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# first church

## WEST HARTFORD

### TIDINGS

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

# Peace be with you



September 2011 by Mick Melvin.

Dear First Church family,

I am writing to let you know that I will be retiring from First Church at the end of May. It is a big decision! I have been leading the Spiritual Life Ministry for the past 26 years. However, now that I'm 63 and a grandmother, I am looking forward to spending more time with my family and in my garden.



I am deeply grateful for First Church's willingness to embrace a Spiritual Life Ministry and explore a variety of ways to deepen our understanding and experience of God. While individual spiritual direction has been at the heart of this work, our group experiences have marked our years together.

Early on, we created the Quiet Room and began to meet for Lectio Divina – a contemplative practice of listening to scripture. This practice changed my way of studying scripture, guiding me to learn to preach from memory through storytelling.

Together we painted the large canvas labyrinth that led to renovating the Memorial Garden and placing a labyrinth at its center.

We began our Knitting Ministry and knit hundreds and hundreds of shawls wrapping others in our prayers and compassion. That led to writing *Knitting into the Mystery: A Guide to the Shawl-Knitting Ministry* that has guided churches and groups around the world.

We explored a variety of alternative worship services such as, Taizé, Celtic Evening Worship, Ash Wednesday Services of Healing, Good Friday labyrinth walks and the Blessing of the Animals.

In our renovated Chapel we gathered for an Interfaith Service on the 10th anniversary of 9/11 that ended with creating a human peace sign on the Memorial Garden labyrinth (a portion of that image made by Mick Melvin appears above). We meet for women's retreats, traveled on nine pilgrimages to Iona, Scotland, Ireland and the Camino in Spain.

Every Monday at noon we gathered for the Awakening the Spirit book group exploring new and challenging ideas and understandings about God and World Religions. Our wonderful John P. Webster Library supported us with books and hospitality creating a welcoming place for everyone.

Susan, page 2

Worship with us! All services are archived online to watch anytime at: [https://bit.ly/FC\\_Sunday\\_Worship](https://bit.ly/FC_Sunday_Worship)

**MAY 2**

John 15:1-8  
"Abide in Me"  
Rev. Amie Giguere

**MAY 9**

Mother's Day  
Psalm 98, John 15:9-17  
"Encircled in Love"  
Rev. Susan Izard  
(38th anniversary of her ordination)

**MAY 16**

Luke 24:44-53  
"Dear Theophilus..."  
Rev. Erica Wimber Avena

**MAY 23**

Pentecost Sunday  
Acts 2:1-21  
"As the Spirit Moves"  
Rev. Erica Wimber Avena

**MAY 30**

Memorial Day weekend/  
Trinity Sunday  
John 3:1-17  
"Three in One"  
Rev. Amie Giguere



## Church Family News

- You may submit your prayer requests to our pastors online at any time: [http://bit.ly/FCprayer\\_request](http://bit.ly/FCprayer_request)
  - Cathy Mieczkowski's father **John P. Egan**, passed away on March 25, 2021. Our prayers are with Cathy's family.
  - **Frances M. (Salter) Thompson** was a long time church member who passed away in January. She was living at Chatfield at the time.
  - Webb Carnes' father died on April 24 at his home in Texas following a long illness. **The Carnes family** is in our prayers.
  - **Lindsay Taylor Matécat** (daughter of Joy and Andy Taylor) and her husband **Jean Luc** are opening a restaurant in Colchester VT in May. Visit the "Pioneer Lakeside Café" when you travel!
  - As seen online, "Baby Munn Gleich" is due in Sept. to **Elizabeth Gleich** and our former associate pastor **Elliot Munn**. Best wishes!
- If you have an announcement to share, please call the office at 860-233-9605, x111.*

### Susan, *from page 1*

Finally, it was a privilege to preside at your weddings, memorial services and baptisms and participate in Sunday morning worship as we came together to seek God's blessing and grace.

As I move on to the next phase of my life, I will carry all of these memories in my heart. Thank you for the gift of being the Minister of Spiritual Life. I have been deeply blessed.

In grace and peace,  
Susan Izard

## Hartford Seminary President Will Join Cyber Coffee Hour on May 2

During cyber coffee hour on Sunday, May 2 we will have the opportunity to meet Hartford Seminary President Joel Lohr, and to hear from Master of Arts in International Peacebuilding "MAP" Program Director Phoebe Milliken, and ask questions." MAP students will each join a local congregation of their own choosing. This helps the student get to know the Greater Hartford area, and helps the congregation learn about the resources of Hartford Seminary. Right now we are raising funds to support these students through their year at Hartford Seminary. Come August we will be welcoming them to campus and helping them get to know the surrounding community.

Hartford Seminary's Masters of Arts in International Peacebuilding is a one-year professional master's degree which develops students' capacity to build vibrant, healthy inter-and-intra-religious relationships. Students will develop interreligious literacy and acquire constructive conflict intervention skills through a combination of service learning, traditional courses, experiential courses, and project-based learning. The MAP student cohort will be in residence at Hartford Seminary for an academic year where they will study the history and theology of the Abrahamic faiths, peace and violence in scripture, religious leadership, project planning, mediation, trauma awareness, and restorative practices. Our accepted student cohort hails from Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Germany, Greece, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Tunisia and the United States. They are remarkable individuals, and we are privileged to be able to help them develop the knowledge and skills they need to help their home communities.

## From the Moderator

Spring has arrived with all its new beginnings of budding flowers and trees! Just as Eastertide also brings a re-birth of our faith. Sadly, we continue to be burdened by the Covid-19 pandemic, although it is receding – but too slowly!

We long to be back to "normal" – but what does that mean? I certainly have no quick answers, but I have to believe our new normal will not be exactly like the old normal. Some of us have been sticking our toe in the water by going out to eat in restaurants, other brave souls are boarding airplanes.

If all works out according to plan, First Church West Hartford may open its doors to in-person worship this month! Please understand that this is not a summons to be present and accounted for – we know there are folks who for whatever reason may not want to or cannot return to First Church in person. All of you are valued and cherished members of our church community. The church staff and lay leaders will continue to hold you each in our hearts and prayers. The livestreaming of the Sunday services will hopefully fill some of the gap between in-person and at home worship. It is a new venture for us though, so we ask for your patience. (Please see Jim's outline of the livestreaming plan and progress report on page 7).

We have many blessings to celebrate this season – our Teams and Workgroups are going full steam ahead, make sure you check out information about their phenomenal work elsewhere in this *Tidings* issue or in Sunday Notes. If you'd like to join a Team or Work group, just let me or one of the Pastors know. Additionally, this month we will be celebrating Rev. Susan Izard, who is retiring from her work at First Church after 26 years on the pastoral staff. Details of this May 23rd event is being circulated through all our media channels – paper and electronic, and see page 8.

I will close with this note – in the congregational survey, done last December, one question asked the respondents to choose a completion of this sentence: "I believe after the pandemic, when our congregation comes back, we will be..." choices were: much weaker, weaker, the same, stronger, much stronger, or don't know. More than 70% of the respondents said stronger or the same, 12% weren't sure, and the remaining percentage felt the pandemic may weaken our congregation. I would ask everyone to pray hard, work hard, give when and if you can, and reach-out to your neighbors and together we can live into the optimism of that 70%.

*Eleanor Wight, Moderator*

## News from GHIAA

**Anti-Racism:** GHIAA's Racial Justice Activation Team met with ten public school district superintendents and district leaders who covenanted with GHIAA to provide anti-racism training to all faculty and staff district-wide.

**Welfare Lien Repeal:** With the passage of the welfare lien bill, the CT Fair Housing Center has already been contacted by several people who have welfare liens on their homes and are thrilled to know that as of July 1, when the new law takes effect, those liens will no longer have the power to drain their hard-earned equity.



# Search Committee Enters Phase 7 of The Process

It's official! The Senior Pastor Search Committee is now in Step 7 of our Search Process. Remember the diagram with the sunburst in the center and 13 steps described clockwise around it? (Hint: You can find it at the end of the 2020 Annual Report).

Step 7 signifies that potential candidates have seen our posting on the UCC website, and that we have begun to receive, read, and review their Ministerial Profiles. Each candidate will receive an acknowledgment from us that their materials are now in our hands. Any new profiles will be forwarded to us weekly from the Southern New England Conference. Our main activities will center on carefully and confidentially assessing these profiles and other materials against our stated requirements and desires to determine together

which individuals we would like to interview for the position of Senior Pastor.

This part of the search process will be time consuming and repetitive over the next few months. It also requires full confidentiality; we appreciate not being asked questions about the candidates (the number, the regions they are from, their background, etc.) as we are in discernment. When we are ready, we will offer a full report to the congregation.

Thank you for your patience and for the trust you have placed in us. We rely on your continued support and prayers.

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

## Livestream Video Operator Needed

Are you a "computer geek"? Do you anticipate the opportunity to get back to your gaming console to beat that next level? Have you helped out with tech and A.V. support at school plays and functions? Then have we got an opportunity for you!

First Church recently approved the installation of a state-of-the-art video system capable of livestreaming our worship services, as well as recording events such as weddings and performances. The operators of this system will be similar to producers in a master control room in a television studio. You will have the opportunity to manage 6 different cameras from a single console via a joystick controller. Several of the cameras have the ability to pan, tilt, and zoom in for the right shot.

Get in on the ground floor as we put this system together. The vendor installing the system, DNR Laboratories, will be installing the equipment over the next weeks (see more detail on page 7). Once it is installed, they will be providing training on how to use the equipment. If this sounds like something that is exciting and interesting, let us know so you can be one of the first to learn how



*Our secure, on-site video control room has been outfitted with new shelves and paint and is ready for the equipment to be installed!*

to operate this system.

Individuals 18 and older can sign up for this opportunity by emailing [jim.boratko@whfirstchurch.org](mailto:jim.boratko@whfirstchurch.org). Individuals between 14 and 18 can sign up with permission from their parents.

## Unity Green Work Group Update

First Church's Unity Green work group has been meeting regularly with a community team to plan West Hartford's Juneteenth celebration (June 19-20, 2021). A community picnic, mural unveiling, and performances by local artists and students are among the events scheduled.

On Sunday June 20, Rev. Erica's sermon will reflect on an 1812 sermon by Rev. Nathan Perkins, "The National Sins and National Punishment, in the Recently Declared War" in which Perkins denounces five sins – including intemperance, war, and enslavement – that are the result of a violent society. These historic admonitions provide somber realization of how much our national personality has changed.

We will hold a special dedication of the renaming of our historic green after worship. We hope that Unity Green becomes a symbol of community transformation and partnership in the decades to come. Please join us! Contact Barbara Lewis, Judy Schmitt, or Jennifer deSimas with questions.

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Rev. Erica Wimber Avena, Interim Senior Pastor  
Rev. Amie Stuart Giguere, Acting Associate Pastor  
Rev. Susan Izard, Minister of Spiritual Life  
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

  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](http://www.whfirstchurch.org)

**DUE DATE for TIDINGS:** The next deadline is **MAY 14th**, for the **JUNE** issue. Please send items to Joy Taylor: [joy.taylor@whfirstchurch.org](mailto:joy.taylor@whfirstchurch.org)

**DUE DATES for SUNDAY NOTES & eNEWS:** Submissions are due each Tuesday by noon to Suzanne: [suzanne.nardi@whfirstchurch.org](mailto:suzanne.nardi@whfirstchurch.org).

## MAY REACH OUT:

Community Partners in Action mission focuses on behavioral change and advocates for criminal justice reform.

Their employment, basic needs, reentry, and recovery services work together to reduce recidivism, enhance public safety, and inform policy – all at a fraction of the cost of prison.

Statewide, they serve thousands of men, women, and youth each year. Their programs help participants learn to think differently and to make better choices. The programs help participants to address their personal and basic needs as they prepare to become employable, re-engage in their education and stabilize their families. They also grow by giving back to their communities.

For more information or to donate: <https://cpa-ct.org/our-work>  
Community Partners in Action, 110 Bartholomew Avenue, Suite 3010, Hartford, CT 06106

Thank you for your support.



## 235 Items Collected!

### Bikes & Bags a Great Success!

Thanks to the generosity of members of our church community and West Hartford, one hundred eighty duffel bags, carry-ons, backpacks and totes were donated on April 10, to be distributed and divided between Ädelbrook and The Bridge Family Center.

Fifty five bikes were donated for the Hartford Rolling Anvils Bike Team of the Ct. Cycling Advancement Program. And while all that was happening on that beautiful day, two carloads of food were received for Loaves and Fishes and the West Hartford Food Pantry. Thanks everyone!

– The Outreach Team

**Next date for Drive By / Drop Off  
Food Donation Program:  
Saturday, May 15, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
in the Church Parking Lot.**

## The Academy Garden Needs Your Help!

This month, our children will be transplanting seedlings that were started in their classrooms. Before we can get these veggies in the ground, our soil needs some help. We've weeded and tilled but definitely need some good soil to add to the plot. If anyone has any bags of planting soil they could donate, we'd be so appreciative. All of our classes have been learning not only about the life-cycle of plants, but about the value of having good insects visit our garden like the praying mantis, aphids, and bumblebees.

All of us at the Academy have been learning about "The Marigold Effect." A marigold is someone who protects you, helps you thrive, and encourages your growth-similar to what marigolds in a garden do for vegetables and other plants. It is important to recognize the marigolds in our life! We'd like to plant protective marigolds in our garden and would welcome a flat of colorful marigolds! If you have any items you'd like to donate to the Academy Garden, contact Dawne Quinn.

Thank you for helping us continue to bloom!  
Dawne Quinn, Education Director  
First Church Academy for Young Children  
860-232-2106  
[www.firstchurchacademy.org](http://www.firstchurchacademy.org)





## Intergenerational Camp!

*This year's theme for Vacation Bible School is  
"Be Loved. Be Kind. Be You."*

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!

With social distancing restrictions, this year's program will take a different format, and is an opportunity to engage the whole family! For 2021, this will be an evening program, one night a week for around six weeks. VBS-er's of all ages are invited to join us, as this will be an intentionally intergenerational program with opportunities to explore spiritual practices and engage in worship together!

The Faith Formation Work group has not set a date yet, and is looking for your input. Please fill out the survey on our Summer programming to guide our decision!

**Survey URL: [bit.ly/21SummerSurveyFC](https://bit.ly/21SummerSurveyFC)**

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to Lauren Dube, Minister for Children and Family Ministries at [lauren.dube@whfirstchurch.org](mailto:lauren.dube@whfirstchurch.org).



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

Jennifer deSimas, Library Director: [jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org](mailto:jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org)  
 Karla Grafton, Assistant Librarian: [jpwebsterlib@whfirstchurch.org](mailto:jpwebsterlib@whfirstchurch.org)  
 General Inquiries: [jpwebster@whfirstchurch.org](mailto: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.

## Ongoing Services

- Reference and reader's advisory services by phone and email
- Curbside service 2-3 p.m. on Mondays, and by appointment
- Device advice to talk you through your gadget's cyber issues
- Church Archives access for researchers
- Place a hold over the phone, or via the JPWL online catalog

## Search our catalog

We are adding new books and resources (nonfiction, fiction, children's and more) every week.

For the protection of our patrons and staff, all materials are quarantined for three days after they are returned, per American Library Association guidelines, and might not be available to check out. Thank you for understanding.

## 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. Their next book is *The Remarkable Ordinary: How to Stop, Look, and Listen to Life*. Frederick Buechner reflects on how both art and faith teach us how to pay attention to the remarkableness right in front of us, to watch for the greatness in the ordinary, to use our imaginations to see the greatness in others and to love them well. "Walk alongside Frederick Buechner as his memories and experiences show the little moments of grace in the daily routines and terrible surprises of life" (review, *A Pilgrim in Narnia*) Pick up your copy at the JPW Library Mondays from 2 to 3 p.m. or by appointment.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT** led by JPW Library Director Jennifer deSimas, meets at 5:30 p.m. on May 6 to discuss Louise Erlich's *The Night Watchman*. "Based on the extraordinary life of the author's grandfather who worked as a night watchman and carried the fight against Native dispossession from rural North Dakota all the way to Washington, D.C., this powerful novel explores themes of love and death with lightness and gravity and unfolds with the elegant prose, sly humor, and depth of feeling of a master craftsman." Join the discussion! Books are available at the JPW Library Mondays from 2 to 3 p.m. or by appointment.

## Tired of Zooming? 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. Please register on CCB to join and to receive updates about our walks. Contact Jennifer with questions: [jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org](mailto:jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org).

## "Mom, when can we go back to the JPW Library?"

As First Church staff considers the procedures for post-pandemic meetings, events, and worship services, the JPW Library also is preparing to welcome patrons back to our stacks, children's corner, and reading room. Once the building's doors are open, we hope to be able to allow up to 12 people (including library staff) in the reading room. We will continue to adhere to church and State of CT guidelines regarding safely gathering indoors and in-person, and we will stay informed about updates to the guidelines. Thank you again for your patience as we move through this emerging situation.



## New Book Drop is Here!

We are excited to announce that we have installed a new exterior JPW Library Book Drop near the Rotunda. Patrons will no longer need to journey through our 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 safely to our patrons.



*Prototype of our new Book Drop.*

### 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; and 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. Sundays).

*How is the JPW Library handling returned materials?*

For the protection of our patrons and staff, all materials are quarantined for three days after they are returned, per American Library Association guidelines, and might not be available to check out. Thank you for understanding. Staff who handle the materials follow safety protocols, including cleaning the area properly.

# Livestream Video System Update

Since the congregational vote affirming the installation of a new state of the art video streaming system and audio system, a lot of work has been underway!

We've completed the contract with DNR Laboratories, the firm who will be doing the installation for us. The initial deposit has been made, and the equipment has been ordered. Jim Boratko met with Don Gamsjager, the owner of DNR, and walked through the installation plan. The tentative installation date is the first week of May.

## WHEN YOU COME FOR WORSHIP, WHAT CHANGES WILL YOU SEE?

We've been extremely mindful of the aesthetics of the space, and have tried to make the equipment as hidden and unobtrusive as possible. With that in mind, here's what to expect:

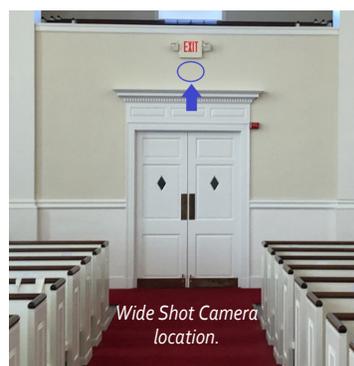
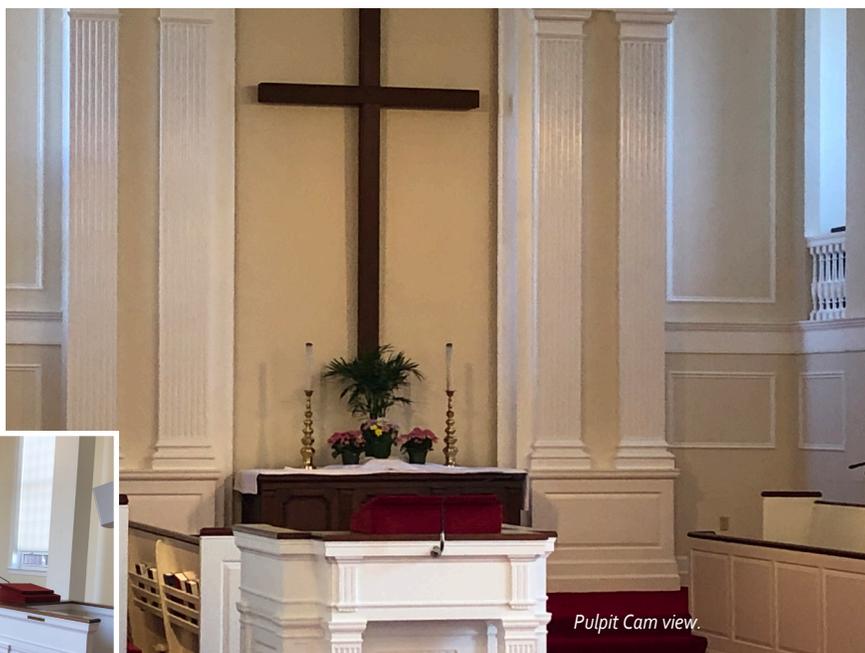
There will be a total of six cameras and four microphones installed. The first one we'll talk about is the Pulpit Cam, which will be installed on one of the pillars. It will be a remote PTZ (Pan, Tilt, and Zoom) camera for the primary purpose of focusing on the pulpit, bell tables, piano and the action down front. The camera will be white, so it will match the trim of our Meeting House.

The next camera is the Lectern Cam, which is another PTZ camera with a number of purposes. It can rotate and look to the back doors of the church (think about the view for when the bride comes down the aisle for a wedding), and then turn completely around to focus in on the front of the altar where the minister accepts the weekly offering, and anywhere in between.

The third camera will be our Wide Shot Camera, the view that we will use for times when specific action isn't happening down front (during hymns, preludes, etc.). This is a PTZ camera that will have the ability to zoom up 30 times to the front of the altar.

## FLEXIBILITY & CREATIVITY

What about the times when the choir sings from the balcony? Or the Trombone Choir plays from there? What about times when we have dancers and Colossal Puppets? There will be a fourth camera that will be movable within the Meeting House. It will be on a tripod and can be used for those types of circumstances.



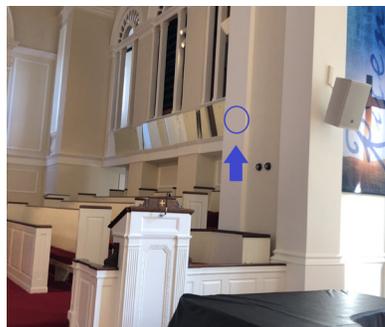
Finally, there will be two fixed cameras near the organ console, one pointing down on the manuals (keyboards) of the organ, and the other is the Pedal Cam. Given the popular interest in these perspectives for our online services, we decided to include two low cost cameras in the system so these views will continue to be used for worship

services as well as recitals.

All of these cameras will be managed "remotely" behind the scenes from the newly customized Video System Control Room – thank you Mark Swanson and Jim Warner who revamped what was previously a closet. This means we won't have traditional camera operators blocking views or obstructing worship.

I would be happy to conduct a tour of the equipment and its capabilities once it is installed and operational. You can also view a narrated version of this progress report with additional information on our YouTube channel.

–Jim Boratko, Director of Worship Arts





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12 South Main Street  
West Hartford, CT 06107



## Celebrate Susan with The Jolly Beggars!

On Sunday, May 23rd a concert with The Jolly Beggars Celtic band will be held on the labyrinth. Also at this time, we will be celebrating Rev. Susan Izard's long ministry at First Church (26 years)! There'll be music and socializing (to the extent possible per Covid-19 regulations in place at that time) from 5 to 6:30 p.m. All are welcome! Bring your lawn chair and mask! If it rains, we will gather in the Meeting House.

## Yoga

Our yoga classes have been continuing on Zoom! Since they are virtual, there is no space limitation and you can come at any time. 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@deepeacect.com](mailto:nancy@deepeacect.com) or 860-521-8186 to get the links or if you have any questions!

## Weekly Bible Study:

Tuesdays, from 6 to 7 p.m. via Zoom. For more information, Jennifer deSimas at [jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org](mailto:jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org).

## Church School

Sunday school classes will continue to meet at 10 a.m. Sunday mornings via zoom. Reach out to Lauren at [Lauren.dube@whfirstchurch.org](mailto:Lauren.dube@whfirstchurch.org) for the link!

Our asynchronous lessons will continue as well, with special "worship-at-home" opportunities for our families! Please reach out to Lauren for the link to our virtual classroom.

## West Hartford in NY Times

West Hartford has made national news – again – and for good reasons – again! Often showing up in the media and surveys as a vibrant, appealing place to live, this time when featured in a *New York Times* article, a photo of Lauren and the kids was also featured! Go to [NYTimes.com](http://NYTimes.com) and search "West Hartford."