



The Spire

**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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Holy Week at First Church!



Palm Crosses, French Toast, and Fellowship An Annual Tradition

March 23 – 9:00am – 11:00am in Congregational Hall

Please join us for our all-church breakfast. There is no charge but free-will donations will be accepted. Learn how to make crosses with strips of palms.

We usually make hundreds in just one hour!

Following the palm cross making, join in the fun of an *Easter Egg Hunt* for grades 2 and younger. *Children grade 3 and up (as well as any adults) are invited to experience The Bell Tower Tour.*

Palm Sunday – March 24

10:00am Worship

We will journey with Jesus into Jerusalem.

The Choir and Congregation will sing *The Palms*

The Bearing of the Cross will signal the beginning of Holy Week

Maundy Thursday – March 28 – 7:00pm

Join us for this special service of *Tenebrae: A Service of Light and Shadows*.

The Lord's Supper will be shared around tables as we take this time to reflect on the final experiences of Jesus through scripture and song.

Good Friday – March 29 12 Noon

This service is the crux of the entire Holy Week. Without this action, Christianity and its sequelae would not exist. Come walk the *Via Dolorosa* to the cross with sung music. Hear "*Voices from the Crowd*" as they speak about what it was like being in Jerusalem that Holy Week. Sing and listen to songs of the Passion.

Holy Saturday Worship – March 30

An Easter Vigil at Ashlar Village in Auditorium A&B at 2 PM

Based on the ancient liturgy: Fire, Word, Water, and The Lord's Supper.

The Joy of Easter Sunday – March 31

10:00am – Easter Celebration Worship

Join us for this uplifting service of music, prayer, and thanksgiving as we celebrate the resurrection and the presence of the living Christ in our lives.

An array of Easter flowers will brighten our sanctuary!

Stay after worship for a cookie or two!

A Note From the Pastor

So we are taught that Easter is all about new life in Christ. That Easter is all about Resurrection. We are taught that because Christ lives, we can live also. While I believe all of this to be true, I wonder how this might be true for all God's children, not just those who live in the relative safety of Wallingford, CT.

Each day as I watch and listen to the news, my heart breaks. I want for the world's children what I want for my own. I want for my brothers and sisters around the globe to have what I have, enough and often more than enough. Enough food, enough warmth, enough comfort, enough opportunities to learn, enough opportunities to play, enough work, enough access to medical care. Enough. That's all I pray for. Enough for all God's children. ALL God's children.

My heart goes out to those who have needed to flee their homes because of war, violence, natural disasters, hunger, political upheaval, gangs, drugs, or threats due to beliefs or sexual orientation. We should all be safe in our homes.

The UN Refugee Agency expects that 130 million people will be forcibly displaced by the end of the year. 130 million people. That's 130 people who have lost almost everything. That's 130 million who don't have enough.

As a person who believes the good news of the Gospel. As a person who believes that Jesus died and rose again for us all, I feel compelled to do something about offering new life and new hope to those who desperately need it.

IRIS, Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services, is doing amazing work settling refugees in CT. They have settled several thousand in the last three years alone. As an Easter person, I am partnering with IRIS and an Interfaith Team in the Meriden/Wallingford area to welcome a refugee family to our area and support them in as they experience new life and new hope. Our task will be to be sure when they come here they have enough as they work toward self-sufficiency. Enough food. A safe home. Needed medical care. Practice learning English. Tutoring for their children. Lessons in public transportation. Enough furniture to be comfortable, but not a burden. Enough new friends to make them smile.

It takes a village to welcome a displaced family. Would you like to join me in being part of a welcoming village? Would you like to give someone hope and new life?

Easter blessings,

Pastor Meredith



A Note from the Moderators

Dear Members and Friends,

The blessings and beauty of Easter are fresh in our minds. With thanksgiving for the resurrection of Christ, we offer gratitude for the love, grace, and forgiveness of sins that God has generously bestowed upon us.

As we reflect on God's generous love during the sacred Easter season, we are also moving into the "season" of our church year when we must face the realistic need to talk about financial support for the church. As the budget for the current year is being reconciled and budget plans for the upcoming year are being made, we, as members and friends of this congregation, must reflect on our ability to support with generosity the ministries of this church and all of the efforts to serve our Vision and Mission. In the days and weeks ahead, we will all once again be asked to make a pledge of financial support to First Congregational Church, a pledge that reflects our love for the church and our joy in being able to give in the service of God.

As moderators, we are continuously awed by the generosity of this congregation: generosity of spirit, generosity of talent, generosity of time, and generosity of resources. When someone in our church family is in need of prayer or meals or financial support, our church family responds with generous and loving support. When asked to give food to those in our community who face food insecurity, our church family responds. When asked to provide clothes and shoes to those who are lacking, our church family responds. When asked at Christmas, Easter, and other times throughout the year to help a child in DCF care know that they are special and not forgotten, our church family responds. When asked to donate our time and talents in worship, at fellowship events, and at fundraisers, our church family responds. We consistently, lovingly, and generously respond to needs in a way that serves God and puts our Vision and Mission statements into action.

We come to you now to say plainly that our church is in great need of your financial generosity. We will face budget shortfalls in the present fiscal year because our supporting income is less than we anticipated. Our Administrative Ministry is facing the need to recommend bold moves in the next fiscal year to preserve our financial well-being. It is a fact that our ability to continue to serve God in this place is dependent upon each and every person's loving and joyous generosity to this church. Will we respond in any way we can...as much as we can?

The answer to that question is deeply personal and one not made lightly or without prayerful reflection. As you consider your love offering/pledge to the church for the upcoming program year, we offer to you these Biblical examples of generosity (shared recently during a Ladies' breakfast devotion on generosity) that might help to guide your reflection:

- Exodus 36: 1-7: Generous people often give more than they are asked to give.
- 2 Corinthians 8-9: Generous people give in response to a great cause.
- Luke 21: 1-4: Generous people give out of their substance, whether large or small.
- Luke 10: 25-37: Generous people give more than just their money.
- Genesis 45: Generous people give even when it doesn't make sense.
- Luke 7: 1-10: Generous people give to help others, even when they differ from one another.
- Matthew 14: 14-21: Generous people give to see the impossible become possible.
- Luke 19: Generous people give as a byproduct of their own personal transformation.
- Luke 21: 1-4: Generous people give out of their own poverty.
- Philippians 4: 15-16: Generous people give when others will not.

In the upcoming weeks when each of us will be asked to consider our giving, please remember the generosity God has bestowed upon you, the generosity you can offer in return, and, most importantly, what is possible when the gifts of generosity, love, and service to Christ are shared and celebrated by all.

From the Minister of Music



Thank you all for contributing your “change” to the musical **CALLED** by Mark Burrows which the Youth Choir presented on Feb. 25. We collected \$451. 23 which we presented to the Wallingford Animal Shelter on Sat. March 16. Some of the children are going to volunteer at the shelter on an ongoing basis. Below is a picture of us giving a check to the shelter.

I am writing the information for the Sunday worship on April 7 because I will be exploring some of the percussion instruments played in Bawa. I have brought them back with me from my visits to Bawa.

For those of you who do not know about Bawa, Cameroon, this church has been involved since 2006 in supporting activities such as the purchase of bednets and more importantly, the mission board as it was called in the past has funded the salary of Sylvain Foulepack, our manager of activities in Bawa. Dr. Dennis Richardson, a former member of this church, and Dr. Blaise Dondji co-founded the Bawa Health Initiative. The Rev. Margaret Jay, a former minister of this church served as president of the BHI board for many years. At the present time, Michele Tarantino, a church member and I serve on the board whose members are now both on the east and west coasts.

I know some of you have asked what is happening in Bawa. We have been unable to go there in the past 6 years because of the civil wars going on there and then COVID which did not reach Bawa at all. Some trips are being planned in the next year.

But connections with Bawa and support of activities have not stopped. It has been delightful to be able to zoom with them. The health clinic has been built and functioning. We are now reinvesting ourselves in the public health of the village as well. Michele Tarantino will report on what we have been doing and what is planned for the future.

See you on April 7.

Thank you all for your contributions to the Children’s Choir musical CALLED. We raised in total \$451. 23 which the children presented to the Animal Shelter last Saturday. We made a good connection there . A couple of the children are interested in volunteering there.

More for children:
SUMMER POSSIBILITY:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE ORGAN, THE KING OF INSTRUMENTS
August 19-22, 2024. 10-12 noon

Learn where the air comes from to make the pipes sound
Learn about the different sounds the pipes can make and how that happens.
Come play the organ, especially if you already play the piano.

Registration Information will be forthcoming



Worship SCHEDULE



Christ is Risen! Let Us Celebrate!

April Worship

April 7 - Bawa and Communion

April 14 - Baptism

April 21 - Earth Day Celebration

April 28 - Reception of New Members

Faith Formation News

Sunday School had a great month! We are continuing to learn about Jesus' time with the disciples and more about Lent. We also had a fun St. Patrick's Day where we learned a little about St. Patrick and how his faith in God helped him bring Christianity to Ireland. We are looking forward to more lessons this spring.

Youth Group also had their game night which was a lot of fun. Looking ahead, we have a special youth group about Holy Week and a Church Escape Room in beginning of April.





SEARCH AND CALL TEAM

The Settled Senior Pastor Search and Call Team is VERY EXCITED to announce that we have set the following dates and times to meet with small groups of church members to hear their thoughts about the church and their hopes for our new pastor.

- Sunday, April 21 at 11:30 (after church) in the Guild Room and Williams Room
- Wednesday, April 24 at 2pm in the Guild Room
- Thursday, April 25 at 6pm in the Guild Room
- Saturday, April 27 at 10am - This will be a REMOTE meeting for those who would like to participate via ZOOM

The Team is actively gathering information to create the Local Church Profile that we will use to provide information about our church to prospective new pastors.

The profile is built around three central questions:

Who are we? Who is God calling us to be? Who is our neighbor?

Answering these questions will help us clarify where to focus our energies in the next chapter of our ministry. It will also help clarify what sort of minister we need for this next chapter.

Please plan to join one of our casual conversations.
Please make your voice heard!

*** SOON there will be a survey coming from the team that we strongly hope EVERYONE will complete. The survey will provide an additional opportunity for ALL of our church members to weigh in on choosing our new pastor.



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*. 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 entry 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!

[Complete this form using the QR Code](#)



PHOTOS

A picture is worth a thousand words and will help us to get to know one another better. Please have your picture taken at church, by a friend, or a headshot selfie to be included in the directory.

Please email your photo to FCCWDIRECTORY@gmail.com

Thank you for your participation!

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 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.

Church Community Garden

WALLINGFORD VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK

1029-1097 E 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 well-being.

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



April Monthly Mission Drive

**First Congregational Church
23 S. Main St., Wallingford**



Snack Drive

The Monthly Drives Team of the Mission & Outreach Ministry is collecting snack items for Ulbrich Boy's and Girl's Club. Suggested items would include a variety of snacks, granola bars and fruit cups.

**** Due to allergies NO NUT products ****

Prefer to make a monetary donation? Store gift cards and other monetary donations will also be happily accepted the day of the drive or at any point before the drive.

Snacks will be collected on:

Date: Saturday, April 20, 2024

Time: 9:00 am to 11:00 am.

This is a drive up, drop off event at the rear of the church. As always, your donations are greatly appreciated!

If you have questions, please contact Louise Zemina at 203-988-2517 or email her at louisezem@aol.com



MISSION MONEY AT WORK

As the scripture says: " and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday". Isaiah 58:10

As a reminder, this year, mission fund donations were not specified in the pledge. A general pledge was made. A certain amount was then budgeted for mission fund distribution. To date, the church revenues are less than expected in the budget. We have been trying to balance our church's missions and values and commitment for mission distributions with the church's internal financial situation. While we all agreed that making no distributions was not in line with our values, we did proportionately reduce our distributions this month with a hope we could recoup in future months.

Your mission team met once again to donate internationally, nationally, locally and within our church community while keeping our mission and values in mind.

Supporting our world & church –

One Great Hour of Sharing – This aligned with the UCC's One Great Hour of Sharing on March 10, 2024. As the UCC website explains "One Great Hour of Sharing 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 Love of Neighbor." We felt committed to the international support provided by this mission plus the desire to support the greater UCC church effort. We donated \$250.

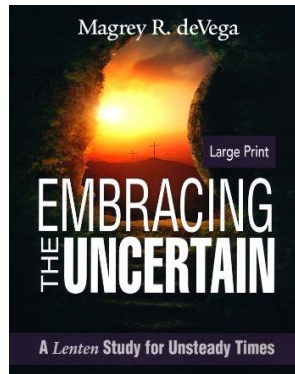
Supporting our country –

Feeding America - This nonprofit organization has a network of more than 200 food banks that feed more than 46 million people through food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other community-based agencies. We felt compelled that feeding the hungry was something we were called to do. We donated \$150.

Supporting our local community -

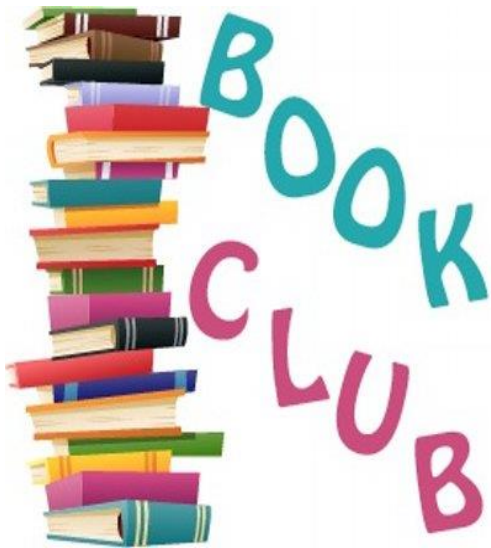
Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers of Greater New Haven – The mission of the organization is "We are neighbors who help neighbors live lives of connection and care, with seniors at heart." They do this through activities such as sharing experiences, rides, food and other services, primarily with seniors. This is designed to cultivate connection, support wellness, and relieve loneliness and isolation. They embrace people of all faiths and beliefs. Since many of our donations or drives benefit children, we felt compelled to also take care of the elderly. We donated \$100.

Bible Study



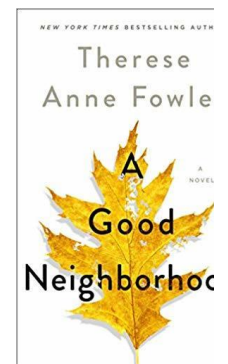
We continue with our study *Embracing the Uncertain*, Magrey deVega explores six stories in the Gospels as Jesus travels toward Jerusalem. These stories are signposts in the gospel narrative, pointing down at a world filled with uncertainty, yet pointing us forward to a cross that can show us how to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

Join us Tuesdays April 2, 9, and 15. We meet from 7 – 8 PM in the Guild Room. Books are available from Charlene Bruce or at the study. All are welcome!



“ A Good Neighborhood “ by T. A. Fowler
“A provocative, absorbing read.”
People Magazine

Hope to see everyone on Tuesday April 23
at 6:30 in the Guild Room!





Ladies' Breakfast

Please join us for a

Ladies' Fellowship Breakfast

Saturday, April 27, 2024

9-11 AM

At the home of Denise Castellano
65 Kingsland Avenue, Wallingford

Please bring a dish to share and enjoy a meal, scripture discussion,
and fellowship.

RSVP to Lori Folk-Barron (lorifolkbarron@gmail.com or
203-314-9885) by Thursday, April 25th, and let her know
what breakfast item you plan to bring. Suggestions include juice,
muffins, yogurt, fruit, banana bread, quiche, etc.



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

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.

Prayer Shawl Ministry



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 Gygax), 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.



SPRING RUMMAGE SALE

MAY 2nd, 3rd, and 4th

The Spring Rummage Sale will be held on Thursday, May 2nd and Friday, May 3rd from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m., and on Saturday, May 4th from 9:00 to noon. As always, your donations of gently used clothing, linens, shoes, coats, pocketbooks, and small household items are greatly appreciated. All donations can be brought to the church **STARTING SUNDAY, APRIL 14TH.**

Hours for drop offs on Mondays through Fridays are 9:00-3:00. Storage space is extremely limited. **NO FURNITURE CAN BE ACCEPTED.**



HELP IS NEEDED WITH THE FOLLOWING:

1. Setting up tables on Sunday, April 28th in Congregational Hall after coffee hour.
2. Sorting donated items from Monday, April 29th through Thursday, May 2nd from 9:00 am to noon and 1:00-3:00 p.m.
3. Working the sale floor whenever available those 3 days and hours.
4. Breaking down the sale on Saturday, May 4th at noon.

Last year's spring rummage sale raised \$3,123!!! With your help, we can reach that goal again or go even higher. If you are able to help, please call Bernie Annunziata at 203-415-9809.

THANK YOU!



350th Anniversary Celebration Team

At the March 4, 2024 meeting, the Vision Board voted to establish that the 350th anniversary celebration of First Congregational Church of Wallingford will take place in the calendar year of 2025, or from January through December 2025. This was done to allow for additional planning time for our year of celebration!

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!

A Message from the Flower Team

Thank you to all who sponsored memorial flowers this Easter season! We also extend our gratitude to Joe Geremia and Geremia Farms who again donated many beautiful spring flowers that enhanced the beauty of our Easter worship service.

We offer another reminder that 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 supporting this ministry on a weekly basis.

In looking ahead, we are in need of sponsors for these upcoming dates:
April 14th, April 28th, and May 5th.

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, such as placing palm plants in the chancel on Palm Sunday.

Thank you!



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



Emerson Fearnley passed away February 26, 2024 at the age of 101. His funeral service was held March 4 at the Wallingford Funeral Home.

Fran Rice passed away peacefully March 7, 2024. She was 96 at the time of her passing and had been with her beloved Holman for 80 years. A service celebrating her life was held March 13 at the church

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

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First Congregational Church of
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The next Spire will be published in May 2024. Spire submission deadline is the 15th of every month for the following month's edition.

Email the church office at : officemanager@firstchurchwfd.org



Happy Spring

