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first church

WEST HARTFORD

TIDINGS

JUNE 2021 • NEWSLETTER • WWW.WHFIRSTCHURCH.ORG • 12 SOUTH MAIN STREET, WEST HARTFORD, CT • 860-233-9605

Celebrate Confirmands



On September 20, 2020 five youth in our congregation began their confirmation experience here at First Church. The year, though not what any of us imagined it would be, still made room for curiosity and questions, for faith and doubt, for exploration and growth.



The confirmation journey has not just been about these five youth, however. It has been about the encouragement and support of their parents; it has been about the willingness and curiosity of their mentors; it has been about the commitment and dedication of their leaders.

Now, as they make their choice whether or not to be confirmed and become partners in the common life of the church, it is about the entire congregation. Not only will we promise to welcome them with open hearts, we will make promises to teach by word and example, to guide them in the way of prayer and service and offer them our love and support.

The rite of confirmation simply affirms the promises we make at baptism: to accept the sacred responsibility of helping each one

grow toward a life lived in faith. It is a joy and a privilege as well as a gift and a responsibility to enter into the relationships present in shared congregational life.

Perhaps we can each approach this month's confirmation worship service on June 6th as an opportunity to renew our own commitments to the church and to one another. May we listen to one another's questions and concerns with open minds and hearts. May we take one another's contributions seriously, treating them with respect. May we expose one another to the fundamental questions of faith and explore them together. May we share our own faith experiences and questions. May we ask for and offer help when needed and may we ask for and offer our prayers. May we do all of these things, relying on God's love and grace.

Even as we celebrate **Joey Carbone, Andrew Chang, Emily O'Keefe, Connor Mayr and Andrew Sarzen**, it will surely be a joy to celebrate who we are and who we are becoming. Though their confirmation journey is coming to an end, their spiritual and faith journey continues, as it does for each of us.

-Rev. Amie Stuart Giguere, Acting Associate Pastor

Worship with us! Worship in the Meeting House with us, or watch online.

<p>JUNE 6 <i>Confirmation Sunday</i> Acts 1:3-8 "Witnesses" Rev. Amie Giguere</p>	<p>JUNE 13 Acts 5:27-32 "And More Surprise Witnesses" Rev. Erica Wimber Avena</p>	<p>JUNE 20 <i>Father's Day / Unity Green dedication and celebration (see p. 5)</i> Ezra 9:5-6 "The Legacy" Rev. Erica Wimber Avena</p>	<p>JUNE 27 <i>Open and Affirming Sunday</i> Isaiah 56:1-8 "Thus says the Lord" David Figliuzzi (MDiv student at YDS)</p>
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Church Family News

■ In our prayers: Cathy Diane Denton and her family on the death of her son **Robert "Bobby" Denton** on April 27, 2021. Services are planned for a later date. Cards of condolence are welcome and may be sent to Diane at: 275 Steele Road Apt.B312, West Hartford, CT 06117

■ In our prayers: Helen George and family on the death of her husband **Daniel George**, (known to many at FC as our former tenor soloist). A graveside service was held at Cedar Hill Cemetery on May 6, and a Memorial service is planned for July 9 at 3 p.m. at First Church.

■ Best wishes to recently retired **Rev. Susan Izard!**

■ You may submit your prayer requests to our pastors online at any time: http://bit.ly/FCprayer_request

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

“Expect Pandemic Delays,” they said...

On May 30 we resumed offering in person worship services at 10am on Sunday in the Meeting House. The proposal for Live Streaming equipment which the congregation approved at our March meeting has not been fully installed yet, due to “pandemic delays.” In the meantime we will offer a pre-recorded service available online and an in person service with the same sermon, music and message, until we can Livestream from the Meeting House directly. Pandemic protocols are being carefully considered by our church leadership, we want all who gather in person or online to feel welcome, safe, and connected. No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here!

Guest Preacher on June 27

Open & Affirming Sunday

David Figliuzzi is a third year Master of Divinity student at Yale Divinity School. Ministry is a second career for David who previously served as Cigna’s Global Diversity and Inclusion Officer and the Executive Director of the Cigna Foundation. Feeling the call to ministry, David stepped out of his corporate career in 2019 to pursue ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ. In addition to full time seminary studies, David currently serves First Church of Christ in Suffield. Additionally, David has extensive lay leadership experience at his home church, Asylum Hill Congregational Church. David is excited about the power of the gospel to build vibrant and inclusive communities who work together to transform our neighborhoods and our world.



David and his partner Rob reside in West Suffield.

From the Moderator

Hello everyone! As I write this, we are finally having some warm almost summer-time weather – yay! June will be an exciting month for First Church, West Hartford.

At this moment all signs indicate we will be back in the Meeting House providing in-person worship in addition to pre-recorded online worship. If all goes well, we might even have live streaming of worship before month’s end. No guarantees on that, due to COVID impacts creating shipping delays.

In conjunction with West Hartford’s Juneteenth celebration, we will be rededicating and renaming our green space on South Main Street to Unity Green. This has been a very important journey for First Church from initial contact by Concerned Parents of Color of West Hartford. Through discussions and presentations we explored the history of First Church and its members’ roles in the enslavement of indigenous people and people of color. It has been a sobering, interesting, and mind-opening understanding of the history of oppression in this country and our town. It’s a journey that I, and I expect others, have felt very fortunate to be able to participate in and to address in some small way. It is our opportunity to acknowledge our First Church history in a very meaningful way. I would ask you to please join the celebration on June 19th and the dedication of Unity Green on June 20th.

June also brings us Gay Pride month, an opportunity to celebrate the LGBTQ+ members of our community. This also is an important moment in history for First Church. Since October of 2006 First Church has “officially” been an Open & Affirming congregation, which is just another way to say whoever you are, wherever you are on your quest for understanding your true self and identity, you are welcome in our congregation! And I know this to be true because my wife Rayda and I have been warmly welcomed at First Church (even before 2006!).

It seems sometimes that we humans in general are so quick to label and marginalize people who may be different, either by race, ethnicity, sexuality or gender identification. Fully aware of this challenge, First Church has been – and continues to be – actively examining, considering, and addressing these concerns. I know as we move forward through the month of June and beyond, we continue to learn, act accordingly, and celebrate with all people!

-Eleanor Wight, Moderator

Tired of Zoom calls? Ready to be outside? So are we!

Join JPWL staff each Monday morning this summer as we walk to, around, and about West Hartford and nearby parks and places. Our first walk will be Monday, June 7 at 9 a.m. We will meet in the church parking lot. Wear appropriate shoes and bring a water bottle. Contact Jennifer with questions: jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org.



Four Ways to Give:

1. Give by Text: Text GIVE to (860) 222-7870.
2. Give Online: Visit our website at <http://www.whfirstchurch.org/donate/give>
3. Give by Mail: Mail checks to First Church, 12 S. Main Street, West Hartford, CT 06107
4. Give Gifts of Securities: Contact local Financial Advisor Sue Banville at Edward Jones in West Hartford at 860-521-2119.

Search Committee Update: Moving Right Along!

The Senior Pastor Search Committee has been active now for a year! It was on May 24th, 2020 that our committee of nine was first commissioned by the congregation. These days, we are meeting more frequently to review the Ministerial Profiles we receive from the Southern New England Conference. We also have our own Zoom account which allows us greater flexibility in our scheduling and helps to assure the confidentiality of our discussions.

While we cannot report on candidates, we do have some news about one of our committee members. Seth Holmes, his wife Julie and 7-year old son Hudson will be moving to the Rochester, NY area soon as Seth is taking a new teaching position at the Rochester Institute of Technology and so they can be closer to Hudson's grand-

parents. Seth writes, "We will miss the many friends we have made at First Church over the past 8 years, but hope to be back for the occasional visit given how many strong connections we now have in the Hartford area. Though I am sad to leave the search committee early, I am confident in the strength of the group and know they will guide the right pastor to the church."

Seth has been a faithful and valued member of our team, serving as our Zoom Administrator and has been an absolute pleasure to work with. We will miss him, Julie, and Hudson. Please join us in wishing them a smooth transition to their new home and much happiness ahead.

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

Salute to Our Graduates: Class of 2021

You are invited to celebrate our high school and college seniors! The graduates will be standing in our church parking lot between 6 and 6:30 p.m. on June 6 (Rain Date is June 7) to receive your well-wishes in a "drive by" format again this year.

Please enter the parking lot via the Farmington Avenue entrance and exit via the driveway onto Isham Road.

Ideas to consider: hang signs from your vehicles, bring noise makers, drop a card in a basket by the rotunda doors, and/or any other creative things you can imagine to safely salute our graduates! We know church members are interested and invested in our young people and this is an opportunity to honor this milestone in their lives.

2021 High School graduates:	Jack Wilkins
Jackson Carbone	2021 College graduates:
Joey Lorenzo	Ruthie Harrison
Maggie Mieczkowski	Lizzy Quinn
Carolyn Quinn	Ethan Wilkins
Ethan Schuck	



Saluting them in this way continues to be important this year when traditional types of ceremonies continue to be modified. Please let Amie know if there are other graduates we should reach out to. Thank you!

Please direct comments or questions to Amie Giguere: amie.giguere@whfirstchurch.org. Thank you!

What's Going On in Social Media?



It has come to our attention that many members and friends would like a peek into what goes on in the First Church social media pages. It's a vibrant digital world, thanks mostly to Amy Melvin and Joy Taylor who fill up our Facebook, Instagram and sometimes even Twitter pages on behalf of First Church. (Additional thanks to Karla Grafton and Jennifer deSimas for their creativity!)

If you don't have access to all the pages or "apps.", you can go to YouTube.com to watch a slide show of social media images from first quarter of 2021. This link is not public which means it is not searchable so you must type this exact url into your web browser to view the slide show: https://youtu.be/v_vUSZh-fCw

Best Wishes Rev. Susan Izard on Your Retirement!

Photos from the celebration, including a live performance by The Jolly Beggars, have been shared on YouTube, Facebook, and will be posted in church soon!

DUE DATE for TIDINGS: The next deadline is JUNE 14th, for the JULY & AUGUST 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.

Living in Spirit • Committed to Service • Open to All



Rev. Erica Wimber Avena, Interim Senior Pastor
Rev. Amie Stuart Giguere, Acting Associate Pastor
James Boratko, Director of Music Arts
Lauren Dube, Minister for Children and Family Ministries
Dawne Quinn, FCAFYC Director
Suzanne Nardi, Office Manager
Lisa Reed, Business Manager
Jennifer deSimas, JPWL Director

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



**JOHN P. WEBSTER
LIBRARY**
Resources for Faith & Life

Jennifer deSimas, Library Director: jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org
Karla Grafton, Assistant Librarian: jpwebsterlib@whfirstchurch.org
General Inquiries: jpwebster@whfirstchurch.org Phone: 860-232-3893
Explore our catalog online! <https://jpwebster.biblio.org/eg/opac/home>

Staff Hours:
Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Curbside Services
2 to 3 p.m. on Mondays or
by appointment.

Welcome Back!

The JPWL is open to patrons once again! We have returned to our regular operating hours, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday-Thursday. Sunday hours are 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

The church building will still be locked; we are asking that patrons call us when they arrive and we can let them in. Please note that we are using only the Rotunda door, and that patrons will follow the appropriate pandemic protocols requested by our church leadership. We want all who gather to feel welcome, safe, and connected with our community. We are looking forward to welcoming you back to our beautiful library! The chocolates are waiting!

New Book Drop Installed!

We are excited to announce that our new exterior JPW Library Book Drop was installed last month! You will no longer need to journey through the church building to return materials. Simply drive up and drop them into the Book Drop, 24 - 7 - 365! The purchase of this Book



Drop is part of our approach to continue providing library services conveniently and safely to our patrons.

Book Drop FAQs:

● **When will the items that I return in the Book Drop reflect on my library account?** Please allow up to two days for returns to be removed from your JPWL account. (Please note that we do not collect fees for our materials.)

● **Can I donate books and other items through the Book Drop?**

No. Unfortunately, we cannot accept any non-library items or donations through the Book Drop. Please bring your book donations into the JPW Library during business hours (9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. Sundays).

Weekly Bible Study:

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

Yoga on Zoom (Hybrid TBA)

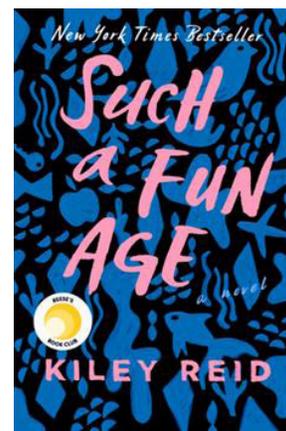
The classes are Tuesday evenings at 7 p.m. and Wednesday and Thursday mornings at 9:15 a.m. We enjoy connecting with conversation before and after class. The class itself is appropriate for all levels. Contact Nancy Murray at nancy@deeppeacet.com or 860-521-8186 to get the links or if you have any questions!

Book Group News:

AWAKENING THE SPIRIT is on summer break and as you know, our long-time leader, Rev. Susan Izard, retired at the end of May. We are deeply grateful to Susan for her years of leadership and friendship. Susan introduced many of us to authors we might never have encountered, and we'll miss working with and learning from her. Many blessings on your retirement, Susan!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT, led by JPW Library Director Jennifer deSimas, meets at 5:30 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month. They will hold a hybrid meeting (in-person, but with a virtual option for those who prefer it) on June 3 to discuss *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid

Emira Tucker works as a babysitter for lifestyle guru Alix and her news anchor husband Peter. When Emira takes toddler Briar to an upscale supermarket, suspicions arise because she is Black and the child is white. A security guard accuses Emira of kidnapping, and is appeased only when she calls Peter. But a video of the incident goes viral, and that's when the "fun" starts. *Such a Fun Age* explores the stickiness of transactional relationships, what it means to make someone "family," and the complicated reality of being a grown up. Can we connect across barriers of race, gender, wealth and privilege? Books are available at the JPW Library. Please contact Jennifer with questions: jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org



Fall Programs: Save these Dates!

Please join us for these upcoming fall programs. Details are just starting to be fleshed out, but for now, please save the dates:

September 16, 23, and 30:

Glen MacLeod, Professor Emeritus, UConn Department of English
Wallace Stevens, Spiritual Poet

October 21:

Author Kaitlin Curtice, *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. More about her book here: [this link: https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/native-kaitlin-b-curtice/1133988237](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/native-kaitlin-b-curtice/1133988237)

December 5, 12:

John Dominic Crossan & Amy-Jill Levine: *Nativity Narratives in Matthew and Luke*

Thank you Clean Up Day Helpers

During our spring church cleanup event Judy Labadia organized and purchased bag lunches for the volunteers. Contributions were also made by Jeanne Warner and Carole Carter.

Unity Green to be Dedicated On Juneteenth Weekend

One year ago it was brought to our clergy and lay leaders' attention that the historic green space in front of First Church, the town green, had been donated in 1748 by a colonial slave-holder.

As a result of this revelation a newly-formed group, the Concerned Parents of Color of West Hartford (CPCWH), respectfully requested that the members of First Church consider changing the green's name to reflect welcome and affirmation for people of all races and backgrounds. Affirmation, in other words, for all of God's children.

CPCWH's founder, Adrienne Billings-Smith, suggested Unity Green as the new name, and while other names were suggested and considered, this one emerged as the favorite. At a special meeting of the congregation on November 29 the congregation approved changing the green's name to Unity Green (as seen in December 2020 *Tidings*).

Since last June, our talented worship team and staff at First Church have engaged with us in small groups and on Sunday mornings, helping us reflect on what welcome means. The JWPL



sponsored speakers, group studies, workshops, and dramatic performances for both the church and the wider community where we considered the deeper meaning of this action at this time in our town's and nation's history. First Church established a bright path of community cooperation for other towns and states to follow when they encounter issues of racism and estrangement. We have taken a giant step in creating God's Beloved Community.

On Sunday, June 20 at 11:30, after a church service featuring Rev. Erica Wimber Avena's use of an 1812

sermon by our church's third pastor, Rev. Nathaniel Perkins, we will officially rename the center green to Unity Green with a ribbon cutting to declare the new name of Unity Green. A reception will be held on the church lawn afterwards.

Our partners – the Witness Stones Project/West Hartford, WHAASCO (West Hartford African American Social & Cultural Organization), and the CPCWH, along with representatives from the West Hartford Board of Education and the Town – will stand with us to honor the people who lived and walked here before us and to honor their humanity and contributions.

May Unity Green be a place of love, joy, and acceptance for those who stand here now, and for the ancestors who look on from their place in the great consciousness of God's creation.

P.S. A West Hartford Community Conversation webinar (via Zoom) is scheduled for June 3rd at 7:30 p.m. to discuss the upcoming Juneteenth celebration. Judy Schmitt and Dottie Stone have been invited to participate. Watch Sunday Notes for more details.

Drive by Drop off (DBDO!) Food Collection

will continue throughout the summer on the second Saturday of every month.

June 12, July 10, August 14.
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Volunteers from the Outreach Team will be on hand to take your contributions, which will be shared with the West Hartford Food Pantry and Loaves & Fishes' Meals To-Go program.

You are making a direct impact on hunger in our towns.

The most needed items are:

- ✓ CANNED FRUIT & APPLESAUCE
- ✓ SOUP
- ✓ TUNA & OTHER CANNED MEATS
- ✓ RICE
- ✓ BAKED BEANS
- ✓ COLD CEREAL
- ✓ CANNED PASTA

The need is great! Thank you for your generosity.
-The Outreach Team

JUNETEENTH ART SHOW

The West Hartford Public Library Foundation is organizing a free art exhibition at Noah Webster Library as part of West Hartford's Juneteenth celebration this year. Organizers have invited artists of color to submit art to be displayed at Noah Webster Library from June 5-19. For more information, go to the WH Library website: <https://www.westhartfordlibrary.org/books-more/juneteenth-celebration/#juneteenth>

Flower Delivery

The Inreach Team is looking for volunteers to deliver flowers. The delivery can be made on Sunday or a day or so after. If you would like to help, please contact Rayda Bouma at rbouma@comcast.net. You may call Nancy Ball or Rayda Bouma.



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WEST HARTFORD

12 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107



JUNE REACH OUT:

Silver Lake Conference Center, located in Sharon CT, is a year-round outdoor ministry of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Silver Lake hosts close to 1,000 young people each summer and more than 3,000 retreat participants in the off-season. In addition to groups from Southern New England UCC churches, they consistently offer retreat space to other Christian denominations, Jewish groups, school groups, and hobbyists. Our summer program is open to all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identification, or sexual orientation.

Silver Lake is a place where young people experience nature, make new friends, and explore their faith. With more than 60 acres of wooded land on lakeside shores, Silver Lake offers many opportunities for young people to take risks and try new things with the support of an intentional Christian community.

For more information or to donate: <https://www.silverlakect.org/>

Thank you.



Church School

Hello Friends! The Church School has had an exciting few weeks! After wrapping up a unit on Environmental Justice, the Church school celebrated Mothers' Day by praying for our mothers. We celebrated Ascension day by celebrating a year of transitions and we celebrated Pentecost together.

A date for returning for in-person, outdoor Church school is still to be determined, so keep your eyes on the Sunday Notes, E-news and your emails! Virtual Sunday School classes will continue until then.

You Are Invited to Intergenerational Camp!

This year's theme for Vacation Bible School is "Be Loved. Be Kind. Be You." Compassion Camp will take place on six Wednesday evenings this summer.

Join us at 5:30-7 p.m. from June 16th-July 21st. Watch your eblast and Sunday Notes for details on how to register for this family-friendly opportunity for ALL ages!

I hope you can join us this summer as we explore what it means to have compassion for ourselves, others and the world through engaging crafts, catchy music and intergenerational worship experiences!

-Lauren Dube, Minister for Children and Family Ministries
lauren.dube@whfirstchurch.org