



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

Email: officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org (office)

Website: www.firstchurchwallingford.org

From the Interim Minister's Desk

Rev. Meredith Jeffers



Some of you may remember that my first Sunday preaching at First Church, I likened Interim Ministry to Foster Parenting. The comparisons between the two are numerous. As we prepare to walk through our first Holy Week together, a special Easter tradition comes to mind. Needing to blend the Easter traditions of several different families of origin, I decided to do a traditional Easter Egg Hunt, but with a twist. One of the families of origin in my blended family celebrated Easter by searching for a single basket filled with real eggs and toys. Another family celebrated by hunting for dozens of plastic eggs filled with candy. Another didn't celebrate Easter at all. And still another was given a bag of their favorite Easter candy and told to not eat it all at once. Knowing there were many different Easter traditions to consider, I ultimately ended up creating a Jeffers family tradition. Easter breakfast at church, followed by Easter worship followed by a hunt for plastic eggs filled with puzzle pieces. My vision was we would assemble the puzzle together as the pieces were found and we would know we had found all of the pieces once the puzzle was complete. But one of my "spirited" children invented a tradition of his own – withholding one of the puzzle pieces so that everyone would spend days trying to find the last egg and puzzle piece to complete the puzzle. We did that every Easter, until one year, we didn't. The tradition had been fun and meaningful, but it had run its course, and we decided to create some new traditions, more practical and meaningful for my growing family. We still remember fondly hunting for eggs and never finding the last piece, but new memories and new traditions have been made throughout the years. We have sweet memories of Easter's past and we have made room for new Easter experiences. We consider all a rich part of who we are.

It was fun going down memory lane as I prepared this month's pastor's column. The original column was written to explain the reasoning that went into the announced shift in the telling of the Passion narrative during worship, specifically the use of the cross and Via Dolorosa, a ritual that is out of sync with the Passion narrative which would not have such an experience until several days later, on Good Friday. As interim, it seemed a good interim task would be to help the church develop a Holy Week narrative more in line with the historic Christian narrative. Recognizing that the Palm Sunday ritual was beloved by many, I asked many questions, spent a fair amount of time in prayer, before consulting with the Deacons and deciding to keep all the key elements in place, but in a more historically accurate sequence. The change was announced and there was a fair amount of outcry and disappointment. Several members wrote articulate letters of protest to key church leaders and myself asking to change it back. The Deacons voted to return to the original way of doing Palm Sunday and reconsider change at some later date. If, in my work as interim, I was operating on a win/lose mentality, I would consider the unwillingness to change this ritual as a loss. I could have been frustrated by a church "stuck in its ways and unwilling to change. I could have picked up my marbles and gone home mad. Instead, I used this experience as an opportunity to learn more about the church, how it understands Congregational process and how it expects to make decisions. I learned more about the need for better transparency and mutual trust between senior leaders and myself. I learned to listen for unspoken voices. I learned that sometimes the right thing to do, isn't always the right thing to do. While I was hoping to teach all of you about more historic accuracy, you taught me some fine nuances of living together in community in a historic traditional church. No winners and losers here in the saga of the Via Dolorosa. With honest, thoughtful, respectful communication we all win.

I am very much looking forward to walking through Holy Week with all of you. As you will see looking at our Holy Week Schedule of Events, Holy Week at First Church is filled with traditions and opportunities to worship. If you review the schedule, you will see that many beloved traditions will take place exactly as you expect them to. A few traditions, like Maundy Thursday come with a twist. I am hoping you will receive this Holy Week as an opportunity to think about why we do what we do. Like the Easter Egg Puzzle tradition, the way we do Holy Week this year may not last forever. But if God is still speaking, as we so fondly say in the UCC, how will we deepen our faith as the Resurrection speaks into our lives once more? Joyful resurrection, all! ~Pastor Meredith



A Message from the Moderators

“Change does not necessarily assure progress, but progress implacably requires change.”
- Henry Steele Commager

The subject of change has been a frequent theme of our Spire messages, and for very good reason. For the past three years, church leaders have had to concentrate their efforts on navigating a unique period in our history to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and the severe responses needed to contain it. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to everyone involved for getting us through to this point.

But this difficult environment is, in large measure, behind us. We have entered a period of renewed optimism and courage to meet the challenges that almost all religious organizations face. Our interim minister is leading us in examining every area of our church organization, and sharpening our vision of changes that most certainly are necessary if we are to meet those challenges and grow our faith community, change our financial trajectory, and meet the promises set forth in our recently written vision and mission statements.

Change is difficult is a popular axiom, and is so because it is a simple truth. It is so much easier to stick with the familiar and avoid the hard work of reflecting on how our present course of action is no longer sufficient to meet the challenges that face us. Already we have all seen how boards and committees have strived to begin the process of revitalizing our physical plant and organizational structure. We have also seen how these changes have already had such a positive, uplifting influence in so many areas. The renovated Congregational Hall, and the updating of our sanctuary are just two of the physical changes that give us all a sense of positivity and cheerfulness that we are beginning on the right course toward a brighter future for our church. And beyond the physical changes, there is energy and enthusiasm in the spirit that surrounds worship, celebration with music, the children, and the launch of our Open and Affirming exploration.

But we are writing to tell you that there is more to come. Some wonderful, fresh ideas have been proposed and are in the process of refinement. There is a renewed sense of confidence that change is to be welcomed because we are capable of managing it to our advantage.

As always, the secret to success is to have every member involved in the change process. Our future as a church depends on every member's contribution, and the modifications to our church organizational structure that are contemplated are designed to do just that.

So please stay tuned. As we have said, this is an exciting time in the history of the First Congregational Church in Wallingford. We conclude this message with this quote:

"Change is the law of life. And those that look only to the past and present are certain to miss the future."

- John F. Kennedy

Peace to all,

Steve and Lori





Holy Week at First Church!

Palm Crosses, French Toast, and Fellowship An Annual Tradition

April 1 – 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.***

(Please be sure to wear sneakers if taking the tour!)

Palm Sunday – April 2

8:00am – Communion service

10:00am Worship and Communion

We will journey with Jesus into Jerusalem.

The Choir and Congregation will sing *The Palms*. Witness the beloved ritual of the cross entering the sanctuary to moving Via Dolorosa.

Maundy Thursday – April 6 – 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 – April 7

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 – April 8

And Easter Vigil at Ashlar Village in Auditorium A&B at **2:00pm**.

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

The Joy of Easter Sunday – April 9

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!

Deacon Ministry



A New Opportunity open to ALL from the Diaconate:

The Diaconate, along with support from prior members of the Stephen Ministry team and our Moderators, is forming a Congregational Care/Support Team.

The Team will reach out to those individuals who would benefit from personal visitation during times of confinement, loneliness, and life issues where a listening ear could be of benefit.

If this is something that you might find yourself being called to do, Please contact your Senior Deacons (Holly Francke/Greg Whitehouse), Cliff Castellano, or your Moderators. Informative training sessions will be scheduled on March 11th from 9:00 – 2:00pm.

If you are an individual interested in receiving a visitation, please contact the church office at (203) 265-1691.



A Message from the Flower Committee



The **2023 Altar Flower** sign up calendar can be found in the Narthex. Upcoming dates that need sponsors include:

April 30

May 7

May 21

June 4

June 11

June 25

If you are interested in sponsoring flowers for any of these dates and cannot make it into church to sign up, please call the church office or email Lori at lorifolkbarron@gmail.com. Direct donations to the Flower Fund are also appreciated to allow us to place flowers on the altar on those weeks when we do not have sponsors and for special occasions. In particular this month, any donations to offset the costs of palm plants for Palm Sunday would be much appreciated. Thank you!

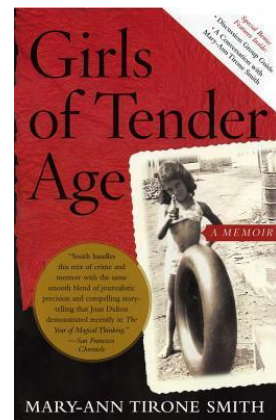


BOOK CLUB



Our April book is “Girls of Tender Age” by Mary-Ann Tirone Smith .

A meeting is scheduled for April 25th
at 6:30 in the Guild Room. Please join us!
We have lots of fun and great discussions.



*Prayer Shawl
Ministry*



The Prayer Shawl ministry creates beautiful comforting shawls, lap robes, and blankets for you to give to your loved ones in need. We also create the Baptismal blankets that are given to each child baptized in our church.

Each shawl and blanket are blessed in our prayer circle. We are blessed with the opportunity to share our love and concern for others through something tangible.

We meet the third Monday of most months. If you would like to join us, please let us know. If you would like to make shawls or baptismal blankets but cannot come to meetings, let us know that as well and we will provide patterns and support.

Please ask one of the deacons or Kathy Janis for a shawl. You may call or text Kathy Janis at 203-376-1173 or kathrynmjanis@gmail.com with any questions or requests.



Are you willing to serve?

Sign Up Today!



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



From The Minister of Music

Music plays a large role historically in the Lenten and Easter Liturgical year. From the chants of the 10th century through the chorales of the Protestant Reformation, through centuries of music-making in all our Christian denominations, the ritual and story of Holy Week has been musically expressed by the creativity of countless men and women all over the globe. The emotion of the music of whatever type can evoke in us feelings that touch us in no other way. As we journey through this last part of Lent and Holy Week itself, you might notice what music, if any, speaks to you.

Sunday, March 26, 2023 at the 10:00 a.m. service the choir will sing excerpts from Pepper Choplin's vocal work, **Once Upon a Tree**. Choplin gives us a look at the conditions in the city of Jerusalem and what it was like in the upper room and the Garden of Gethsemane. You might note that in this latter piece, a musical device is used when Jesus can speak and at the same time you can get people's reactions. Unfortunately, we are unable to do the entire work and story and will have to leave the rest to your imagination and historical knowledge.

Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023:

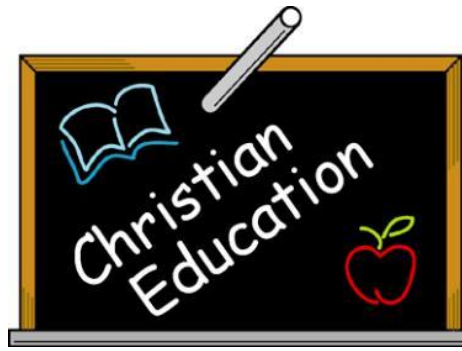
We will sing "**The Palms**" by Jean Faure. A children's choir will sing as well as the traditional "pick up". Please be ready to rehearse either on the pulpit side of the balcony or in the seats below. Music will be provided. Kathy Wallace will be directing. The Palms will be sung very early in the service so the children may go to Sunday School. It is a communion Sunday.

Good Friday service: April 7, 2023, at 12 noon in the sanctuary.

Come and walk the Via Dolorosa to the cross. Hear "Voices from the Crowd" as they speak about what it was like being in Jerusalem that Holy Week. You will hear some poignant songs sung like "On the Willows" from Godspell, "Were You There", "Ten Thousand Angels Cried" and other songs that were written to acknowledge Good Friday.

Children will be rehearsing "The Palms" after church on March 19 and March 26 as well as about 9:30 a.m. on Saturday April 1 in conjunction with the Palm Cross making.

Easter Sunday: April 9, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. worship. We will close the service with the singing of the "Hallelujah Chorus" by G. F. Handel. Kathy Wallace will be directing. Music will be provided. Come to the front of the sanctuary during the last hymn or sing from your seat. We welcome all to sing at this joyous moment.



The Youth Group and Sunday School have continued to have a great year and look forward to a fun Lenten season! The Sunday School has started talking about Jesus and His teachings and are excited to start to learn about Lent and eventually Holy Week. The students also helped host a February coffee hour along with Christian Education and passed out kindness hearts that they made during Sunday School. Christian Education also just hosted the Shrove Tuesday Pancake dinner and are excited that the Pancake Flipping Trophy is once again staying with the Sunday School!

The Youth Group met three times in February which included their lock-in and grinder making! The youth bonded over a theme of teamwork and participated in many activities that focused on working together! Below are pictures from the lock-in.

The next morning, they were up bright and early to make grinders to hand out after church! Thank you to the resource adults that helped and everyone who supported the grinder making fundraiser! We look forward to more meetings in the spring and continue to build on the teamwork message!

If you have questions about Sunday School or Youth Group, feel free to email me at kaylaperkowski@gmail.com





Open and Affirming

Love is Love

Open and Affirming (ONA), is a designation for United Church of Christ congregations that publicly affirm LGBTQ+ people and welcome them into their ministry.

In the process of developing our church's current vision and mission statement, it became clear we deeply value inclusivity and hope to be a place where all feel welcome. This led to the decision to work toward becoming an ONA church, and a committee has been formed to guide us through the process. The committee members are Pam Walker, Sandy McKenna, Cathy Knight, Steve Knight, Erica Haddad, Jeanette Gross, and Kathy Filkins.

The Open and Affirming process will provide opportunities for discussion on how we can help our church be welcoming and inclusive for all. We strongly encourage everyone to participate, and invite open, respectful conversation on the topics being discussed. Please contact a member of the ONA committee if you have questions on the process or what it means to be an ONA church.

You may ask why we need to go through this process when we have always considered ourselves a welcoming congregation.

Many churches denounce LGBTQ+ people, and they can't assume any church will be a safe and welcoming space for them and their families. Publicly stating we are an ONA church will send a clear message that we feel we are all God's children and should be treated with equal respect and dignity.

We invite you all to open your hearts to this process and keep in mind our church's vision statement, which says:

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.

“Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

*****Donations will be collected after service or can be dropped off at the office *****



The Family Life Board of First Congregational Church presents:

Chili Cook-off and Square Dance night!

Sunday, April 23, 2023

4:00 – 7:00 p.m.

First Congregational Church Hall

Yee HAW! Cooks, Tasters & Dancers wanted!

No entry fee for chili makers – Prizes for 1st., 2nd. & 3rd. place chili!

Sign up at church or email Heidi Bonassar at bonassar@sbcglobal.net by April 16

Professional Square Dance caller Will Larson will be helping us learn dances!

NO experience necessary – come, kick up those heels!

Free will offering for a fun family night!

Fun for all ages!





CONSIDERATION

*Consideration was the star word I received for this new year of 2023! How appropriate for someone like me who has a hard time with change. Maybe you do, too. Our upcoming rummage sale would be a great opportunity for all of us to give some **CONSIDERATION** for helping our neighbors, for CONSIDERING helping our church gain some income, and to **CONSIDER** expanding our own fellowship and friendship with our church family members!*



DATES TO PUT ON YOUR CALENDAR

1. *Sunday, April 16 - Can start to drop off items for sale*
2. *Sunday, April 30 - Set up tables in Congregational Hall at 11:30 a.m.*
3. *Monday, May 1st through Thursday, May 4th - sorting donated items from 9:00 a.m. to noon and then 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.*
4. **RUMMAGE SALE DATES: Thursday through Saturday, MAY 4-6, 2023.**
5. *Saturday, May 6th at 12:00 noon - breaking down the sale.*

THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. **HOURS of Sale:** *Thursday, May 4 - 4:00-7:00 p.m.
Friday, May 5 - 4:00-7:00 p.m.
Saturday, May 6 - 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon*
2. *Items accepted include gently used clothing for ALL ages, linens, shoes, coats, pocketbooks, toys, and small household items.*

PLEASE - NO FURNITURE CAN BE ACCEPTED!

3. *If you have any questions or are excited to volunteer your time contact:
Bernie Annunziata - 203-415-9809*



Family
Life Board

The Family Life board has been busy hosting and planning activities for First Church. In January, we co-hosted a Family Game Night with the Youth Groups. In February, Sarah Mather hosted a group of gals for Bunco night. Both events were well attended, and we had a lot of fun. We have a couple of great events coming up.



On April 1, we will host an Easter Egg Hunt after the Palm Cross Breakfast and cross making. It is open to all kids in 2nd grade and younger.



On April 23, Family Life is hosting a Chili Cook off and Square Dance. Please sign up in Congregational Hall after the 10:00 am services either to enter your chili or do some dancing. We will have a professional square dance caller so let's kick up our heels!



We are planning more events so stay tuned!



EASTER FLOWER MEMORIALS & TRIBUTES

During Lent, you will have the opportunity to purchase flowers to honor and remember loved ones and to 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 **April 2**.

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

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: _____



EASTER EGG HUNT

Please join us after breakfast
and palm cross making

•Open to kids in 2nd grade or younger •

Date: Saturday, April 1

Time: 9:00AM

**Please Meet in
Congregational Hall**

Sponsored by Family Life Board

COMMUNITY AND WORLD SERVICE



The Community & World Service Committee has used mission money once a month the past few months to buy an evening meal for 50 homeless people living at a hotel in Middletown.

The Wallingford Shelter had to close due to Covid and the people staying there were moved to the hotel where they can be in separate bedrooms. The government is paying for their stay. We sent \$500 to World Central Kitchen to help pay for food for the earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria and people leaving Ukraine.

We also gave \$500 to the Chrysalis shelter for women to help with expenses and \$3,000 toward the cost of the church's youth mission trip this year.





Love Is Love

**Sunday, May 7th, following services
In Congregational Hall
Presented by the Open and Affirming Committee**

Join us for lunch and conversation as we welcome our guest speakers. We hope to raise awareness of the challenges members of the LGBTQ+ community face in a society that is not yet fully accepting. This will be a platform for our guests to share their stories of acceptance and difficulties. This is also an opportunity for our church community to hear from these individuals on what change is needed and begin to discern how we can walk by their side in these efforts.

Please sign up to attend during coffee hour at the ONA table, by emailing Kathy Filkins at kathyfbooks@gmail.com, or by calling the church office at 203-265-1691.



The Board of Community and World Service is sponsoring a donation drive to benefit **Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis, Inc.***, which serves victims and survivors of domestic violence.



Items needed:

NEW Twin-sized Sheets, Blankets, Comforters, Pillows



Cash donations or gift cards to department stores to help purchase these items will be gratefully accepted as well!

As always, your donations are truly appreciated!

Questions? Contact Debby Voelker at dvbrae@gmail.com or 203-265-9586

*Chrysalis provides crisis intervention, support services, self-sufficiency programs, safety planning, and court-based and systems advocacy to victims and survivors of domestic violence and their children through community-based and housing programs. Services include a 60-day emergency SafeHouse, a 24-month transitional living program and homelessness prevention advocacy and service linkages. Chrysalis provides prevention education and tailored parent services to interrupt the cycle of violence.



Christian Renewal Weekend

May 19-21 for Men

June 2-4 for Women

Could you use a spiritual boost? A Christian Renewal Weekend has been created to do just that. These Weekends have been crafted to help you draw closer to Jesus and feel inspired and empowered to come back to this church with renewed energy and enthusiasm to serve our Lord.

We are Footsteps in the Sand, a community of Christians from a number of churches in this area that seeks to bring people closer to Christ. Our mission is to develop people for the local church and encourage Christian action. This has been made all the more urgent as churches try to recover from three years of the pandemic.

Our non-denominational community has been holding retreats for over 40 years and more than 4,000 people in this area have attended, including people from First Congregational Church of Wallingford.

Footsteps Weekends are conducted by a team of 21 volunteers including two clergy. After attending a Weekend, people come back feeling renewed and energized to work with their pastor in serving their church.

If you would like to know more contact Bob or Lorraine Westervelt or go to our website Footsteps-Sand.org.



First Congregational Church of
Wallingford

23 South Main St
Wallingford, CT 06492

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Email the church office at :
officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org

The Spire

