placed on the Connecticut Registry of historic places. Being in the registry will make First Church eligible to apply for grant funding for our remaining projects. The grant writing team includes: Ann Faust (consultant), Trevor Davis, Suzanna Barrett, Julia Burkey, and Jim Miller.

The building committee includes Suzanna Barrett, Mary Lou Brady, Trevor Davis, Jim and Pam Miller, and Jim Silver.

Project and expense update

Through December 31, 2019, **\$275,313 has been spent by the Vision Fund.** See attached financial summary. Completed projects include: The **organ refurbishment project** (contract cost \$73,631), the **sanctuary renovation** is complete. (Cost \$60,531), and **new pew cushions** for the main floor of the sanctuary.

[Vision Fund Update continued]

Accessibility projects: Power door openers have been installed for the side entrance at a cost of \$6,000. New microphones and a “loop” hearing assistance system have been installed in the sanctuary (cost \$25,000).

Sound system speaker upgrade: In addition to the hearing assistance system, the building committee has recommended that the speakers and mixer be upgraded in the sanctuary at a cost of up to \$45,000. This project falls outside of the Vision Fund, so we proposed executive committee to go forward with these improvements using unrestricted endowment funds. Executive Committee’s guidance is to wait on this expenditure until we find out whether or not our grant applications are successful.

We have spent \$56,347 of the \$90,000 budgeted for Youth Programming. The Appreciative Inquiry process continues to have discussions on where the church can best invest the \$55,000 of the Vision Fund designated for Outreach.

The three remaining major building projects (**Court Street ramp, Exterior painting and window covers, and elevator update**), may be eligible for grant funding. The timing of these projects will be tied to grant funding opportunities.

Jim Miller, Vision Fund Treasurer



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Talking Theology: Conversation Over Coffee!

Join First Church on the first Wednesday of every month at 6:30 pm for *Talking Theology: Conversation Over Coffee!* We meet at Perk on Main (in Main Street Market) for discussion about the divine and religious beliefs. This is open to all, so invite your friends! Contact Casey Russo (writetocasey@gmail.com) or Vickey Allen (vickey.allen@gmail.com) for more info. Topics so far have included "Who (or what) do you think God is (or isn't)?" and "What does it mean to have a relationship with God?"



Adult Bible Studies

Many devout churchgoers and members of a church, I was surprised to learn, are not familiar with the Bible, myself included. When a friend gave me a beautiful study Bible that is when I decided to try and read the Bible. Here at First Church I found a wonderful group of people to worship with and from being part of a small group found that like myself, there was a desire to learn more about the Bible. With the blessings of Pastor Julia, I organized a group where we first started with Upper Room and decided to move on to a more in depth study of the Bible using a book called *Engaging in God's Word*, specifically Genesis. We currently have two groups, one on Tuesday afternoons and the other Wednesday nights. If you are interested, please contact me at annmariefoote@gmail.com or 860 343 1154.

—Ann Marie Foote

Bisexual+ Discussion Group

Meets monthly on the fourth Wednesday of the month. For February, Wednesday 26, the time is moved up to 5:00 p.m. (instead of the usual 6:00 p.m.) due to Ash Wednesday services. Other upcoming dates are Wednesdays March 25 and April 22 at 6:00 pm. This group is for all genders who consider themselves bisexual, bi-curious, pansexual, queer, allies, or those who wish to know more about bisexuality. Our goal is to have a safe space where we can discuss our unique selves. We are self-moderated and do not offer professional advice. People under 18 please be accompanied by an adult.

Inclement Weather Policy

Occasionally we have severe weather conditions that lead us to cancel our regular Sunday morning service. The means of publicizing and informing the congregation are as follows:

- Notices will be posted with WFSB (Channel 3), NBC (Channel 4), Fox (Channel 6), WTNH (Channel 8) (TV stations) and WTIC 1080-AM radio
- An updated message will be put on the church's telephone answering machine;
- Every effort will be made to send out an all-church e-mail;
- In some instances, it may be possible to have someone post a notice on the church door itself.

