



**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](mailto:officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org) (office)**

**Website: [www.firstchurchwallingford.org](http://www.firstchurchwallingford.org)**



Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ~

*Philippians 4:8*

I love being a minister! I love almost everything about it. Preaching. Teaching. Pastoral Care. Creative and committed meetings. Listening to the choir. Mission trips. Officiating during life transitions. Promoting good stewardship of resources. Bible study. Praying for others. Playing with the children. Attending fun intergenerational activities. I love it all! Sometimes I love it too much. It is easy to flit happily from opportunity to opportunity being the church, sometimes working 60 or more hours a week to do it all.

Then came Epiphany. My Star Gift this year is Focus. When I first looked at my Star Gift, I groaned. Focus is not the Star Gift I had hoped for entering a new ministry, but it is the one God gave me, and it is one I believe may help me to be more effective as your Interim Minister. To focus on being focused will require I work hard to determine how to combine the expectations of two full time pastors into one 40 - 45 hour work week. What are essential pastoral tasks and what tasks might the laity value and carry out? My Star Gift calls me to establish priorities and a timeline in which to accomplish them. My Star Gift calls me to focus on the church's Mission and Vision Statements and to work cooperatively with the Vision and Mission Implementation Team to accomplish their task. My Star Gift means I need to focus on God's values and use those values to guide my work, choices and leadership.

In February, I presented Council with a list of eight foci upon which my work will be focused in the next 6-9 months as the church prepares to begin the work of starting a search for a new settled pastor. The eight Foci are 1) Support The Open and Affirming Initiative Process 2) Establish Financial Viability 3) Create and Implement a Comprehensive Care Giving Ministry Structure 4) Support Vision and Mission Implementation Team Conversations and Initiatives Support 5) Assess Staffing Needs 6) Support Structure and/or Restructure of Current Committee and Governance Structure 7) Assess Viability and Sustainability of Offering 8, 10 and Ashlar Village Services 8) Help establish Search Team and Process for Settled Minister.

Each of these foci could be a Pastor's Column in itself. I would be glad to discuss any of them with anyone who is interested or send the fuller description presented to Council. I may be reached at church (203) 265-1691, by cell (914) 255-1690, or email [pastormeredith@firstchurchwlfld.org](mailto:pastormeredith@firstchurchwlfld.org)

Blessings and peace,

*Meredith*



### ***A Message from the Moderators***



*“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking: if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.”*

*Revelations 3:20 (NRSV)*

As we move from the season of Epiphany into the season of Lent while also being in the midst of an Interim Ministry, we continue our reflections on our star gift words for 2023. For all of us individually, our star gift words are intended to spark personal reflections on our spiritual journeys. These words are also highly relevant in our roles as church leaders and members, particularly during this interim period. Lori’s word this year is “listening,” and while we are all personally aware how crucial this action is for everyone during this transformative period in our church, it can nonetheless be a significant challenge for us all.

Since Star Gift Sunday, God has probably provided any number of examples of how important listening is in our day to day lives. Perhaps, just perhaps, there have been moments with our significant others, family, and friends when we have heard them but not really listened to what they said. Perhaps, just perhaps, there have been moments when we have heard something controversial in a meeting, and we just stopped listening. We know about the importance of listening, but it is a task that can be harder than it seems to perform genuinely.

Messages about the importance of listening can be found everywhere, from inspirational calendars to social media memes. We have received prompts to be fully present when with another person rather than allowing distractions of all kinds to divert our attention from really listening to the other. We have been reminded that listening, truly listening to another human being, is an act of love and kindness. We have been reminded that when we interact with others and focus on our responses and reactions rather than listening for understanding, we lose an opportunity for connection, for empathy, for growth, for love, and for human kindness.

And right here in our church, during this important time of transition from the light of Epiphany to the reflection and repentance of Lent, we are reminded of how we must open our hearts to listening to the small and large ways that God and the Holy Spirit may be speaking to us about living into our Vision & Mission in our church family.

As we move forward in worship, in fellowship, in meetings, and in our initiatives for the future of this church, we urge everyone to consider where and how we can all become better listeners in the eyes of God and one another. As we sit in the sanctuary and worship together, let's open our hearts to the messages being delivered and seek to understand the intention of the message and the impact it can have on our lives. As we journey through the Open and Affirming process, let's open our hearts to listen with love and understanding to the perspectives, stories, and pains that others have experienced. As we prepare for the future in meetings and planning sessions, let us listen for messages that the Holy Spirit may be delivering in the ideas and opinions of others and discover the creativity and innovation it may spawn. And, in our private reflections, in our moments of grace, listen to what God is trying to tell us about our personal mission, our personal role in this faith community, and the service God needs from each one of us.

Peace to all,

Steve and Lori



**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 11<sup>th</sup> 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:

**March 26**  
**April 16**  
**April 23**  
**April 30**

**May 7**  
**May 21**  
**May 28**  
**June 4**



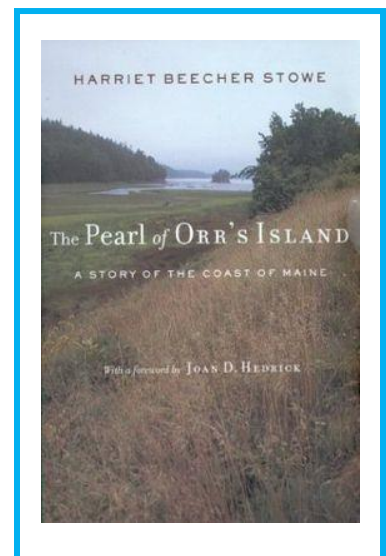
If you are interested in sponsoring flowers for any of these dates and cannot make it into church to sign up, please call the church office or email Lori at [lorifolkbarron@gmail.com](mailto:lorifolkbarron@gmail.com). Direct donations to the Flower Fund are also appreciated to allow us to place flowers on the altar on those weeks when we do not have sponsors and for special occasions. Thank you!



## ***BOOK CLUB NEWS***

Our March book is “Pearl of Orr’s Island” by Harriet Beecher Stowe. A copy is available in the church office.

Meeting is March 28 at 6:30 in the Guild Room. Please join us to discuss this very popular and heart- warming story.







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](mailto:kathrynmjanis@gmail.com) with any questions or requests.



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***



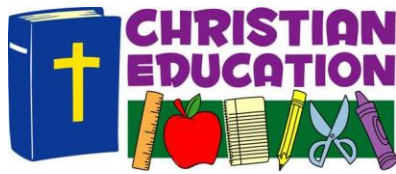
The liturgical season of Lent has arrived. We begin our journey to Easter. Musically we will be focusing on pieces that reflect this walk like Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley as well as some more contemporary pieces.

During the six weeks of Lent musically we will be preparing for a choral sermon on Lent 5 (March 26) which will set the scene for Holy Week which begins with Palm Sunday on April 2. We invite you to join us in these preparations in the following ways.

1. **CHILDREN'S CHOIR** (grades 4-8) FOR PALM SUNDAY (April 2) AND EASTER (April 9). Meeting time: Thursdays March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 from 4:30-5:15 pm in the Music Room.
2. **GOOD FRIDAY** (April 7) 12 noon service. The youth groups as well as others are preparing for this walk to the cross.
3. **LENT 5** The Chancel Choir is preparing a 20 minute adaptation of Pepper Choplin's work "Once upon a Tree." Join us in rehearsals on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m.
4. **PALM SUNDAY** (April 2) Join us in the "flash" choir either in the balcony on the pulpit side or down in front on the pulpit side to sing the opening verse of "The Palms." Music will be provided.
5. **EASTER SUNDAY** (April 9). Join us in singing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" at the end of the service. Music will be provided.

Contact Jeanette Gross at 860-803-8745 (text or phone) or email [gross7jeanette1@gmail.com](mailto:gross7jeanette1@gmail.com) with questions or problems.





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](mailto:kaylaperkowski@gmail.com)



## Open and Affirming

On Sunday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion section of the church's library was introduced to the congregation. Books for all ages are available to borrow each Sunday in Congregational Hall. Please stop by, take a look at the titles and select a book to help raise awareness of the issues faced by the LGBTQ, and other marginalized communities.

Buttons are available for anyone that would like to show their support for the ONA process, and we welcome you to wear them with pride (pun intended).

The ONA committee is creating a schedule of programs to facilitate discussion on the ONA process and how you can help make our church welcoming and inclusive for all. Watch for announcements on upcoming events.

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

*(Romans 15:7)*



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 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>. & 3<sup>rd</sup>. place chili!**

**Sign up at church or email Heidi Bonassar at [bonassar@sbcglobal.net](mailto: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!**





The First Congregational Church  
23 S. Main Street- Wallingford

Community and World Services will be sponsoring the annual Easter Baskets for The Department of Children & Families.

Please pick up a basket to fill on Sunday, March 5.  
They will be in Congregational Hall. We will be collecting  
the filled baskets or supplies to help fill the baskets on

**Saturday, March 18 from 9-11am.**

This will be a drive through or drop off event.

Please keep the card attached to the basket.

If you have any questions, please contact Karen Janus at 203-265-5882  
or [kjanus01@snet.net](mailto:kjanus01@snet.net)

# WELCOME **NEW MEMBERS**

## **New Member conversations and orientations are being planned!**

If you are contemplating membership in First Congregational Church, Wallingford, you are cordially and enthusiastically invited to attend a three-part series hosted by church leaders and members that will explore the history of the First Congregational Church and its connections to Congregationalism and the United Church of Christ, introduce the missions, activities and committees of the church, and review the responsibilities of church membership. Those interested in becoming members after this series will be formally welcomed during a worship service that celebrates the commitment between new members and the congregation.

If you missed our first session, you may still join us at our remaining two sessions on March 5th, and March 19<sup>th</sup> starting at 11:30 am.

Interested? Please contact Maureen in the church office (203-265-1691) [officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org](mailto:officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org) to add your name to the list.



## 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*

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### 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: \_\_\_\_\_



# BOARD OF TRUSTEES

UPDATE

Our lease agreement with Jerry Farrell is complete, signed and effective March 1, 2023. We leaned on the expertise of Church Members Mary Antonetti for her non-profit accounting knowledge and Vinny Cervoni for his legal representation at a nice discounted "church rate" and we thank them both so very much! We were also sure to have our insurance agent prepare exactly what we needed from Jerry for insurance coverage and documentation.

During February, Jerry is preparing the spaces for his offices and has paid us 50% of his monthly rental fee to have access to the spaces early. All of our church belongings were moved out of the Meeting House with the help of so many wonderful volunteers and we are very thankful to the MANY hands. Those belongings are starting to help upgrade our other spaces. Classrooms are benefitting from the Wallace Education Center with new tables and chairs and soon we may add the TVs and DVD/VCRs that we moved over.

The Guild Room is now home to the Pethybridge Meeting Space with their beautiful, donated conference room table and chairs along with artwork and an antique trunk. The big table that was in the Guild Room has moved to the Barnes Community Center and it is perfect since the Barnes family also donated that table to us. The Chapman Family living room area is now gracing the Senior Minister's Office and the Library. Both spaces are beautiful and welcoming. We have a few more things to place and we're thankful for everyone's ideas as we continue to appreciate and honor all who helped us secure and beautify the Meeting House.

Our plumbing situation is almost completely behind us! Thanks to Michael Savenelli's focus and dedication to bringing in the right contractors, the excavation and pipe repair between the nursery and the bathrooms was completed smoothly and successfully. As a result, all that should flow through the pipes and out of the building is once again moving smoothly. Toilets are being upgraded now and by the end of the month we will be in great shape.

We continue our work renting our spaces to provide funds for repairs, renovations, and our budget. It's going really well. While we benefit from rental income, our community benefits from being able to use our beautiful spaces at reasonable rates. There was a beautiful Moroccan event for a nice group of women last month and they had such a great time they may rent again in March and possibly each month. We have a table of prices prepared that is working well so far and we will continue to adjust our rates.





## ***Interim Pastoral Relations Committee---Who-What- Why***

As our congregation travels through this time of interim ministry, the church council has appointed an Interim Pastoral Relations Committee (IPRC). Its members are John Perkowski, Kathy Filkins, Heidi Bonassar, Jesse DePonte, and Greg Whitehouse. The committee recently attended a UCC training session to better understand their function and responsibilities.

The goal of the IPRC. is to promote a faithful, shared ministry between the pastor and the congregation. Both the IPRC and the Interim Pastor have responsibilities to fulfil to achieve this goal.

To promote a successful relationship with the IPRC, the Interim Pastor should:

- Be receptive to communication from the committee, demonstrate a willingness to listen and an openness to improvement and ideas.
- Cooperate with the committee to understand identified concerns and make genuine attempts at change when change is recommended.
- Communicate openly to provide a candid assessment of church life, clear articulation of the pastor's vision for ministry, and information about the needs and issues of the congregation.

To effectively support the Interim Pastor, the IPRC should:

- Provide the pastor with honest feedback, affirmations of strengths, constructive criticisms, and thoughtful and candid observations.
- Support the pastor's well-being and encourage respect and boundaries for the pastor's personal life.
- Promote communication with the congregation which includes education about the pastor's role and scope of work and feedback from and to the congregation.

As we go through this time of change and discernment, it is important that everybody's thoughts and opinions be heard. We are all on this journey together as we strive to put our Vision and Mission statements to work in the world around us and to prepare our congregation for the hiring of a settled Pastor. With the goal of making sure that thoughts and opinions are heard and effectively communicated, we encourage you to share your comments or discuss any issues or concerns you might have directly with Pastor Meredith.

This committee is here to support both the congregation and the interim pastor. We understand communicating directly with the pastor may seem like a daunting task, so in next month's Spire, we will share suggestions on how to effectively communicate with Pastor Meredith regarding any issues or concerns you may have.

First Congregational Church of  
Wallingford

23 South Main St  
Wallingford, CT 06492

*The Spire is published  
monthly except summer by  
The First Congregational  
Church of Wallingford, CT.  
The deadline for the Spire  
articles is the 15<sup>th</sup> of each  
month, September through  
June.*

*Email the church office at :*  
[officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org](mailto:officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org)



***The Spire***