



**At the First Congregational Church, UCC of Wallingford, CT,
we have discerned the following vision and mission
for our faith lives together:**

Vision

Our faith – rooted in the compassion and teachings of Jesus Christ – is the foundation of our love for one another and service to the world around us.

We offer a home for those seeking deeper meaning or purpose in their lives through the exploration of Jesus Christ’s teachings. The love and compassion found in those teachings commit us to uplift each individual and celebrate our shared humanity.

Mission

We will foster spiritual growth, loving communication, and mutual care, thereby empowering us to confront issues that impact our community and the world, including poverty, isolation, and exclusion.

We commit to developing a nurturing environment where all are loved, valued, and inspired to meaningful participation in the life of the church. Through our Christian faith, compassion, and service, we will dedicate ourselves to making a positive impact on the lives of people in our community and beyond.



The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

23 South Main Street, Wallingford, CT 06492

Church telephone: (203) 265-1691

Church Office Hours: Tues.– Fri. - 9:00am – 2:00pm

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From the Pastor's Desk

The Settled Minister Search and Call Team has been selected, commissioned, and have begun their work. That is a sign that we are into a new stage of our ministry together. For the last fifteen months I have listened, learned, reflected, and supported all of you to the best of my ability. I have listened to your stories, personal and corporate. I have learned what is important to you and how you function as a group. I have reflected on a huge amount of data and how it all fits together. (or doesn't) And I have attempted to support you in discovering who you are and who you are called to be. This work has involved supporting the ONA Process and new Team Structure; Developing the ministry at Ashlar; providing numerous and varied Worship Opportunities; re-starting Bible Study; welcoming and nurturing Visitors and New Members into the life of the church; seeking to build a more responsive Congregational Care System; and working with the staff behind the scenes to keep things moving as smoothly as possible.

Last year my Star Gift kept my FOCUS on the things I just mentioned. In this next stage of our ministry together my FOCUS will be to enact my 2024 Star Gift EMPOWER. I anticipate taking what I learned last year, asking more questions and then hopefully EMPOWERING you to become the best of who you understand yourselves to be. I have shifted to "needs to be done" to create the best possible launching pad for the new settled minister. My FOCUS has now shifted to EMPOWERING in the following areas.

- 1) Updating the membership rolls and creating a functional **Church Directory**. There is a Team working on this as we speak. Your participation is critical!
- 2) Resourcing the **Search and Call Team** as they begin their work, then as needed.
- 3) Making decisions about the viability of the **8:00 Service and Ashlar**. (in conjunction with the Worship Ministry and Vision Board)
- 4) Establishing a viable **Stewardship Plan**. We need many gifts for this Team to function well.
- 5) Strengthening the **Care Giving Ministry** to be focused on Lay Care Giving instead of Pastoral Care.
- 6) Establish a **Job Description for the Settled Pastor** that can be reasonably accomplished in 40-45 Hours a week. Enact personal boundaries and practices to help the church experience the limits of what they can expect from a 40-45 Hour a Week Pastor.
- 7) Resource the Faith Formation Team in hiring a **Faith Formation Coordinator**.
- 8) Completing the ONA Process and Planning Future Initiatives of Inclusion.
- 9) Look at and make recommendations about the **Church's Staffing Needs and Resources** available to support those Needs. Establish or re-establish working Job Descriptions and Working Agreements that balance needs, expectations, resources, just compensation, and individual needs and preferences.
- 10) Work with a wide constituency to establish an ambitious, visionary, achievable, sustainable **Budget**.
- 11) Work with the **Celebrate 350 Team!!!**

I look forward to living into this next step of our **ministry together!**

My Understanding of my Star Gift – EMPOWER

Give someone a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach them to fish, and you feed them for a lifetime.

Lao Tzu

Faithfully, Pastor Meredith

March Worship Preview



- March 3 Communion
- March 10 We will receive our One Great Hour of Sharing offering (see story on p.8)
Commissioning of our Sacramental Ministers (see story on p. 8)
- March 17 The Rev. Marilyn Hendrix, Guest Preacher. Rev. Hendrix will preach a message entitled "Blindness of a Different Sort."
- March 24 Palm Sunday. This traditional service will begin with the singing of "The Palms" and Children's Joyful Hosannas and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It will conclude with the bringing in of the cross to the mournful "Via Dolorosa." This traditional service marks the beginning of Holy Week.
- March 28 Maundy Thursday. Once again, we will gather for an of experience Jesus' Last Supper as we gather around candlelit tables in Congregational Hall receive Communion and hear story of Jesus last days and Passion. Last year we had a full house. Please RSVP if you plan to come so we can be sure of sufficient seating. 7 PM
- March 29 Good Friday. We will gather in the Sanctuary at Noon and think about the Passion Story through the eyes of our children. 12 PM
- March 30 Easter Vigil at Ashlar Village. Join us at Ashlar Village for an Easter Vigil where we will celebrate our faith through Light, Water, Word, and Communion. Ushers and Greeters are needed. 2 PM, Bridge House Auditoriums A,B,C
- March 31 Join us for this uplifting service of music, prayer, and thanksgiving, as we celebrate the resurrection and the presence of the living Christ in lives. An array of Easter flowers will brighten our sanctuary!

A Note from the Moderators



As you may imagine, the commissioning service for our Settled Minister Search and Call Team on February 5, 2024 was accompanied by our exhalation after reaching this momentous milestone. Together with the congregation, we uplifted this Team, offered our gratitude, and shared in a covenant to support and encourage them on their journey toward calling our next Settled Minister. We offered ongoing prayers that the Holy Spirit would guide them as they unite their individual spiritual gifts in the search process.

The New Testament reading that we shared as part of that commissioning service continues to resonate with us and warrants repeating. From 1 Corinthians 12:4-12: *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually, just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body though many are one body, so it is with Christ.”*

We celebrate the spiritual gifts that the members of our Search and Call Team bring to the work that is before them. At the same time, we urge the rest of the members and friends of this congregation not to step back and simply wait for the work of the Search and Call Team to be realized. We must not simply wait for God to guide our next Settled Minister to our doorstep. Rather, we need to remember that while we are seeking the next Settled Minister that God wishes us to know, our next Settled Minister is out there looking for a dynamic congregation, a congregation that is: walking in the service of its Vision and Mission, looking toward the future with hope and positivity, and *continuing to do what God has called us to do and be what God has called us to be*. To be the dynamic congregation that will lead a new Settled Minister to us, by the grace of God, we need everyone to recognize and offer their spiritual gifts in support of the Vision and Mission of First Congregational Church.

To be certain, so many are hard at work already, devoting their spiritual gifts to the work of the Spirit in our church family and making our congregation God’s foothold for his work within our walls and within our community. We see it in the work of our ministries. In small and large ways, we see members and friends devoted to our ministry teams for worship, congregational care, faith formation, membership, mission and outreach, and administration. The energy that exists within this work reflects the dynamic work of God that will help draw and call to our next Settled Minister. We offer our gratitude to all who are generating this energy.

At the same time, we ask you, during this critical time of *being* the church as the Search begins, how is God directing you to use spiritual gifts in this place? What can you offer that will allow the church to live and grow into our Vision and Mission? The information in this Spire offers so many opportunities, and we hope that we are helping to foster a sacred space where new ideas and new possibilities are open for exploration and creation. Please don’t sit and wait for the Search to be completed...be the life of this congregation *now*...bring your gifts *now*...let us flourish and grow and ready ourselves *now* for the next milestones to which our God is guiding us.

With the peace of Christ,
Lori Folk-Barron & Greg Whitehouse
Co-Moderators

From the Minister of Music



As the Spire goes to press the children's choir is preparing a short musical to be presented on Sunday, February 25, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. in worship and at 1:30 pm at Ashlar Village.

This musical "CALLED" by Mark Burrows focuses on children exploring and discovering that they also are able to do something to help in the difficulties in the world. A collection of pocket change was taken by the children as part of the musical which the children decided to give to the Wallingford Animal Shelter. I hope you were able to be present for this worship service.

The Sundays in Lent, in general, the music groups will be focusing on African American spirituals. February is Black History month which also gave us an opportunity to explore some spirituals, their historical meaning, and what they can mean to us today. We will continue this exploration as we move through Lent and end on Palm Sunday with a setting of the spiritual "Ride on, King Jesus".

Sunday, March 10, 2024, has been designated by the national American Guild of Organists (AGO) as a Sunday where organists all over the United States will play in their services compositions written by women. I will be playing a piece by Florence Price who was a black composer who lived in the early twentieth century.

HOLY WEEK

Palm Sunday, March 24, 2024: Musically this service will be the traditional one with children choir, adult choirs and congregational singing The Palms and ending with the Via Dolorosa as we project what will happen during this Holy Week. The Handbell choir will be playing a processional with the choir.

The choir will be singing on Maundy Thursday.

Good Friday will be devoted to the youth and teenagers to explore what this most holy day means. For me, this is the pinnacle of the week. Without it, there would be no resurrection.

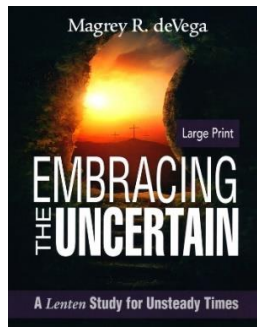
Adults will hopefully join in this exploration.

***Easter Vigil at Ashlar Village: March 30, 2024 at Bridgehouse.
All are welcome to attend this Service.***

EASTER SUNDAY March 31, 2024. This glorious day comes early this year. Musically it climaxes in majestic, celebratory sounds. Will everyone please bring bells of any sort to ring so we can make a joyous noise!

Soli Deo gloria!

Jeanette. Minister of Music



In *Embracing the Uncertain*, Magrey deVega explores six stories in the Gospels as Jesus travels toward Jerusalem, where he will be crucified. These stories are signposts in the gospel narrative, pointing down at a world filled with uncertainty, yet pointing us forward to a cross that can show us how to follow Jesus with courage, obedience, and the hope of resurrection.

Join us Tuesdays March 5, 12, and 19, and April 2, 9, and 16. We meet from 7 – 8 PM in the Guild Room. Books are \$11.50 and are available in the church office. All are welcome!



Welcome the Rev. Marilyn B. Kendrix March 17, 2024

On March 17 we welcome the Rev. Marilyn B. Kendrix, Retired Bridge Conference Minister of the Southern New England Conference UCC, to the pulpit. Since 2012, her personal ministry has included preaching at over 100 churches to raise awareness about mass incarceration in America. In her ministry to seek criminal justice reform, Marilyn co-wrote *The Justice Imperative: How Hyper-Incarceration Has Hijacked the American Dream* (Significance Press, 2014). Her current social justice preaching ministry addresses systemic racism and the controversy over critical race theory. So far, she has preached at an additional 80 churches on these subjects. The ONA Team will host an 11:00 coffee hour following worship for further conversation about how the themes of racial justice intersect with our work toward becoming an Open and Affirming Church.



Commissioning of Our Sacramental Ministers – March 10, 2024

Historically, FCCW commissioned elected Deacons to serve the church. Part of that service included being a part of the church's two sacraments, Baptism and Communion. With our new structure, we no longer have elected Deacons to serve in that function. A new designation is being explored in this new structure, that of Sacramental Minister. Sacramental Ministers are not elected, but are called to serve God and the church by ministering to others through the Sacraments. All prior Deacons are Sacramental Ministers, but others have been called to be a part of administering the Sacraments. New Sacramental Ministers will be Commissioned on March 10. All previously Commissioned Deacons will affirm their calling that same day. Commissioning is investiture of authority to perform religious functions (serving Baptism and Communion) on behalf of a Congregation. Come and be part of Commissioning our Sacramental Ministers!



One Great Hour of Sharing Offering - March 10, 2024

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is one of four special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten Offering supports the Disaster, Refugee, and Development Ministries of the United Church of Christ within Wider Church Ministries. OGHS supports life-giving recovery efforts when disasters devastate communities and lives. It empowers partners worldwide in their labors to build sustainable futures. OGHS plants seeds of peace where war has multiplied despair and destruction. Our communities and world need these blessings so very much right now. Our role as faithful light-bearers carries a witness of love and hope and persevering possibility that counteracts the cynicism, hatred, and hopelessness that are all too prevalent in this moment. I hope you'll give to the One Great Hour of Sharing offering this year with a spirit of joyful generosity!



You are Loved! You are Valued! You Count!

One of the many tasks we are undertaking in preparation to welcome a new Settled Senior Pastor is to update our Church Records and Directory. Since the last official update, (in 2014) much has happened in the life of our church members and friends. People have been born and died. Some have married, divorced or been widowed. People have moved. Many no longer have land lines. Some live part of the year somewhere else. Some have affiliated with a new faith community and forgot to tell us. It is important to have updated information on each of our members and friends to facilitate better communication, and also to allow the Search and Call Team to be able to reflect accurate demographics as they create the Church Profile to be seen by potential candidates. Please fill out one form for each affiliated Member/Friend of the church. Confirmands should complete their own form in addition to being included on their parent's/responsible adult's form. Please help us update our records. You count!

We make it easy for you to be counted!

You may fill out the Directory form in church on Sundays or at the church office.

You may print the form you will receive soon via Mail Chimp and return it to the church office. 23 S. Main St. Wallingford, CT 06492

You may connect to the form via this link <https://forms.gle/ggD8bWqEC1H4xayJ9>

You may connect via the Directory QR Link



Can we count you in?

Updates from Faith Formation Ministry

Sunday School has had a very fun February! The youth have been able to help with coffee hour, learn about Jesus' journey during this Lenten Season, and hand out kindness hearts after church. The pictures below show the K-2nd graders working on a lesson about Jonah and the whole group working on their kindness hearts.



Youth Group also had fun in February! They have been meeting regularly including an early morning meeting to make Superbowl Grinders. Thank you to all who purchased one!

All youth in grades 6 – 12 are invited to join us for all upcoming meetings. Youth in grades 6th – 8th meet from 4:00 – 5:30 and grades from 9th – 12th meet from 5:30 – 7:00. The next ones are listed below:

March 10th: March Madness Night

March 24: Learning about Holy Week

April 7th: Escape the Room at Church

Questions? Email Kayla at kaylaperkowski@gmail.com .

Introducing the Settled Minister Search and Call Team



Cliff Castellano: I am married and have two adult children; I live in Wallingford with my wife Denise and our dog, Tucker. I have lived here for over 30 years and have been a member of our Church for almost 30 years. My children were raised in the Church going through Sunday School and Confirmation class. My daughter Meghan was active in the Choirs and was a staple in the epiphany arts shows. I have been an active member, starting my Church career on the Board of Christian Education and then moved onto the leadership of this board. I'm proud to say we were instrumental in the configuration of our Church library which I know is enjoyed by many. I then moved to the board of Deacons on which I have served many times, four separate times as the Senior Deacon.

Some of my fondest memories were carrying in the Cross with the Pastor on Palm Sunday. I have also served on the Board of Trustees, and I was the fair committee chair for some 7 years. I have been a Stephen Ministry Leader and I'm very proud of the work that we have done as a group, helping and walking with our fellow members in their time of need. I taught Confirmation class with the Rev. Margaret Jay for some 5 years; it was a real gift to get to know our senior youth. I have attended youth groups as a chaperone. My son Taylor and I were on the inaugural youth Ministry trip to Hobbs NM, and that was an awesome trip. Currently, I serve on the Visitation team and along with the team are helping to keep our members that can't attend connected to our Church. I truly believe this is a vital Ministry to our Church. I am honored and will do my very best and look forward to working with our team to find our next settled Pastor.



Erica Haddad: I am a lifelong Wallingford resident. My husband and I have three children who are between the ages of 10 and 15. I am grateful for my fulfilling career as the first and second grade teacher at an amazing independent school in North Haven. I enjoy volunteering as a leader for Boy Scout Troop 5, and currently serve as our Committee Chair. My favorite ways to spend my free time are hiking, gardening, camping, reading and practicing yoga. I've attended First Congregational Church of Wallingford for 43 years—my whole life! Attending Sunday School each week was a meaningful part of my routine during my childhood. After spending a few years away during college, I returned to this church community, was married here, and had my three children baptized into this faith. Over time, I became more involved in volunteering by serving on the Board of Christian Education and then the Board of Community and World Service. While serving as Church Clerk, I attended Council meetings and took the minutes.

When it was time for our church to discern a new Vision and Mission statement, I led the Jeremiah Project, a process that guided our journey to discover what our church most deeply valued. This involved recruiting and organizing groups of volunteers, collaborating with a writing team to craft the new statements, and helping to provide guidance as we began implementing our new vision and mission. I am currently a coordinator for our Mission and Outreach Ministry and a member of the Open and Affirming Team. Last summer, my son, my dad, and I participated in our church's week-long mission trip in Hazlet, NJ. This was an experience I will always remember. I recently organized one of our church's monthly drives with a focus on collecting winter accessories to donate to our local emergency shelter. Our church has provided a comforting and centering space for me throughout the stages of my life. I feel a sense of community and shared purpose here. As part of the search team, I hope to help find a pastor who will love our church family and lead us forward by finding new ways to thrive.



Russ Hinckley: My wife Kristen and I have been members of the First Congregational Church of Wallingford since 2009. Both of our children, Nate (21) and Lauren (18) went through our excellent Church School and were confirmed. I have served on the Ushering Committee, Family Life Committee, Nomination Committee and am now on the Membership Ministry Team. I enjoy helping with church events such as the Christmas Fair, Chili Cook off and Palm Cross Breakfast. I currently serve on an Ushering Team and I am in the rotation of folks who play the chimes before church. Outside of church, I work as a Special Education Teacher in Cheshire. I am excited to serve on the Settled Minister Team because I greatly value this Church, its people, services, education, music and events. I hope to work with the Settled Minister Team to find a compassionate, dynamic leader to help our congregation grow in spirit, camaraderie and membership.



Mudi Kenney: I've been attending First Congregational Church since 2017 and officially became a member in 2020. Prior to that I lived outside of CT and attended other churches at those locations. Since joining the church, I have participated in the Jeremiah Project and was part of the Mission and Outreach team in 2022/23. I accepted the nomination to be on the Settled Minister Search Team because this church is now my home – both of my children were baptized here - and I want to serve where I can to help us build our future. Being able to help in the process to find our Minister is such an honor, and I will do my best to aid us in finding someone that embodies our vision and mission – creating a church community that is open and welcoming to all.



Amanda Nesto: I am honored to serve on the Settled Minister Search and Call Team. I grew up in Hamden as an active member of the Spring Glen Church. In 2017 I became a member of the First Congregational Church of Wallingford, and have felt a passion for my “new church home” ever since! My children, Kyla (13 years old) and Frankie (10 years old) have been active in the Sunday School and Youth programs since they were young, and also love our church community. I have been on the Faith Formation Ministry (formerly Christian Education) since 2019. Currently I am teaching our third and fourth grade Sunday School class, but I have taught students of various grades depending on the year. When I am not at church, I am working as a Classroom Para in a Kindergarten classroom at Cook Hill Elementary School in Wallingford. On the weekends I am usually working my second job, as a wedding photographer. I felt called to be a part of the Search and Call Team to share my viewpoint as a parent, a Sunday School teacher, a Faith Formation member, and a person that genuinely loves the First Congregational Church of Wallingford. I am invested in the future of our church and its continued development with a new Minister.



Nancy Tipping: I have been attending this church weekly since January 2023 and I became a member in November 2023. I attend Wednesday evening choir rehearsals and sing in the choir every Sunday. I joined the monthly mission drives on Saturday mornings, have enjoyed the monthly Ladies Breakfasts since September, and helped with the Fall Rummage Sale and Christmas Fair. In addition, I participated in weekly bible study in the fall, as well as monthly meetings of the Book Club. I want to serve on the Search and Call Team because I believe this church is capable of having a great future. In addition to being full of very friendly and very kind people, this church is willing to change and try new things in order to grow both in faith and in numbers.

The new administrative structure, Open and Affirming Process, Ladies Breakfasts, and twice yearly breakfasts for the families of newly baptized children, are examples of recent changes that make this church special. I want to help save it from the fate of my last church. I was a member of my last church (Northford Congregational) for 26 years and watched it become smaller and smaller, and watched the members decide time after time that they weren’t going to change anything. Before leaving the church in January 2022, I held many positions because no one else could due to advanced age (council chair, missions chair and others).



Kathy Wallace: I have been a member of this church my entire life. I have been involved on several committees in the past including music and stewardship and have served as a Trustee. Currently, I am a coordinator for the Administration Ministry, am on several teams in the Administration Ministry and Mission and Outreach Ministry, teach church school, and am part of the Monday morning work group that attends to church building maintenance, repairs, and improvements. I felt called to be a part of the Search and Call Team because I am a long time member of the church, have a deep love for the church (it is truly my home), and I think I can be helpful in completing the church profile and in interviewing candidates (as I have experience with this).



Nancy Churma (alternate): I have been a member of the church since 1987. Both of my children were baptized and raised in the church. I taught church school for a few years. I served on Christian Education, Community and World Service, and Music Committees several times. While my daughters were participating in youth choir, I assisted Jeanette at weekly rehearsals. I have been a member of the handbell choir and Chancel Choir for many years. I felt that my experiences with different church boards and committees would enable me to serve on the Settled Minister Search and Call Team.



Cathy Knight (alternate): I have been a member of First Congregational Church for 25 years. During that time, I have served three terms on the Diaconate and twice as Senior Deacon. I have also served on Community and World Service, Flower Committee, and the Family Life Board. Currently, I am serving as an Usher, Visitor as a member of the Congregational Care Team, and Co-Administrator of Book Club. Before retiring in 2012, I worked as Chief Operating Officer of a freight brokerage company and as a District Human Resources Manager for a major trucking company. I am honored to serve on this team and look forward to it being a very fulfilling way to serve our church.



The **Open and Affirming** certification process is nearing a very important part of the journey. We've hosted a one-hour documentary, invited guest speakers, established a library with relevant books, had a guest preacher, and Pastor Meredith has preached that "Love is Love", all in an effort to familiarize everyone with the importance of the acceptance and inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. At this point in time, we can actually see the completion of the work in sight, but there are several more steps coming up that involve the entire congregation that we want to make everyone aware of.

The next step is to write a Covenant concerning our being an Open and Affirming church. The *openandaffirming.org* website defines this document as "an act of faith, a solemn promise to God in response to God's holy Word. An ONA covenant is a serious step for a congregation in the life of a church."

Here are the steps our church will take to construct the Covenant.

1. **We are asking for suggestions from *everyone in the church* as to what should be included.** Please send your ideas via email to ona.fccw@gmail.com, with your suggestions. Please submit your comments by March 15th.

Note: there are some very good examples created by churches in our area that you can read at these web addresses: <https://springglenchurch.org/open-affirming> , <https://firstcheshire.org/more/open-affirming-lgbtq-friendly-church> , <https://northhavenucc.org/open-affirming-statement> , and <https://northguilforducc.org/social-action.html>. You can of course also get more information at <https://openandaffirming.org> .

2. **The ONA Committee, considering the suggestions from members of the congregation, will write a rough draft of our Covenant.** We want to tell you that we intend to expand the Covenant so that it covers all people. Jesus Christ has taught us that God loves every single one of us, and a more inclusive statement is in keeping with His teachings.
3. **The Vision Board will review the first draft**, offering their suggestions for improvement.
4. **This draft will be published in the May Spire.**
5. **A meeting open to all church members and friends will be held after Coffee Hour on Sunday, May 19th to solicit comments from everyone concerning the draft.** The purpose of this meeting is to give everyone a final opportunity to weigh in on the wording of the Covenant draft.
6. **The ONA Committee will finalize the Covenant and it will be distributed with the information for the Annual Meeting.** As can be seen in the above paragraphs, every effort is being made to provide every member with an opportunity to make suggestions about the content of this important document, the goal being a final Covenant document at the Annual Meeting.
7. **At the Annual Meeting in June, a vote will take place that will determine whether we will adopt the Covenant and join the growing number of ONA congregations in the UCC.**

On our sign on the Parade Ground in front of our church are the words "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here." The Covenant we make is another expression of that commitment. We look forward to your input and to crafting a Covenant that expresses our devotion to following the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A Message from the Flower Team

Lent is here, and so is the time to order Easter memorial flowers for the sanctuary! Please see the Easter flower order form elsewhere in the Spire and help us to remember your loved ones this Easter season.

The **2024 Altar Flower** sign up calendar is available in the Narthex. Please sign up for the dates that are special to you and your family. We thank our altar flower sponsors for adding to the beauty of our worship each week.

We are in need of sponsors for the following upcoming dates: March 10th, March 17th, March 31st, April 14th, April 21st, and April 28th.

Direct donations to the Flower Fund are always appreciated to allow us to place flowers on the altar on those weeks when we do not have sponsors, to help provide holiday flowers to our homebound members, to provide flowers to our baptismal families, and for special occasions. Thank you!



The cost to offset processing fees when paying online by credit card has increased on December 1, 2023 from 2.75% to the percentage of 3.37%.

If you have any questions, please contact Kathy Wallace at 203-745-9842 or kathywacct@gmail.com



EASTER FLOWER MEMORIALS & TRIBUTES

This year, Easter is **March 31st**. During Lent, you will have the opportunity to purchase flowers that will honor and remember loved ones and decorate the Sanctuary for Easter. Please complete the form below and put it in the collection plate or return it to the church office by **March 24**. You may also order flowers via the Online Giving tab on the church website: <https://www.firstchurchwallingford.org/>

Thank you for your continued support and generosity.- *The Flower Team*

EASTER PLANT ORDERS

Number of Daffodils: _____
Number of Tulips: _____
Number of Hyacinth Plants: _____
x \$10 each
Subtotal: _____

Number of Lily Plants: _____
x \$12 each
Subtotal: _____
Total: _____

_____ I will pick up my plant(s) after the Easter services _____ Please donate my plants.

In Honor Of: _____

In Memory Of: _____

Your name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____



The First Congregational Church
23 S. Main Street- Wallingford

Monthly Drives Team will be sponsoring our annual
Easter Baskets for The Department of Children & Families.

Baskets will be available for pick up on
March 3 and we will be collecting the filled
baskets or supplies to help fill the baskets
on

Saturday, March 16 from 9-11am.

This will be a drive through or drop off event.

Please keep the card attached to the basket.

**If you would like 2 baskets, consider picking up siblings
they have been tied together**

If you have any questions, Please contact Karen Janus
at 203-265-5882 or kjanus01@snet.net

Helping Hands

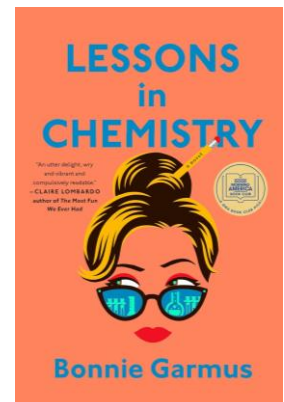


As many of you may or may not know, we have been providing meals to some members of our church family, who through various circumstances, are receptive to having a meal delivered to them.

If you know of someone in our church, who either on a short or long term basis, could benefit from a delicious dinner, please let us know. Also, if you wish to have your name added to our list of folks who have volunteered to make a meal, please let us know. We'd be happy to have you join us!

Helping Hands is just one of many "behind the scenes" groups within our congregation that provides comfort and support to our fellow brothers and sisters.

If there is a need or if you are willing to cook, please contact either Louise Zemina at 203-988-2517 or Bernie Annunziata at 203-415-9809.



Big bestseller for March!

We are reading
"Lessons in Chemistry"
by Bonnie Garmus.

"Irresistible, satisfying and full of fuel" NYTimes Book Review
Please join us on March 26 at 6:30 in the Guild Room.

Prayer
Shawl
Ministry



YOU GAVE ME COMFORT

Do you have a loved one, a friend, an acquaintance with health, family, personal issues? The Prayer Shawl ministry creates beautiful comforting shawls, lap robes, and blankets for you to give to your loved ones in need. There is always a selection appropriate for men, women, children, parents, caregivers. We have a variety of colors and sizes for you to give. Please ask one of the Care Team (Charlene Bruce, Cheryl Naski, Cliff Castellano, Joan Bushey and Ann Gyax), Pastor Meredith or Kathy Janis for a shawl. All are created by loving hands, blessed in our group and just waiting to give to someone in need of that loving touch, that reminder that they are cared for and cared about through whatever is going on in their lives.

We also create all the Baptismal blankets that are given to each child baptized in our church. Please consider asking for a special blanket for a child in need. Again, we have many sizes, colors and patterns for any child. Perhaps a parent who needs a Prayer Shawl and a special blanket for their child?

Please call or text Kathy Janis 203-376-1173 or email kathrynmjanis@gmail.com with any questions or requests.



Congregational
CARE TEAM

We Would Like to Be There When You Need Us!

We would like to be there when you need us. Sometimes, things happen in life leading to someone needing special care – the loss of a loved one, a hospitalization, a nursing home stay, a prolonged illness, an unsettling life transition, becoming homebound... If you are in need of care or would like to be added to the Prayer List, please call Pastor Meredith at 914 255-1690 or the church office at 203 265-1691. They will share your request with the Visitation Team Coordinators Charlene Bruce and Cliff Castellano. If you would like to be a visitor and join the Visitation Team, contact Charlene at charlenebruce@sbcglobal.net or Cliff at cliffc45@yahoo.com

Because of **YOU** our church changes lives.

2024 Stewardship Team Kickoff

Are you ready to help imagine a new approach to generous giving?

Do you have the passion to help secure the funds needed for the congregation to continue helping our community and providing programs?

😊 Prayerfully consider joining the 2024 Stewardship Team 😊



Contact Leslie Spiars to sign up and learn more!!

Call or Text 203.600.8043

Together, we will continue to support issues that impact our community and the world including poverty, isolation, and exclusion.



The ministry of ushering is a crucial part of worship because it is one of the most visible ministries in the church, nevertheless the usher performs a major role in ensuring that people see and experience that.

People feel invited to serve the church through a welcoming ministry. The church usher duties can be summed up in a few words – making people feel welcome at church, assisting the Pastor with people management, assisting with seating, collecting offering, and maintaining a safe environment. Currently, we have five rotating teams. Usher teams are only needed no more than once a month.

If you are interested in joining the ushering ministry, please contact Tony Annunziata at (203) 500-9542



MISSION MONEY AT WORK

As the scripture says: "He gives generously to the needy; his kindness lasts forever." And God, who supplies seed to sow and bread to eat, will also supply you with all the seed you need and will make it grow and produce a rich harvest from your generosity. 2

Corinthians 9: 9-10

Your mission team started the year off strong trying to help support people in need internationally, nationally, locally and within our church community while keeping our mission and values in mind.

Supporting our world –

Child Fund – Child Fund is a global community of people who care about children. Hoping to provide sustainable assistance, we choose several items from their donation catalog. We approved "Starter Farm +1 Piglet" for \$430 which includes two sheep, one goat, six chickens and feed plus one piglet. Fourteen mosquito nets for \$77 to help prevent malaria and other diseases. And finally, "A Barnyard of Blessings" for \$848 which includes one cow, two goats, six chickens and one pig. As noted by the Child Fund, these gifts can provide ample protein, vital nutrition, and income for years to come.

Supporting our country -

Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services ("IRIS") – The primary mission of IRIS is to provide refugee resettlement services and help refugees and other displaced people establish new lives. They provide such services as housing including basic needs such as furniture, groceries, and household goods; health; education; employment; legal and case management services. We approved a donation of \$500.

Supporting our local community -

Wallingford Community Shelter – The Wallingford Community shelter has reopened in 2024 for a shortened season with a new approach to partnering with local churches. Partnering with First Baptist Church of Wallingford, we approved the reimbursement of the cost of two days' worth of breakfast and lunches for the residents. The estimated cost is approximately \$150.

Youth Continuum – Youth Continuum provides a continuum of care for young persons experiencing homelessness. Typically youth ages 14 to 24 are fleeing dangerous living environments, struggling with substance use, aging out of state care and at risk of sexual violence and trafficking. They provide a safe bed, transitional housing and a path to independence. They operate in the New Haven area. We approved a donation of \$500.

Supporting our church –

Youth Mission Trip – We are proud to support our youth mission trip through a donation of \$500.



350th Anniversary Celebration Team

Between May 2024 and May 2025, we will be celebrating the 350th anniversary of First Congregational Church of Wallingford!

Time to Celebrate!

Celebrations and activities to honor the 350th will be occurring throughout the year, and we need the assistance of many to celebrate this momentous year. Are you a party planner? Do you enjoy organizing fellowship activities? Do you have connections to other community organizations that might get involved in celebrating this church, OUR church, as an important member of and contributor to the community of Wallingford? We are looking for creative ideas, and we need you!



LIGHTNING STRIKE UPDATE

It has been nearly 8 months since the severe thunderstorms on July 4, 2023 caused a lightning strike that rendered much at the church dysfunctional the next day. The lightning strike disabled the computers, phones, doors, alarm system (both at 23 S Main and the Meetinghouse), lights in the sanctuary, and some smaller items.

The costs of repairing the damages to our alarms, electronic door access, communication systems, and lighting totaled \$12,482! Because these unexpected expenses would have taken 83% of the \$15,000 allotted in our budget for church repairs for the entire 2023-2024 fiscal year, we sent an appeal to the congregation for donations that would offset these expenses.

To date, we have received \$2,900 in generous donations toward our Lightning Strike Fund. Thank you to all who donated towards this giving opportunity.

thank you

If you find yourself able to assist in offsetting the costs incurred from the lightning strike, we continue to gratefully accept donations to the Lightning Strike Fund. Please place your donation in the offering plate, mail it to the church office with directions to apply it to the Lightning Strike Fund, or use the online giving option on the church website:

<https://secure.myvanco.com/L-Z3ZD/home>.

We appreciate your generosity and assistance in addressing these unexpected expenses.

Church Community Garden

WALLINGFORD VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK

10291097E Center St, Wallingford, CT 06492

Dear Our First Congregational Church Members,

Spring is just around the corner, and we're excited to announce a wonderful opportunity for you to get involved and make a positive impact! Our church community garden will be in full bloom, and we're looking for enthusiastic volunteers to join our gardening team.

Why Volunteer?

Nourish the Soul: Gardening is not just about planting seeds; it's about nurturing connections, fostering growth, and creating a beautiful space for everyone to enjoy.

Health Benefits: Spending time outdoors, digging in the soil, and tending to plants can boost your physical and mental wellbeing.

Community Bonding: Working side by side with fellow church members strengthens our sense of community and shared purpose.

What Will You Do?

Planting and Weeding: Help sow seeds, transplant seedlings, and keep our garden beds free from weeds.

Watering and Pruning: Ensure our plants receive the love and care they need to thrive.

Harvesting: Enjoy the fruits (and vegetables) of your labor by harvesting fresh produce for our community.

How to Get Involved? Simply contact Tina Caldwell at the email below or sign up on the sheet posted in the church narthex. Let us know your availability, and we'll add you to our gardening team.

Bring:

- Gardening gloves
- Sun hat
- Water bottle
- Enthusiasm!

Together, we can cultivate beauty, share abundance, and grow deeper connections within our church family. Let's make our community garden a place of joy, reflection, and growth.

Thank you for being part of this green initiative!

Blessings, Tina Caldwell Community Garden Team Lead

For more information please email Tina.Caldwell520@gmail.com





New members will be received April 28.

For more information, speak to Pastor Meredith



Madison Lee Astorino was baptized February 18, 2024. Madison was born June 28, 2023. She is the daughter of Lindsey and Nicholas Asterino and the sister of Jacob Astorino. Welcome to the newest member of Christ's Church!



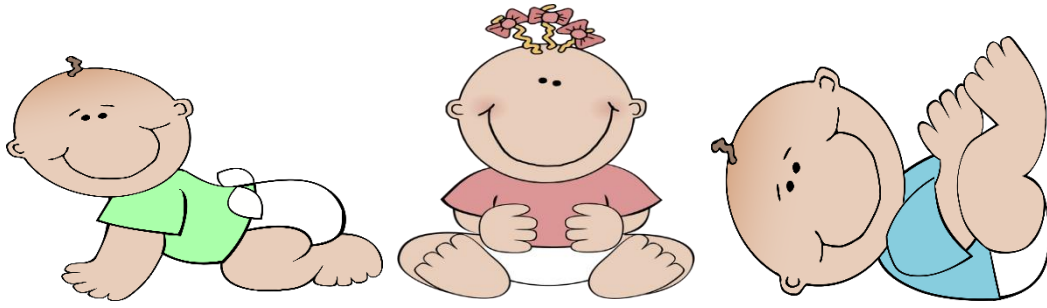
Betty Barnes passed away December 11, 2023 at Masonic surrounded by the love of her family. She passed away at 104, having lived a long and rich life. She will be buried in the spring at the convenience of her family.

Margaret Porter passed away December 14, 2023 in St. Mary's, Georgia. She will be buried in Bloomfield, NJ.

Patricia Ann Bauers passed away January 14, 2024 after a long illness. She was an active volunteer at First Church. Patricia is survived by her husband Barton. Funeral arrangements are private.

Robert Schaeffer passed away January 15, 2024. Robert is survived by his wife, Gail. His funeral was held at the Wallingford Funeral Home on January 21, 2024.

Virginia Bodin passed away January 28, 2024 at Ashlar Vilage. She is survived by her husband, Gus. The Bodins were active in the Guilford Congregational Church for many years and were also involved First Church Wallingford's ministry at Ashlar Village. A Memoria Service will be held at 11 AM March 16 in the Hartog Auditorium at Ashlar.



Baby Corner Wish List

Baby wipes

Lotion

Baby wash

Diaper rash cream

Baby blankets

Grooming kit

Pajamas (sleepers) Gender neutral

Diapers All sizes

Shampoo

Pacifiers

Infant Tylenol

Boogie suckers

Baby washcloths

Blankets

Items will be collected and delivered to
DCF Meriden/Wallingford

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

23 South Main Street, Wallingford, CT 06492

Church telephone: (203) 265-1691

Church Office Hours: Tues.– Fri. - 9:00am – 2:00pm

Email: officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org (office)

pastormeredith@firstchurchwlfld.org (pastor)

gross7jeanette1@gmail.com (Minister of Music)

Website: www.firstchurchwallingford.org

First Congregational Church of
Wallingford
23 South Main St
Wallingford, CT 06492

*The next Spire will be
published in April 2024. Spire
submission deadline is the
15th of every month for the
following month's edition.*

Email the church office at :
officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org

