



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



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 circumstances; mental, physical, development, 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.

Adopted June 9, 2024

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A Message From the Interim Minister

There was a song I learned in Sunday School many years ago. Perhaps you did, too. The song is “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian.” It’s a song thought to have originated in the 1750s in Virginia with African American enslaved persons. The verses are simple. “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart, in my heart. Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.” Subsequent verses move us through in similar form. Lord, I want to be more loving. Lord, I want to be more holy. Lord, I want to be like Jesus. This song has been in my heart and on my mind as I contemplate what it means to be a Christian in this time and in this place. This song comes to me as a prayer. It is a prayer of petition. Lord, I want to be Christian. A Christian who is more loving, more holy, and who thinks and acts like Jesus. This time and this place cry out for nothing less. But the world is challenging every fiber of my being. Lord, hear my prayer.

I think I can take on being more loving and more holy if I take that on one day at a time. But to pray to be more like Jesus feels a bit overwhelming, because Jesus often did things we might not have expected, sometimes at great risk to himself. Jesus spoke truth to power; he welcomed the stranger; he reached out to touch and heal the untouchables; he wrestled with the devil; he took limited resources and stretched them so that all had enough. I can say, sing, and pray I want to be more like Jesus, but how? That feels scary right now, especially knowing that someone who preached the gospel of Jesus Christ is receiving death threats for calling people to practice Jesus’ values of love, compassion, and mercy. Lord, have mercy!

I have accomplished much of what I was called to do when I came here as your interim 26 months ago. I have been wondering what needs to come next in our journey together. The Prayer Service, held in the Washington National Cathedral last Tuesday helped to give me a greater understanding of what my call might be with this congregation in the remaining time we have together. My call is to help this congregation explore what it means to follow Jesus, despite, or perhaps because of those things that we believe divide us. We need to learn and practice Unity. A unity beautifully described by Mariann Edgar Budde, the Episcopal Bishop of Washington.

Unity is “not for agreement, political or otherwise, but for the kind of unity that fosters community across diversity and division, a unity that serves the common good...It is not conformity. It is not a victory of one over another. It is not weary politeness nor passivity born of exhaustion. Unity is not partisan. Rather, unity is a way of being with one another that encompasses and respects differences, that teaches us to hold multiple perspectives and life experiences as valid and worthy of respect; that enables us... to genuinely care for one another even when we disagree.

Lord, I want to be like Jesus. Do you?

Blessings, unity, and peace,

Pastor Meredith



A Message from the Moderators

We knew when we mentioned in November how nice and pleasant the temperatures had been outside, that it couldn't last for long. As we compose our message for February, winter is in full swing with cold temperatures, strong winds and snow. The good news is that the days are slowly getting longer and hopefully spring is not too far away. There is much going on at the church to give both us and others a feeling of warmth. The Warm and Cozy Drive on January 18th collected much needed items which were donated to the Wallingford Emergency Shelter. Later that day, the 350th Kick Off Celebration Dinner took place, and what a wonderful heartwarming time it was for the 140 people in attendance that night. It was a joy filled opportunity to meet with friends and church members, both old and new, to reminisce with everyone including 4 of our past ministers who joined us that evening, and to enjoy the musical talents of the Praise Band. Our thanks go out to all who made that very special night possible.

But those 2 events were just the start of this 350th year, and there is much more to come! On the evening of February 7th, there will be a repeat performance of the beautiful "Our Father" choral sermon by our choir and guest performers. On February 9, we will be celebrating Boy Scout Sunday with a short presentation from Bob Beaumont about the history of scouting during our 10 o'clock service. On March 30th, a Silver Tea and Vintage Wedding Gown display will be held in Congregational Hall immediately following the service. On May 4th, we are planning a special worship service and after party to celebrate the "birthday" of our church. On May 26th, we are going to march as a group in the Memorial Day parade to honor Wallingford residents who made the ultimate sacrifice. To complete the first half of our yearlong celebration, on June 8th at our Annual Meeting, we will be opening the Time Capsule from our 325th year. **And the best part is, to be part of any of these events all you need to do is to show up!** We encourage you to join us for each of these special 350th events and to bring your friends and family. Future Spires will have additional information about those events and the ones planned for the second half of the year.

As Bob Westervelt mentioned during the opening of the 350th Kick Off Dinner event, it's hard to even imagine the hardships endured by the 31 men, 30 women and 40 children who started this church 350 years ago. With their trust in God, their support for each other and by the bounty of divine providence, they persevered and established our church in 1675 and many generations of parishioners, along with the 18 ministers, have brought us to where we are today.

As we enter the month of February, let us embrace the spirit of love that surrounds us, not only in our personal relationships but also in our current faith community. This is a time to deepen our commitment to one another, to reach out to those in need or those who may be feeling isolated, and reflect on how we can better embody Christ's love in our daily lives and in the world around us. As we approach the upcoming Lenten season, let us prepare our hearts for a time of personal renewal through prayer, service to God, and intentional acts of compassion. May this season bring us closer to God and one another.

With the grace and peace of Christ,

Greg Whitehouse and Lori Folk-Barron, Co Moderators



FUTURE MUSIC EVENTS

OUR FATHER, A Journey through the Lord's Prayer

by Pepper Choplin

Friday, February 7, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary

This amazing choral work which many of you have heard once will be repeated by the Chancel Choir augmented by singers from Silk n' Sound and the New Haven Chorale and instrumentalists. We wish to present this work to the Wallingford community and surrounding areas. There will be a reception in Congregational Hall after the performance.

COME, WALK WITH ME

by Pepper Choplin

Friday, March 21, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. in the sanctuary

What's this, Choplin again? Yes. This time the composer walks us through Holy Week. Choplin has a way of inviting you in as he repeats the phrase "come, walk with me" as we walk with Jesus through the last week of his life. This choral work will be accompanied by historical paintings which have been created over the centuries depicting this event. By doing it in the evening we have the advantage of dark which will highlight our pictures resources. We will again be joined by outside singers and instrumentalists.

Along with our entry into the spring, comes our journey though lent to Holy Week—Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Easter. The Rev. Jeffers will lead us in a series from Sanctified Art focusing on dichotomies of life.

PALM SUNDAY April 13, 2025 10:00 a.m. worship—one of our favorites services as the cross is carried into the sanctuary with the singing of Via Dolorosa. This service telescopes our vision of Holy Week as we approach the resurrection of Christ.

EASTER SUNDAY April 20, 2025 10:00 a.m. worship—The Resurrection of Christ—Easter Flowers, Trumpets. Drums, Hallelujah Chorus and Leonard Cohen's poignant "Hallelujah."

FCCW SHROVE TUESDAY

Pancake

DINNER

6 PM
CONGREGATIONAL
HALL

Join us for food, fun and festivities!

Pancakes
Relay Races
Fellowship



March 4, 2025 @6

First Congregational Church

23 S Main Street, Wallingford, CT

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23 S. Main Street, Wallingford**



SOUP DRIVE

The Monthly Drives Team of the Mission & Outreach Ministry is collecting soup for Master's Manna.

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.

Soup will be collected on:

Date: Saturday, February 15, 2025

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
louisezem@aol.com or 203-988-2517



Save the Date for a

Women's Fellowship Breakfast

Saturday, February 22, 2025

9-11 AM

Location and presenter TBD. Watch for more details!

Book Club News



We are reading "Faith" by Jennifer Haigh. "A complex, disturbing and thought-provoking novel." Goodreads.

Please join us at 6:30 PM on Tuesday February 25 in the Guild Room.

Support our Youth Mission Trip



Support our Youth Mission Trip

Super Grinders and Salads for SUPER BOWL SUNDAY!!

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Place your order for Superbowl Sunday, February 9, 2025

Price is only \$10 for a 12" grinder sandwich or \$10 for a tossed salad

Total items order _____ @ \$10 each = \$_____

Circle whether grinder or salad desired and select type of meat and toppings for each

(Circle one) Grinder or Salad	Meat: (circle one) Turkey Ham Tuna Roast beef None	Toppings: (circle all desired) cheese lettuce tomato onions cucumber green peppers
(Circle one) Grinder or Salad	Meat: (circle one) Turkey Ham Tuna Roast beef None	Toppings: (circle all desired) cheese lettuce tomato onions cucumber green peppers
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(Circle one) Grinder or Salad	Meat: (circle one) Turkey Ham Tuna Roast beef None	Toppings: (circle all desired) cheese lettuce tomato onions cucumber green peppers

If more than five grinders or salads desired, please listed additional on the back.

Please place your order no later than Monday, February 3rd. You may place your order during coffee hour or by leaving the order form and check in office. Pick up will be on Sunday, February 9th after church until 12:30. All proceeds will benefit the youth mission trip to this summer. **A special thank you to Mark Allard and to Ferraro's Market in North Haven for all of the quality meats, cheeses and produce used to make each grinder and salad.**



Coffee Hour Forum – February 23

The UCC was formed with the hope that “we all may be one”. People from Evangelical, Reformed, Christian and Congregational traditions (four streams) joined with other diverse groups. Each church was independent while sharing basic Christian beliefs. Over time some diverse groups' histories have been lost along with the benefits of their diversity to the collective UCC. To study the Fifth Stream of the UCC means uncovering histories of these special movements.

The Rev. Edwin Pérez Jr., will speak about the African-diasporic theologies the UCC inherited, in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, as the foundation for the emerging future of the denomination and local church as it progresses.

The Rev. Charlene Bruce highly recommends and has enjoyed hearing Rev. Pérez speak as a candidate for ordination. The Faith Formation Ministry and the Open and Affirming Team hope you will join us on February 23 for a Coffee Hour Forum after church (11:45-12:45). A light lunch will be served.



Youth Mission Trip Scranton, PA July 20-26, 2025

Youth (going into ninth grade next year through age 20) interested in going on this mission trip should speak with Maddie Torre or Lorraine Westervelt. We are collecting a \$50 deposit by February 9 when we gather to make subs and salads.

Art Show

November 9, 2025

In Congregational Hall

Exodus 35:31-32

And he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze.

- **This is the time to gather some wonderful art work to display in the church art show! “Art” includes photography projects, craft projects, etc.**
- **This is a multi-generational display of our congregation’s art work for our 350th celebration year!! Please invite your family & friends are welcome to show their artwork too!**
- ***Drop off to a designated area of congregational hall on Sunday, Nov. 2 and the work will be on display on***
 - **Sunday, November 9th**
- ***Pick up your art work on Monday, Nov. 10th between 3:00 – 5:30 p.m. or at coffee hour on Sunday, Nov. 16th***



I'm trying to give people time to create something or put things aside as artwork comes home with your children! Please label with family name & artist's name.

Questions? Please email Pam Perkowski at pperkowski@myhts-wallford.org



Join the 350th “Voices of Devotion” Project!

By now, you have heard that one of the many ways we will be celebrating the 350th Anniversary of First Congregational Church in 2025 is with the “Voices of Devotion” Project. Modeled after the Upper Room devotionals that many of us use for our daily devotional time, we are seeking devotionals written by past, present and (hopefully) future members and friends of FCC. With the start of 2025, we have begun to share submitted devotions on a weekly basis via email, and we intend to publish all of the devotions in booklet form at the end of the anniversary year.

Some may find the idea of writing a public devotional to be intimidating, but we want to remind you that the purpose of this project is to celebrate the many voices that have worshipped God at First Congregational Church. We are looking for YOU, the heart, soul, and history of FCC, to lend your voice and offer a devotion that speaks from your heart. Write about an experience, large or small, that told you God is near. Write about an event, a memory, a trial, a person, a particularly meaningful piece of scripture...anything that brought your heart closer to God or reminded you that the Holy Spirit was and is a force in your life.

To create your devotional: Choose a Bible scripture that speaks to you or connects to the story you have to tell. Describe your story and how you apply this story and its spiritual truth to your life. How do you hope others might apply it to theirs?

We pray you say YES to participating in this project. Please use the attached form to submit your devotion. The “Voices of Devotion” team members will confirm the receipt of your submission. If you have submitted your devotion and did not receive confirmation or received a “rejected email message,” please assume we have not received it, and contact us at fcc350devotionproject@googlegroups.com or at lorifolkbarron@gmail.com. You can also enter your devotional using the Google sheet at this link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfr6UXLI8h8weoxhhyoG23cKxWF0DXRDi_4z-2oGzq-b84lcQ/viewform?usp=pp_url

We are accepting submissions on a rolling basis. Please feel free to submit more than one devotional if you have more than one story to tell!

With joyful voices,

Lori Folk-Barron, Bernie Annunziata, Marsha Mather, and Bob Westervelt

“Voices of Devotion” Submission

Name: _____

(as you wish it to appear in the devotional booklet)

Email Address: _____ Phone: _____

Title: _____

Quoted Scripture: _____

Quoted Scripture Citation: (e.g., Jeremiah 29:11-14) _____

Devotional Text: (up to 500 words) *Please handwrite or type below or attach separate page*

Prayer:

Please submit devotional by

- Email to fcc350devotionproject@googlegroups.com
- Use this Google sheet link to enter your devotion directly
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfr6UXLI8h8weoxhhyoG23cKxWF0DXRDi_4z-2oGzq-b84lcQ/viewform?usp=pp_url
- Mail to “Voices of Devotion” Project, First Congregational Church, 23 South Main Street, Wallingford, CT 06492.



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.



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.



A Message from the Flower Team

We are in need of altar flower sponsors for these upcoming dates in 2025. Please sign up in the Narthex or email Lori (lorifolkbarron@gmail.com).

February 9 March 23 April 6

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

Thank you!





The 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 six 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



Our sympathy is extended to the family and friends of Avery Morgan, who passed away December 28, 2024 at Masonicare.

Our sympathy is extended to the family and friends of Alfred (Al) Mueller who passed away January 4, 2025. A memorial service was held January 18 at the Wallingford Funeral Home.

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Email the church office at :
officemanager@firstchurchwlfld.org

