



**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. - 9:30am – 1:00pm

Email: officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org (office)

Website: www.firstchurchwallingford.org

We, the faith community of the First Congregational Church of Wallingford, United Church of Christ, aspire to live by the wisdom of Christ's teachings.

At the heart of our vision and mission is a commitment to inclusivity and acceptance.

We welcome everyone regardless of age; race; culture; sexual orientation; gender identity and expression; family configuration; economic circumstance; mental, physical, developmental, and emotional ability; and religious tradition.

Jesus Christ, in speaking to his disciples said this: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13: 34).

As current disciples of Jesus, we commit to maintain a nurturing environment where all are loved, valued, and inspired to meaningful involvement in the life of the church.

Jesus' teachings of love and compassion call us to uplift each individual and celebrate our shared humanity, both within the sanctuary of this church and throughout the community in which we live and serve.

Diversity in our world is a gift from God which we celebrate.

Guided by our Lord's wisdom, we offer an authentic and loving welcome to all who seek a relationship with God, and we proclaim ourselves an Open and Affirming church.



OPEN AND AFFIRMING COVENANT



Message from the Minister

I guess the first thing to say is “hello.”

Hello!!

My name is Jeff, and I’m your new Minister.

That probably was the one thing you all knew about me already, and if you’ve been here since September, you probably also know a little bit of my biography, too. I am so glad that you have invited me to

become part of your family, and I anticipate with gladness the joy of getting to know all you in the days ahead.

January is a great time for new things.

I grew up in Michigan, and the approach of January always felt exciting to me. Autumn, nature’s Advent, represented a quickening of sorts as vacations wrapped up and school started again. The falling leaves marked time with the falling temperatures as we anticipated the approach of Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year’s Day. My mother taught me to cook in those Autumns of my youth, and as the years passed I derived great joy as I was invited to take a larger role in the kitchen to help with the holiday meals (next November, I’ll make you my scratch pumpkin pies!).

I was also fortunate enough to grow up in a public school district that prioritized outdoor education, so the fall also included away camp and music camp and school farm visits. These are all happy memories of community and togetherness.

As the snow eventually came, and the holidays arrived and passed, we would, finally, arrive at January. Our hymnody remembers it as “The Bleak Midwinter,” but I remember it with joy – not so much because of the snow, but because of the anticipation of the new beginning that January represented. A new year loomed large, and the possibilities were endless. Spring was just around the corner!

As I write this, that’s how I feel today. I have just wrapped-up four months of joyous ministry at the First Church of Christ in Saybrook which included a wonder-filled Advent and Christmas Season. And now, as my beloved January again arrives, that old excitement of new beginnings is in the air. The possibilities are endless!!

My first few weeks among you will no doubt be a bit frenetic as I get to know you and acclimate myself to the rhythms of our church. There’s a long checklist of things that a new minister must do, and, with your help and support, I will be working diligently through that. I want to meet all of you in the weeks and months ahead, and we’ll certainly run into one another around the church as we all pursue the work the God has called us to do here.

In Paul’s letter to the Christians in Philippi, he writes:

“Beloved(s), I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

As I join you for these last days of your 350th Anniversary Celebration, let us press on and respond to God’s call. To that end, I pledge to you my love and support as we walk together in service.

Blessings for the New Year, friends! Jeff



Message from Minister of Music

Happy New Year to everyone! We are now embarking on a new chapter of our church history. We welcome The Reverend Jeffrey Birch to the pulpit on January 4, 2026. I am excited to be entering this new working relationship. I hope that together, Pastor Jeff and I can involve you in some new interesting endeavors in worship experiences. We will be meeting together and planning ahead.

I wish to thank all of you who participated in the music programs this past year.



Above:
Multigenerational
Boomwackers

Left: Choral Sermon
The Ballad of
Bethlehem
by Pepper Choplin

I do have sad news that the organ is in need of a major repair. I request, in the meantime, that you keep all the doors the chapel, chancel and sanctuary open to allow for air circulation. The pipes which you cannot see need to have the air always circulating through them. The flow of air help keeps the organ in tune. The street-side pipes have been going flat because the doors have been shut. I thank you all for becoming stewards of this detail. I will give you more information about what will need to be done concerning the organ in the future. We do have an organ maintenance fund, but it will need to grow quite a bit to help this project.

New ideas are bubbling up. I will keep you all informed as they materialize. In the meantime, we have many ways of making music. I hope you will participate.

Happy New Year,
Soli Deo Gloria, Jeanette

A Message from the Moderators

The year 2026 is knocking on our door! As we say farewell to our year of celebrating First Congregational's 350th anniversary, there is much to anticipate as we move forward. As each new year arrives, we have grown to anticipate early January when we learn what our star gift word is for the coming year. While it remains to be seen what word the congregation as a whole will draw, there is one word that is echoing through our minds as we think about the year ahead....WELCOME!



The scriptures have much to say about offering Welcome and the related idea of Hospitality. For example, the Bible teaches us the following:

Hebrews 13:2 – Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

Matthew 25:35 – For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.

Revelation 3:20 – Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.

Romans 15:5-7 – May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Welcome that may be first and foremost on our minds is the arrival of Rev. Jeff Birch as our new settled minister. We look forward to getting to know Jeff, learning from him, and offering welcome and support as he comes to lead our congregation. Let us do all we can to uplift him and this congregation as we begin this new journey together.

Although Rev. Jeff's arrival may be the most immediate welcome that comes to mind, there are so many others to consider as we continue the work of God in this congregation:

- welcoming strangers who seek a congregation committed to Christ's teachings & love;
- welcoming those who are in need of care, inclusion, and connection;
- welcoming each other as we begin a new era in the life of First Congregational Church;
- welcoming ideas that help us serve our larger community, our Vision & Mission, and our call to serve as disciples of Christ;
- and welcoming hope in a world that is divided, conflicted, and weary.

We can be the agents of welcome in all these many ways. Join us, rejoin us, or get to know us as First Congregational Church extends the hand of welcome and the love inherent in that hospitality. Let us be moved by the Holy Spirit to reflect God's precious welcome with our words, our actions, and our relationships to one another.

Welcome 2026!

With the grace and peace of Christ,

Lori Folk-Barron & Greg Whitehouse, Co-Moderators



January 4, 2026 - John 1:1-18

"The Word, The Son, and The Light"

Communion (my first Sunday with you)

January 11, 2026 - Matthew 3:3-17

"The Fourth Epiphany"

Baptism of Jesus, Star Gifts

January 18, 2026 - Amos 5:18-24

"Not Long"

Martin Luther King Day

January 25, 2026 - Matthew 4:12-23

"Drop Your Nets!"

**Communicating with
Pastor Jeff...**

Office 203-265-1691
Mobile 860-204-2130
pastorjeff@firstchurchwlfld.org

Office hours by appointment



Welcome Pastor Jeff!!

"For the Lord rejoices to see the work begin!" Zechariah 4:10

Sunday
January 4, 2026
will be
Pastor Jeff Birch's
First Worship Service
at our beloved
First Congregational Church of
Wallingford.



"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" Isaiah 43:19

PLEASE JOIN US
for the service and a time of celebration
following the service.



"With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts." Eleanor Roosevelt

"It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life for me, and I'm feeling good!" Nina Simone



Grace, Peace and Blessings,

The Search and Call Team, Transition Team & Pastoral Support Team 😊



Please Join Us for a
Night of Dinner,
Dancing and a Cash
Bar to Cap Off our
350th Anniversary
Year

First Church Star Ball

Saturday, January 10,
2026

6:30-10:30 PM

The Wallingford Elks
148 South Main Street,
Wlfd. CT



Tickets \$35.00 in Advance
\$40.00 at the door





Discover Beautiful Scotland!

Travel Presentation January 8, 6:00 PM

The First Congregational Church of Wallingford is sponsoring a 10-day trip to Scotland, September 14 – 23, 2026. Highlights of this Collette tour include Bagpipe demonstration; Whiskey tasting; Isle of Skye; Loch Ness; Orkney Islands (Skara Brae and Standing Stones of

Stenness); Dunrobin Castle; Sheepdog demonstration; Edinburgh Castle; Scottish Cooking demonstration and more! The tour also includes transportation to the airport, roundtrip airfare and hotel transfers.

This tour not only offers a fabulous travel opportunity, but it is also a fundraiser for our church! The First Congregational Church will receive a commission based on the number of travelers. A limited number of seats has been reserved, and to take advantage of the special reduced rate, registration must be made by March 15, 2026. Registration is on a first come, first served basis.

Join us in Congregational Hall on **Thursday, January 8, 6:00 p.m.**, for a travel presentation by a Collette representative outlining the details of this great tour. The trip is not limited to First Church members. Invite your friends!

Travel brochures are available in Congregational Hall. For additional information and/or to register, go online to: <https://gateway.gocollette.com/link/1393031>

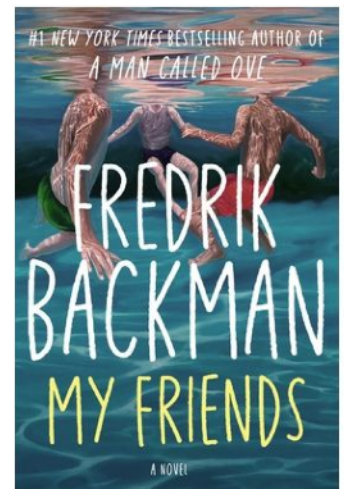
Book Club News

Happy New Year everyone!

Our Christmas gathering was a great time with goodies and good talk. None of us can remember if we've already read John Grisham's "Skipping Christmas" so we will read that for next Christmas.

For January we are reading the New York Times best seller "My Friends" by Frederick Bachman.

See you all at 6:30 on January 27 in the Guild Room.





Warm and Cozy Drive

Along with Scouting America Troop 5, our Mission and Outreach Team will be sponsoring a winter accessories drive on

Saturday, January 17

9-11 AM

First Congregational Church
23 S. Main Street-Wallingford

We will be collecting new cozy items in adult sizes, including socks, hats, scarves, gloves/mittens, umbrellas, and ponchos.

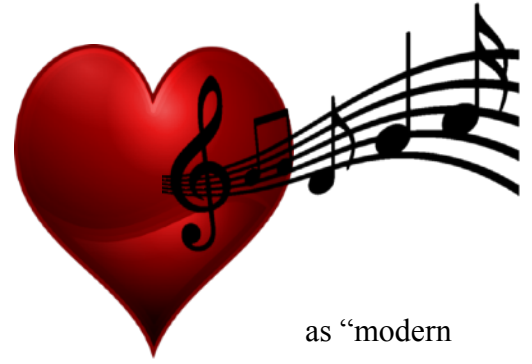
These will be donated to the Wallingford Emergency Shelter

If you have any questions or are interested in volunteering, please contact Erica Haddad at 203-494-9768 or ejhaddad5@gmail.com

SING FROM YOUR HEART

February 22nd during Coffee Hour

Experience a unique opportunity to enjoy fellowship and connection through music in a group singing session led by Art Allen. We will learn and sing together some contemporary Christian songs that have stood the test of time.



Borrowing from folk, rock and pop influences, think of these songs as “modern music” with Christian lyrics and themes. Several of the songs have been played by our Praise Band or performed by various soloists - 10,000 Reasons, Cornerstone, Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone), Open the Eyes of My Heart.

Accompaniment will be provided by custom digital instrumental tracks that feature real musicians playing real instruments. The arrangements provide a contemporary "sound" - acoustic and electric guitars, keyboards, bass, drums and percussion - that brings today's Christian Music to life.

Can't read music? No problem – we aren't going to use any! Haven't sung in a group in a while, or maybe never? Don't worry, these songs are very intuitive and do not require any special musical ability or skills. Singers of all ages and skill levels are welcome, especially "reluctant" singers or those who don't think they are "good enough." No prior experience is required! (If you're not into singing, just hang out at coffee hour and enjoy the music).

So, don't be shy - share the music that's within you. Don't hold back... Sing From Your Heart!

Questions? Want more info? Contact Art Allen arthur.t.allen@comcast.net



Thank you to **Warren Gatcomb** for his donation of the sanctuary Christmas tree once again this year! His generosity enhances our worship throughout Advent and the Christmas season.

Thank you to **Joe Geremia and Geremia Farms** for the donation of poinsettias, above and beyond those sponsored by the congregation. For many seasons, Joe has helped us to honor the memories of loved ones and beautify our sanctuary for the celebration of Christ's birth, and we are grateful.



Thank you

Words cannot express my gratitude for the beautiful farewell celebration we

shared on my final Sunday, December 21, 2025. It could not have been more perfect! It was such a joy to watch generations mixing and chatting over the Cocoa Bar and Cookies. Thanks to all who made cookies, made gallons of hot chocolate, ordered the beautiful cake, wrote heartfelt messages, sent cards and texts, gave very thoughtful gifts, dedicated beautiful flowers (which are still thriving), and offered hugs and kind words.

The gifts I received from the Congregation were so kind, thoughtful, and generous. The basket of crafts from the Christmas Fair will bring back fond memories of a fun part of the church's life and the people who created them. More theater has been a primary retirement goal and catching up on pleasure reading has been another goal. Associated with that is passing along the books as I read them so that others might enjoy them. Your gift from Amazon has inspired me to try Audio Books, something I have wanted to do for a long time but haven't had time to figure out. And your contribution to Starfish warms my heart. My work with the SIV family from Afghanistan continues to provide me with great challenges and great joy.

For a wonderful celebration and for being a part of my life for three years (and twenty-five days) thank you from the bottom of my heart! I wish you all God's grace as you move into your next exciting adventure!

Blessings and peace,
Pastor Meredith



Christmas Fair Thank You

*We, as a group, created a fabulous Christmas Fair! Thank you for your hard work, joy, commitment and purchases that enabled our success. The church family is grateful for everything **you** did to help make our fair happen. We made more than \$10,000 to support our church's mission. We are so grateful and celebrate the enormous number of people involved and their various roles. This event highlights our sense of community and how we sprout enthusiasm enabling the spreading of God's Love.*



Sunday, January 11 after church at the crafting tables we will **Debrief the Christmas Fair**. Everyone with a thought or idea is encouraged to join us.



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 Jeff 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?

You can contact the church office at (203)265-1691 to request a Prayer Shawl or special blanket.

First Congregational Church

350th Anniversary Gift Registry - UPDATE

The wonderfully celebratory 350th Anniversary Year is soon coming to a close. As you know, a 350th Anniversary Gift Registry has been part of this celebration. Our Administration Ministry identified a number of projects/needs to help FCC upgrade/update our facilities for future worship and fellowship. The list below has changed slightly due to newly identified needs and removal of others (thankfully) no longer needed. **THANK YOU to all who have already contributed to our registry!** Some of these fully funded gifts are already evident in our sanctuary and the church building. As the 350th year draws to a close, **we are making an end of the year appeal** to members and friends in the hopes that you will continue to prayerfully consider making a special 350th anniversary gift toward the gift registry.

An amazing **Matching Gift opportunity** remains through the close of our Anniversary celebration on January 10, 2026! An Angel Donor has offered a 20% match for every gift made towards the Registry. So, a \$1,000 gift adds \$200 in Matching Funds. The Matching Funds can be applied wherever there is a need on the gift registry. **Thank you to the Angel Donor for the matching funds already received!** The Angel Donor will offer this match up to a maximum donation on their part of \$60,000! This is an exciting opportunity for this congregation!

Our wish list items, estimated costs, and current funding status include:

Project	Cost	Funding Status
Chancel Carpet	\$6,700	Fully Funded! 😊
Flooring between Guild Room & Congregational. Hall	\$3,200	Fully Funded! 😊
Hearing Assist Devices (6)	\$930	Fully Funded! 😊
Kitchen Floor	\$6,650	Fully Funded! 😊
Music Room –4 Fluorescent Fixtures	\$400	Fully Funded! 😊
Office – Fluorescent Fixture	\$100	Fully Funded! 😊
Railing for Chancel Stairs	\$1,000	Fully Funded! 😊
Video Screens – Sanctuary	\$55,300	Fully Funded! 😊
Front Sign – Parade Grounds	\$6,000	Fully Funded! 😊
Hallway (Near Office) – Paint (\$65/Gal)	\$130	Funds Needed
Large Chairs (2) in Sanctuary - Reupholster	\$1,250	Funds Needed
Small Chairs (2) in Sanctuary - Reupholster	\$ 1,050	Funds Needed (\$525 received to date)
Library Paint (\$65/Gal)	\$130	Funds Needed (\$15 received to date)
Light Fixture Near Office	\$150	Funds Needed
Office – Paint (\$65/Gal)	\$130	Funds Needed
Pew Cushions***	\$35,000***	Funds Needed (\$4,000 received to date)
Sanctuary – Refinish Hardwood	\$24,000	Funds Needed
Sanctuary Insulation	\$40,000	Funds Needed
***Please note – additional bids are pending to refine estimate.		

Please use the form below and mail your gift payable to First Congregational Church (23 S. Main Street, Wallingford, CT 06492). Please include "350 Gift Registry" in the memo line. Gifts can also be made on-line at www.firstchurchwallingford.org or using the QR code below. Thank you for considering a registry gift!

Please specify: **Happy 350th Anniversary, First Congregational Church!**

_____ Use this gift of \$ _____ towards the following registry project(s): _____

_____ Use this gift of \$ _____ towards any project as needed.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number or Email Address: _____



MISSION MONEY AT WORK

As the scripture says: "Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." Hebrews 13: 1-2

Your Mission Funds Distribution Team was at work this month using your donated mission money to support organizations that are consistent with First Congregational's Vision and Mission. This month we donated to the following organizations:



Starfish is an organization assisting with Afghan refugee resettlement in CT. This donation was made in honor of Rev. Meredith Jeffers' interim ministry at First Congregational Church. She has been actively involved in this organization, and refugee issues are an important ministerial focus for her. We donated \$500 to Starfish.

Connecticut Mental Health Center Foundation is a private non-profit supporting organization for the Connecticut Mental Health Center. It sponsors programs and public education and administers charitable funds that help adults in mental health and addiction recovery thrive in our community. The CMHC Foundation helps individuals served by the [Connecticut Mental Health Center](#) and through the [Community Services Network](#) (CSN) for which CMHC is the lead agency. This month we donated \$500 to this organization.

Wallingford Animal Shelter maintains the animal shelter and cares for the animals temporarily housed there. We donated \$250 for care of the animals.

Daphne's Brave Heart – Honoring the life of Daphne Jean Filkins, Daphne's Brave Heart at Akron Children's Hospital aims to further efforts around research, advocacy and family support for congenital heart defects. We donated \$250 in Daphne's memory.



Covenant House provides housing and support services to youth facing homelessness. The organization helps young people transform their lives and put them on a path to

independence. Covenant House is open 24/7 in cities across North and Central America. Their strengths-based programs are designed to empower young people to rise and overcome adversity, today and in the future. We donated \$250 for this youth-based mission.

Generation Power CT (formerly known as Operation Fuel) – honors the legacy of Operation Fuel, which provided emergency fuel assistance, while embracing a new mission: to lead the way so current and future generations can thrive with secure access to heat, power, and water. Generation Power CT is evolving from crisis relief to sustainable solutions—empowering households, transforming systems, and lighting the path toward a more just and resilient Connecticut. We donated \$250 in support of this mission.

If you have suggestions for nonprofit organizations whose missions align with FCC's Vision & Mission and who may benefit from our financial support, please feel free to contact any of the following members of the Mission Funds Distribution Team: Joan Bushey, Lori Folk-Barron, Nancy Mueller, Jessica Pereira, or Kathy Wallace.



Wallingford Workcamp Team
Bringing A Community Together



Apply by clicking here to get a home repair!
Pray for residents to say yes to having repairs
done to their homes

Cosponsors: First Congregational Church
Wallingford
and Group Workcamps Home Repair

Wallingford Workcamp

**Free Home Repair for
Our Community**

June 28 – July 4, 2026

Help us find homeowners!

Donate Here!



Volunteer Here!



Helping Hands Deliver Meals

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 provide 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.



A Message from the Flower Team



Thank you to all who sponsored Christmas poinsettia that enhanced our Christmas worship!

The **2026 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.

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



Congregational Care

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 Jeff at 860-204-2130 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



We extend our sympathy to the family and friends of Harold (Hal) Ginter, who passed away November 22, 2025. Funeral and Graveside Services were held December 4 in North Haven. A Service celebrating Hal's life will be held at the church this spring.

We extend our sympathy to the family and friends of Jason Miller, who passed away tragically in car accident on December 4, 2025. A Service Celebrating Jason's Life was held December 12, and his

committal was December 13 in Wallingford.

We extend our sympathy to the family and friends of Alicia Morse, long time Church Historian, who passed away December 8, 2025. A Service Celebrating Alicia's Life will be held at the church January 10, 2026, at 10 am.
