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Living in Spirit • Committed to Service • Open to All

first church WEST HARTFORD TIDINGS



Creator, created, creating!

As we step into the new year, Epiphany 2021, we are at a moment that is a creative opportunity; as we respond to the toll of the pandemic, and as we prepare for the future with faith. One of the things I have been most impressed by in 2020 is the tremendous creativity that has flourished amid all of the pandemic restrictions. People are thinking outside the box: hiking, star gazing, reading, writing, cooking and baking, spending time with pets, wood working, watching old movies, calling up old friends, making home movies, zooming ... people have innovated as they started new projects and finished old ones. Life goals have been marked and surpassed in this liminal time – even as we companion those who have been sickened by Covid-19.



In worship we will focus in on the theme of creativity: God our creator, the renewing beauty of the creation and its seasons, and the creativity of the Holy Spirit. Let's encourage one another as we begin this new year and face the challenges ahead with creativity and imagination. We will still be physically separated from one another, but online we are in excellent company. Join us!

New Years Blessings,

Erica

The Reverend Erica Wimber Avena, Interim Senior Pastor

January Worship Plans: Sundays at 10 a.m. Online version available: https://bit.ly/FC_Sermon

JANUARY 3
Christmas 2
John 1:1-18
"Wisdom Anchors"
Rev. Susan Izard preaching

JANUARY 10
Epiphany Sunday
Genesis 1:1-5
"God Created.
And then what?"
Rev. Erica Avena preaching

JANUARY 17
Martin Luther King, Jr Sunday
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
"Re-creating
Christian Freedom"
Rev. Erica Avena preaching

JANUARY 24
Epiphany 3
Mark 1:14-20
"Re-creating Purpose"
Rev. Amie Giguere preaching

JANUARY 31
Epiphany 4
1 Corinthians 8:1-13
"A Creative Epiphany"
Rev. Erica Avena preaching



Church Family News

■ Jane Stremlau and her family were inadvertently left out of the announcement of **Elizabeth Stremlau's** death announcement in December Tidings. Sisters Jane and Susan, and their families are active members of First Church. Services will be held in the spring.

■ Our prayers are with Jeff Mitchell and his family on the death of Jeff's older brother **Ron Mitchell** in Richmond, Virginia on December 22nd, following a long illness.

■ You may submit your prayer requests online! Please use this link: http://bit.ly/FCprayer_request

If you have an announcement to share, please call the office at 860-233-9605, x111.

Outreach Update

840 Cookies to Loave and Fishes!

22 bakers made 70 dozen cookies for the Loaves and Fishes Meals to Go program. Loaves and Fishes clients really appreciate the homemade cookies in their food packets. Thanks everyone!

-Nancy Ball and Dottie Stone

Drive By Drop Off Food Drive—the need is great!

Donations for the West Hartford Food Pantry and Loaves and Fishes Meals to go Program can be left Mondays during the JPWL curbside pick-up from 2-3 pm. The Saturday drop off date for January is the 9th, from 10 am to 12 pm, when volunteers will be at the Rotunda Entrance to collect your donations.

Covenant to Care Hat and Mitten Drive and Share-A-Gift Tree

Thanks to all who contributed to the Share-A-Gift tree. Thanks to your generosity, the holidays of 42 children in the Covenant to Care program were brighter. Contributions to the annual Hat and Mitten Drive were passed on to Marcia Watson, social worker of the Klingberg Family Center. Thank you!

Oxen Hill Farm Contributes Vegetables

Thank you Oxen Hill Farm for donating three 40 pound boxes of sweet potatoes, carrots and Brussels sprouts to Loaves and Fishes hot meal take home program. You may be familiar with Oxen Hill Farm as we have been a pick-up location for their CSA program. Learn more here: <http://oxenhillfarm.com/vegetable-csa/>



Cleaning Out Your Attic or Garage? We Can Help!

Remember the Outreach Team this winter if you decide to tackle the clutter in your attic or garage. We will be collecting gently used small suitcases and bicycles sometime in March on behalf of two organizations: BiCiCo and Ädelbrook. Thank you!

From the Moderator

At some point in 2021, we will gather again in the Meeting House. What kind of church will we be at that point? What have we learned about our faith and our mission during our pandemic banishment?

During the past ten months, we learned we are a church even without our building. We may feel as if we were banished to the wilderness last March, but instead we were merely banished to our homes. We have technology helping us remain connected, informed, and active with our fellowship and mission work. Our online worship ranges from meditative moments to full-throated sing-along anthems. We listen to stories and participate in prayers as we worship "together" but apart and away from the Meeting House.

Our Sunday worship services keep us pointed in the right direction. The weekly emails and Sunday Notes provide us with plenty of ways to put our faith into action each week. The message is clear: After worship is over, the service (to others) begins and continues!

We do not know who or how many persons have started "attending" our church's worship services posted on YouTube. Yet we sense, by the number of viewings, that we are reaching more persons than before our banishment. When we end this pandemic year, let us remain intentional and infectious about our commitment to serve others. If others have joined us, and have learned about ways to support local organizations serving others, then we want that to continue. If they support the social justice concerns of our congregation, then we want to keep our communications about social justice issues flowing.

As a result, when we return to the Meeting House as a worshiping congregation, we need to attend to not leaving behind any of the followers who are listening to Jesus's teachings. Through our online presence, I believe First Church ministers to four cohorts of people:

- 1) Those who attend worship in person as often as they can;
- 2) Those who physically cannot worship in person, but who desire to participate actively in the worship experience at First Church;
- 3) Those who dip in and out of attending church in person, but who choose to attend services at First Church when they go to church; and
- 4) Those who are interested in exploring and growing in their faith experience, but who may be tentative about walking through the church doors.

I believe worship at First Church reinvigorates us, and calls us to respond faithfully by serving others and calling for justice. Why would we cut off any persons from this experience and call-to-action just because they cannot walk through the church doors and sit in a pew on Sunday morning? We need to think out of the box, and out of the Meeting House, to retain the relationships we have built with others during this pandemic season.

Micah reminds us, "... and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6: 8)

Let's put our faith into action. Let's be infectious about this. Let's not be about coming to church, but rather be about being the church. Everywhere. Every day.

Humbly,
Judy Schmitt, Moderator

DUE DATE for TIDINGS: The next deadline is JANUARY 14th, for the FEBRUARY issue. Please send items to Joy Taylor: joy.taylor@whfirstchurch.org

DUE DATES for SUNDAY NOTES & eNEWS: Submissions are due each Tuesday by noon to Suzanne: suzanne.nardi@whfirstchurch.org.

Updates from the Search Committee

As we begin the new year, the Senior Pastor Search Committee will be putting the finishing touches on the church profile with information gleaned from the congregational survey. The profile will then be available for review and sent to the Southern New England Conference of the UCC for validation and posting. In January, the search committee will be organizing itself to receive and review profiles from interested candidates.

Our search process follows guidelines set by the UCC and encourages reflection, participation, and a vision for our future. Who is God calling us to be as a congregation? The process may seem lengthy, but typically, a search can extend for a year or more. In the meantime, we are fortunate to have an able and adaptive staff and lay leadership to help us through these challenging pandemic times.

It is good to remember that it has been eighteen years since First Church has had a search for a settled Senior Pastor, one with

**"Our work of faith, our labor of love,
our steadfastness of hope..."**

1 Thessalonians 1:3

Pledges for 2021- It's Not Too Late!

The Stewardship Workgroup will be providing periodic updates about the 2020 Pledge Campaign. At the time of this writing, we have gratefully received 101 pledges. Our goal is to reach the same level of contribution as last year. Overall, in 2019, 130 pledges were received. We have a way to go! Even though there wasn't a physical Consecration Sunday this year, pledging can easily be done online by going to our website at whfirstchurch.org/donate/pledge, or by mail. We ask our community of faith to support the mission of the Church by giving as generously as possible. With thanks, The Stewardship Workgroup.

Living in Spirit • Committed to Service • Open to All



Rev. Erica Wimber Avena, Interim Senior Pastor
Rev. Amie Stuart Giguere, Acting Associate Pastor
Rev. Susan Izard, Minister of Spiritual Life
James Boratko, Music Director
Lauren Dube, Director of Children & Family Ministries
Dawne Quinn, FCAFYC Director
Suzanne Nardi, Office Manager
Lisa Reed, Business Manager

Church Office: 860-233-9605 • Fax: 860-232-8183
J.P. Webster Library: 860-232-3893
First Church Academy for Young Children: 860-232-2106
12 South Main St., West Hartford, CT 06107 • www.whfirstchurch.org

whom we hope to have a long-term relationship. Thank you for your continued trust and patience.

May the Spirit guide us in 2021.

Thank you for your trust and prayers.

Suzanne Carnes, Doug Evarts, Seth Holmes, Glen MacLeod, Ryan Mannix, Amy Melvin, Liz Oman-Wilfred, Amber Rottman and Robert Schunder

Mission-oriented Budgeting

In a recent blog post, "Budgeting in a Time of Uncertainty and COVID-19," Rev. Dr. David Cleaver-Bartholomew, the Transitional Associate Conference Minister for Stewardship and Financial Development for the SNEUCC (Southern New England UCC) noted that many churches are stressed in determining their next year's budgets. In it he wrote, "Because of the great uncertainty brought about by COVID-19, along with many churches feeling increased pressure regarding the use of their available financial and human resources, there has been a growing interest in mission driven or mission-oriented budgeting. I hear congregational leaders asking, 'How can we most faithfully and effectively use our available resources??'

As the Business Team and other members of First Church leadership have struggled with our COVID-reality over the past months with pledging and non-pledging donations impacted to a significant degree, these comments struck home. We have been blessed with worship and outreach efforts that are on-going, albeit in virtual formats, as we have embraced the old reality that the church was never really "the building" but instead our members and friends. That said, the financial impact has been real and concerning.

Rev. Cleaver-Bartholomew further noted that "mission oriented budgeting is similar to Zero-Based Budgeting (ZBB). Traditional budgeting calls for incremental increases over previous budgets, such as a 2% increase in spending, whereas ZBB calls for justifying both old and new expenses. ... While traditional budgeting analyzes only new expenditures, ZBB starts from zero and calls for a justification of not only new expenditures, but also existing, recurring expenses."

Recognizing that most First Church expenses are related to staffing and building support (and we have a very large, seventy-five-year old building), the Business Team as well as both clergy and lay leadership have worked diligently to be certain our budget is aligned with our mission. We hope that as members of the congregation, you will prayerfully think about mission as well – what we are and what we hope to be as the budget is discussed and voted upon over the next several weeks. – Court Lewis, Treasurer

New!

Donate via text! This program was launched at the Live Nativity to encourage visitors to donate.

4 Ways to Donate

•Text to Give

Scan this or text "Give" to
(860) 222-7870



•In Person

•Online

whfirstchurch.org

•By Mail

12 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107





From the JPWL Director

New Year Blessings to all!

Now as we stand together, brush the dust from our feet, and walk assuredly into 2021, many of us wonder how the various storylines from 2020 will continue to unfold. More importantly, how will we contribute to the healing and recovery required? In what ways can First Church nurture wavering trust and communication? We can start by continuing our partnership with the Concerned Parents of Color of West Hartford (CPCWH).

First Church voted November 29 to change the name of our greenspace to Unity Green, and we later received the following note from the CPCWH Founder and President, Adrienne Billings-Smith, who had attended the online meeting:

"Today proved to be a starting point – I saw a community come together for the greater good. I saw my neighbors raise their hands with pride – knowing they were helping to heal deep wounds of our nation right here in their own community. So thank you all for everything you have done and are doing. Unity Green is a proud moment in our West Hartford history and I am truly humbled by all of this."

Billings-Smith correctly perceives the historical significance of this moment; we should always keep in mind that "history has its eye on" us, and we will one day be judged in the cool light of the future.

This is why I am so pleased that the JPWL chose author, minister, and educator Dr. Bernard LaFayette, Jr. as our 2021 *Living in Spirit* speaker. Who better to bless the launch of Unity Green than a man who once marched alongside John Lewis and Martin Luther King, Jr.? Dr. King himself appointed Bernard LaFayette as the National Program Administrator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and later as the National Coordinator of the Poor People's Campaign.

I arranged for Dr. LaFayette's presentation last summer, and I didn't know what lay ahead or what Dr. LaFayette's remarks would be. I didn't know that within days George Floyd would die a quiet, violent death and hundreds of thousands would rise in anguished protest. I simply knew that First Church had entered a moment in its 300+ year history where we had an opportunity to help heal the violence of the past, that we could demonstrate to our community what Christian compassion looks like.

I hope you will join us Sunday afternoon, January 17 at 5 p.m. as we gather with members of the CPCWH, Witness Stones West Hartford, leaders from the West Hartford Public Schools, and others from the West Hartford community to welcome this Civil Rights leader.

Please register online at bit.ly/B_Lafayette_Register.

With Blessings for the New Year, Jennifer



Dr. Bernard LaFayette, Jr our Living in Spirit speaker Jan. 17

Ongoing Services

- Reference and reader's advisory services by phone and email
- Curbside service available from 2-3 p.m. on Monday afternoons, and by appointment
- Device advice to talk you through your gadget's cyber issues
- Church Archives access for researchers
- Patrons may call to place a hold during library hours or can place the holds themselves through the JPWL online catalog

JPW Library Book Groups

Books are available at the JPWL via curbside service on Mondays from 2 to 3 p.m. Please contact the library to arrange an alternate pick-up time or to join the discussion.

AWAKENING THE SPIRIT led by Minister of Spiritual Life Susan Izard, meets Mondays at noon via Zoom. They reconvene on January 11, and begin the New Year with *Thomas Berry: A Biography* by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Andrew Angyal. As a cultural historian, Thomas Berry (1914–2009) sought a broader perspective on humanity's relationship to the earth in order to respond to the ecological and social challenges of our times. This first biography of Berry illuminates his remarkable vision and its continuing relevance for achieving transformative social change and environmental renewal.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT led by JPWL Director Jennifer deSimas, meets on the first Thursdays of the month. Our next meeting is Thursday, January 7 at 5:30 p.m. to discuss the highly praised *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett. "The Vignes twin sisters will always be identical. But after growing up together in a small, southern black community and running away at age sixteen, everything has changed: their families, their communities, their racial identities. Many years later, one sister lives with her black daughter in the same southern town. The other secretly passes for white, and her white husband knows nothing of her past. Still, even separated by so many miles and just as many lies, the fates of the twins remain intertwined."



New at the Library!

We now have jigsaw puzzles and board games available to check out. Browse our online catalog to see our full inventory (suitable for children and adults), and call or email the library to reserve your choice.

Mark Your Calendars . . .

February Lenten Series w/John Dominic Crossan:

- February 18, 7 p.m.: *The Crucifixion of Jesus*
- February 25, 7 p.m.: *The Resurrection of Jesus*

Advent Looked Different This Year... but JOY Was With Us!



Live Nativity Thank you

Our event on December 19 was such a blessing! It was just right for a year when the weary world is looking for ways to rejoice! We rejoice and give thanks for the extensive team of people who made the event possible: from the planning team who pulled it all together; to all who gave of their time, talent and treasure for the advertising, stable building, costume washing, music, recording savvy and technical skills; as well as the actors, snow shoveler, crowd control volunteers, candy baggers, the animals and their handlers and all who enthusiastically shared the event with their family, friends and neighbors. Lastly, of course, to all of the visitors. (See it on YouTube if you missed it!) Thank you!

Unity Green Update

How does a traditional New England "green" evolve in the 21st century?

Now that the congregation has endorsed the name, "Unity Green," for the greenspace at South Main and Farmington Avenue, what kind of changes can be expected? The original gift by Timothy Goodman specifies that the land be used as "a place of parrade [sic] forever." Though planning for Unity Green is just beginning, ideas for new landscaping, memorials, artwork, and virtual displays (similar to the Black Lives Matter Prayer Walk) are under consideration. As safety is a prime concern, the Town will be ensuring that the space can safely accommodate community gatherings.

The green traditionally has hosted town celebrations and will continue to be used for that purpose as the Town celebrates Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on Monday, January 18, 2021. First Church's JPW Library welcomes legendary Civil Rights activist Dr. Bernard LaFayette via Zoom the evening before for an online, public conversation with Unity Green Founder Adrienne Billings-Smith.

According to its vision statement, "Unity Green will create a welcoming space in the town center that fosters community connection. Unity Green will inspire conversation, collaboration, contemplation and celebration of what community means by telling the story of the land, acknowledging the past, and embracing the diverse and rich culture of West Hartford."

One goal of the project is to create a more complete and inclusive history of the town by sharing previously untold stories of West Hartford's past and present, giving voice to members of the community often overlooked in traditional history. The Witness Stone project has already recovered the stories of enslaved persons in West Hartford. The stories of others who contributed to West Hartford's growth will be explored.

Planning for Unity Green will continue throughout 2021.



Photos of the seasons' Live Nativity, Christmas Eve Luminaries and Carols by Jim Boratko (Live Stream is on YouTube), and White Chapel Hand Bell Choir on the steps.

Thank You Mission Partners

Thank you to our Mission Partners who have provided segments on what our support means to them, especially this year. The recent participants are pictured here.

Clockwise from top: Kara Capone from My Sisters Place; Kandyce Aust from South Park Inn; Nancy Stockman from WH Food Pantry; and Adria Giordano Chrysalis Center.





Taizé Celtic

Worship Services

JANUARY 10

Evening Worship

JANUARY 24

REACH OUT: **SOUTH PARK INN**

South Park Inn's Emergency Shelter provides a safe, temporary residence to individuals that are literally homeless. The shelter welcomes individuals from all walks of life and has space to accommodate up to 85 men, women, and children every night. They are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, never closing their doors.

Their emergency shelter, veterans' programs, respite, and supportive housing provide personalized support to each of the men, women and children that enter their doors. South Park Inn offers many services, including nutritious meals, personal hygiene supplies, laundry facilities, and bus passes for transportation. South Park Inn's goal is to provide a safe, temporary place to stay as individuals identify the supports and opportunities that lead to their own, long-term housing solutions.

For more information or to donate:
www.southparkinn.org Thank you for your support.

Church School

The church school will continue meeting on Sundays at 10 am. Our Church School lessons will continue with special "worship-at-home" opportunities for our families! Please reach out to Lauren Dube at lauren.dube@whfirstchurch.org to receive a link to our virtual classroom.

Yoga classes are open to all

Remember our yoga classes are still going on every week! Nancy Murray has continued to hold yoga classes live, via Zoom. We have kept our meeting times of Tues. at 7 p.m. and Wed. and Thurs. 9:15 a.m. This has been a nice way to connect with our yoga community. The Zoom room has no space limitation, so all of the classes have "room!" Nancy is also holding a daily meditation class at 12:15 p.m. Email: nancy@deeppeacect.com for links and fees.

Weekly Bible Study:

Tuesdays from 6 to 7 pm via Zoom. For more information, contact Jennifer deSimas at jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org.

