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first church

WEST HARTFORD

TIDINGS

JULY/AUG 2021 • NEWSLETTER • WWW.WHFIRSTCHURCH.ORG • 12 SOUTH MAIN STREET, WEST HARTFORD, CT • 860-233-9606



Season of Transition

A church's season of pastoral transition is a time when we have the opportunity to ask some deep questions about history, identity, leadership, partnerships and vision. I joined you in this process on March 1, 2020, just as the pandemic was beginning. As I write this the Pastoral Search Committee has yet to announce their choice for a settled minister, but I know that that time is not far off. They have been working steadily in this faith filled process and First Church has much to recommend it to an incoming minister.



Rev. Erica Wimber Avena speaks at the dedication of West Hartford's Unity Green, June 20, 2021. Behind her are Vice President of the Concerned Parents of Color, Geeno Gordon, President of the organization Adrienne Billings-Smith, who first approached First Church about renaming the town's green, Barbara Lewis, former historian of First Church West Hartford, Dottie Stone – a direct descendent of Timothy Goodman, the former namesake of West Hartford's town green and JPW Library Director Jennifer deSimas.

I have informed the church leadership that I will conclude my ministry with you on Monday, August 2. I will make my own transition to the role of Interim Senior Minister of the South Glastonbury

Congregational Church beginning September 1 where I will follow the Rev. Dick Allen who is retiring from that congregation after 33 years of service. For now, I will continue to support the church in planning for robust ministries this fall.

I have mixed feelings as I announce this. It has been a joy to work with this congregation, and to learn about your ministries, both today and in the church's long history. Due to the pandemic I feel I have missed the opportunity to get to know this congregation in a "normal"

Erica, page 2

Worship with us! Worship in the Meeting House with us live (or livestream) at 9 a.m. thru Sept. 5, or watch on YouTube anytime.

JULY 4

Communion Sunday
Mark 6:1-6a
"The Prophets' Anxiety"
Rev. Erica Wimber Avena

JULY 11

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19
"Be Lifted Up"
Rev. Amie Giguere

JULY 18

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56
"Healing Past, Present, and
Future Generations"
Rev. Erica Wimber Avena

JULY 25

Ephesians 3:14-21
"Rooted and
Grounded in Love"
Rev. Erica Wimber Avena



AUGUST 1

Communion Sunday
John 6:24-35
"The Bread of Life"
Rev. Erica Wimber Avena

AUGUST 8

Ephesians 4:25-5:2
"Copycat"
Rev. Amie Giguere
AUG. 15, 22 & 29 TBA

Brief Instructions for Viewing Livestream Services

On Sunday mornings around 9 a.m., go to our YouTube channel (link: First Church, West Hartford - YouTube). You should see our video for this Sunday's service first in our content. While the service is streaming live, you will be able to chat with others. After the service ends, the video will be available.



Church Family News

- In our prayers: Doey Barnett and her family on the death of her husband **Jeff Barnett** on May 21, 2021.
- In our prayers: Brenda Worth and her family on the death of her mother **Kathryn Dreher** on May 27, 2021 at age 99.
- In our prayers: Carolyn Lind and her family on the death of her husband **Peter Lind** on June 10, 2021 at age 95. A celebration of Peter's life will be held on Sept. 1, at First Church.
- 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.

Erica, from p. 1

environment. I'm still meeting people in person I did not get to know on zoom, and we are all still adjusting to the "new normal." Nevertheless, the transition work has continued and I have every confidence that the congregation is ready to welcome new pastoral leadership. We have been able to use the pandemic for additional reflection on our ministries and attention to the church's online presence.

I am grateful for all of you who have pulled so hard together to get us through in this challenging season. In addition to excellent lay leadership, I have felt tremendous support and encouragement from the entire congregation and community. This is shaping up to be a great moment to prepare to welcome an incoming Pastor as the pandemic restrictions ease and we re-engage with one another in person. Indeed, all things seem to be working together for good -- for those who have faith. (Romans 8:28)

It has been an honor to serve among you; may God bless you and keep you.

Faithfully yours,
Rev. Erica Wimber Avena
Interim Senior Pastor

Office Staff Summer Hours

The church office staff will be holding in-person office hours on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. during the summer. The rotunda door will be unlocked during the day for visitors. Suzanne, Lisa, and Sarah look forward to helping you!

Worship at 9 a.m. and Keep Cool This Summer!

Summer 2021 adjustments to worship include a change in worship time on Sunday! **Sunday worship will be at 9 a.m.** instead of at the usual 10 a.m. in the Meeting House from July 4 to September 5th. This will allow us to achieve several ends:

- Maintain Livestream opportunities for those who cannot gather in person
- Allow us to appreciate the Meeting House, the organ, the piano, etc.
- Plenty of room for everyone
- By worshipping earlier in the day we hope to avoid the worst of the summer heat

10 a.m. worship time will resume on Homecoming Sunday, September 12, 2021.

From the Moderator

Hello everyone,

As you already know from email, letters, and in this issue of Tidings, our Interim Senior Pastor, Rev. Erica Wimber Avena, is leaving in August to move on to another church who needs her knowledge, wisdom, and facilitation skills; not to mention her new found tech savvy. For many of you, due to the pandemic restrictions, you may not even have met Rev. Avena in person! Such an odd time in our lives. I'm certain this was not her idea of an Interim assignment but she handled it superbly, along with the church staff we pivoted to remote services, added a mix of video and outside material to our worship experience, and guided into the 21st century technology-wise, prepping us for live-streaming worship.

We will miss Rev. Avena, but wish her success, fulfilment, and joy in her future interim ministries and then we step forward to see our next chapter. As we await the recommendation from the Search Committee for a new Senior Pastor, and before we move-on we really should look back and see how far we have come as a faith community. 2020 was a difficult year but there were many accomplishments, Rev. Avena's understanding of what a church in transition needs, and how best to respond to those needs was invaluable. I think it is safe to say "we couldn't have done it without her."

As I write this today, the Coordinating Team and others have already begun a search for a short-term Interim, or "bridge" minister to see us through until we call a new settled Senior Pastor. Please watch for updates in Sunday Notes, Tidings, and other communications from First Church.

On Sunday, August 1st, after worship in the Meeting House, we will celebrate Rev. Avena's time with us and send her off with our thanks and appreciation for all of her faithful guidance over the last 17 months. I hope to see you all then!

-Eleanor Wight, Moderator

Fill a Backpack!

Covenant to Care: The backpacks are coming...the backpacks are coming! It's hard to believe we are thinking about "back to school" already! Look for a backpack to take and fill for one of our Covenant to Care children starting on August 1st. There will be age/grade appropriate suggestion cards included with each backpack. Backpacks are due back to church by August 22nd! Your support is greatly appreciated.

-Janice and Carole

Memorial Services

A number of our families were prevented from celebrating the lives of loved ones who died during the months of the pandemic when gathering and traveling were prohibited. As of now, upcoming Memorial services will include:

Frances Thompson, July 6, 10 a.m.

Daniel George, July 9, 3 p.m.

Dorothy Goodwin, July 24, 11 a.m.

Louise Johnson, July 30, 10 a.m.

Joanne Day, July 31, 11 a.m.

Peter Lind, Sept. 1, 11 a.m.



Join Us for Free, Live, Outdoor Music This Summer!

JULY CARILLON SERIES

First Church is excited to host its annual Carillon Concert Series on Thursdays this July from 6 - 7 p.m.! Bring a lawn chair, bring a blanket, bring a picnic, grab a spot on the rock wall or the labyrinth and enjoy a free concert from our Stearns Carillon! Light refreshments will be provided. Our carillon concerts happen rain or shine - if weather doesn't cooperate, patrons can enjoy the carillon music from the comfort of our Meeting House pews.

AUGUST SUN IS SHINING SERIES

Come join us on the church lawn for our August concert series! Bring some good dancing shoes for some high-energy jazz, funk, rock, and more. All performances are from 5 - 7 p.m. on Tuesdays (rain date the following Thursday, same time). All concerts are free of charge and donations to the West Hartford Food Bank will be gratefully accepted.



Performers announced on www.whfirstchurch.org and other social media!



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Rev. Erica Wimber Avena, Interim Senior Pastor
Rev. Amie Stuart Giguere, Acting Associate Pastor
James Boratko, Director of Music Arts
Lauren Dube, Student 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 [f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [v](#)

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

We celebrate 2021 Confirmation Class (front row, with corsages), shown with mentors and teachers on June 6, 2021. Congratulations Joey Carbone, Emily O'Keefe, Andrew Chang, Andrew Sarzen, and Connor Mayr!

Search Committee Update

The Senior Pastor Search Committee will continue to meet regularly through the summer months. We will review Ministerial Profiles as they come to us from the Southern New England Conference, interview candidates whose qualifications most closely align with our needs, and arrive at decisions through discernment and consensus. While our Zoom sessions have offered convenience, we look forward to meeting face-to-face as well!

We are grateful for your prayers, the continued ministries of our congregation, and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

With thanks and peace,

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

DUE DATE for TIDINGS: The next deadline is AUGUST 14th, for the SEPTEMBER 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.



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>

We are open!
Stop in and see us
We have plenty of new books
fiction, biographies, children's, and
more!
Monday - Thursday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m. - 12 noon

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wallace Stevens, Spiritual Poet

September 16, 23, 30, 7:00 p.m.

Join us (in person) as distinguished Wallace Stevens scholar Glen MacLeod (Professor Emeritus, UConn Department of English) presents an exploration of spirituality in the work of the Hartford poet.

JPWL Used Book Sale

September 24-25, 9:00-3:00:

There will be plenty to browse through at our late summer used book sale!...Discards & Donations...Secular and Spiritual...Adults' and Children's...Rain or Shine. We will accept donations of newer (10-15 years old), gently used books September 11-19. The sale will run Friday-Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. both days. On Friday, purchase a bag for \$10.00 and fill it with books. Bags are \$5.00 on Saturday. All proceeds from the book sale will go to the Hartford Public Schools Literacy Volunteers program. The sale will take place in the parking lot unless it rains – we'll use the Auditorium in case of rain.

ABRAHAM: Out of One, Many

October 5 – November 16

Art Exhibition at the Mandell Jewish Community Center

A timely artistic exploration on living harmoniously, inspired by Abraham, the common ancestor of three celebrated contemporary artists of Middle Eastern heritage from Muslim, Christian, and Jewish traditions. Hosted in collaboration with Hartford Seminary, the JCC, the Episcopal Diocese of CT, and the Connecticut Council for Interreligious Understanding.

Sacredly Created and Wholly Loved:

Kaitlin Curtice, October 21, 7 p.m.

Indigenous (Potawatomi Nation) storyteller and poet Kaitlin Curtice (NATIVE: Identity, Belonging and Rediscovering God) reflects on how today's Christians must help lead the way to peace and reconciliation, learning from the world and the creatures in it -- learning from the least of these -- about what is holy and beloved. Virtual event.

Nativity Narratives in Matthew and Luke:

A Dialog Amy-Jill Levine and John Dominic Crossan,

December 5 and 12, 5 p.m.

Join us as two esteemed Biblical scholars discuss the beloved Gospel story. Virtual event.

Join us for a Monday Morning Meander!

Join JPWL staff each week in July for a Monday Meander at 8:30 a.m. We'll walk around and about West Hartford and nearby parks, meeting in different places each week - please watch for updates in Sunday Notes and on Facebook, or contact Jennifer: 860-232-3893 or jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org.

Stained Glass Window to Be Restored

Do you remember Greystone Church? First Church's fourth building, it was a Gothic-style stone church built in 1882. It had a turret on its northern side. Some 60 years later Greystone Church was destroyed by a fire -- a "spectacular blaze," according to then Rev. Eldon Mills.

The fire damage was extensive, but three stained glass windows survived. Two are kept in the JPWL's Archives and one has been hanging in the library reading room for many years. Recently the window on display began bending out of its frame, and the brittle, aged lead between the glass pieces began to crumble. Library Director Jennifer deSimas contacted Stained Glass Resources in Hampden, MA about restoring the cherished window. Jennifer will be transporting the window to the facility this summer, where it will be completely re-leaded and a custom frame will be made for it.

We are grateful to have the resources from the Crofut endowment, among others, to pay for this restoration, and to allow us to continue the important work of the JPWL.

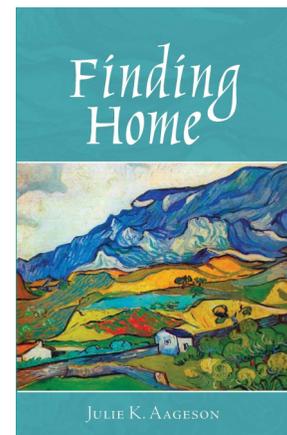
Summer Book Discussion Planned

Monday, July 26, Noon-1:30

Join Rev. Amie Giguere (First Church's Acting Associate Pastor) and Ms. Lauren Dube (Yale Divinity School Student and First Church's Student Minister for Children and Family Ministries) for a summer book discussion in the JPW Library.

The group will discuss *Finding Home* by Julie K. Aageson. "Finding Home offers luminous, grounded wisdom from a luminous, grounded writer. Aageson invites us into a journey of spiritual reflection upon the things that matter most--relationship, story, divine indwelling, vocation, generosity, gratitude, failure, and those pesky questions of meaning underlying them all" (online review).

Books are available to check out from the JPW Library. We hope to offer both in-person and Zoom participation for this event.



Unity Green Dedicated On June 20



Adrienne Billings-Smith and Dottie Stone – a direct descendant of Timothy Goodman, the former namesake of West Hartford's town green – cut the ribbon for the official dedication of Unity Green on June 20, 2021. At left is Vice President of the Concerned Parents of Color, Geeno Gordon, and First Church Music & Arts Director Jim Boratko.



photos courtesy of Gerry deSimas, Amy Melvin, and Joy Taylor



Rev. Avena, Adrienne Billings-Smith, Town Council member Carol Anderson Blanks.

Hunger Doesn't Take Vacation

Drive by Drop off (DBDO!) Food Collection will continue throughout the summer on the second Saturday of every month.

**July 10, August 14, Sept. 11
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

UCCMA Concert

The United Church of Christ Musicians Association (UCCMA) holds a biannual conference of great workshops and worship experiences. One of the highlights of the conference is a concert featuring local artists near the hosting location. The conference was to be held in Glastonbury from July 8-10. Unfortunately, this year the conference needs to be held virtually due to the pandemic, including this remarkable concert.

The artists for this year's concert include:

- Chorus Angelicus and Gaudeamus, the award-winning children's chorus and its adult counterpart, directed by Dr. Gabriel Lövfäll.
- The Hockanum Valley Ringers, a premier handbell choir conducted by Lawrence A. Berdensley.
- Voices of Freedom, a gospel choir lead by the Rev. Lisa Clayton
- The Paul Winter Consort, the seven-time Grammy award winning artist, along with cellist Eugene Freisen, vocalist Theresa Thomason, and musician Jeffrey Boratko

This concert will be available to the general public for the nominal cost of \$10. You can register to access this concert through the UCCMA website (go to the STORE page). -Jim Boratko





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WEST HARTFORD

12 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107



SUMMER REACH OUT:

MIRACLE LEAGUE OF CONNECTICUT

The Miracle League of CT provides opportunities for Connecticut's children with physical and cognitive challenges to participate in recreational, educational and cultural activities in an accessible, nurturing and noncompetitive environment where families can come together to cultivate new friendships and experience the joy of play. In addition to baseball activities, the Miracle League sponsors the *I Can Bike* program in conjunction with the West Hartford Leisure Services Department that teaches children with special needs how to ride a two-wheel bicycle over the course of a one-week camp. Miracle League 68 South Main Street BSMT 100, West Hartford, CT. Email: info@miracleleaguect.org

INTERVAL HOUSE CT

Interval House provides 24-hour hotline(s), safety planning, crisis counseling, emergency safe housing, support groups, criminal and civil court advocacy, information and referrals, community education and outreach as well as programs for the children of clients.

Interval House has made a positive difference in the lives of more than 225,000 women and children (and a small percentage of men) that have experienced psychological and physical abuse at the hands of a domestic or intimate partner. The nonprofit organization strives to prevent and break the cycle of abuse. On site, their cri-

sis counselors are available to meet with the women upon arrival. Comprehensive domestic violence services are offered to clients free of charge.

Interval House P.O. Box 340207, Hartford, CT 06134-0207
www.intervalhousect.org

Church School

This summer the Church School moved from a virtual platform to an in-person one! For Summer programming, the Church School started meeting on the Front Lawn before worship for fun games, arts and stories! Compassion Camp also started last month on the front lawn, and is an opportunity for all of our congregants to learn more about compassion through meditation, worship and games. Both of these activities will continue through July 21st, so you are invited to join us!

* Please note that the Church School will meet at 10 a.m. this summer – *after* worship.

Blessing of the Backpacks & More

During worship on Sunday, August 29, we will set aside some time to bless all of the backpacks for our children returning to school later that week. We'd also like to include all students (regardless of age) as well as teachers and anyone/everyone else!

Please bring your laptop, its case, and/or your briefcase, lunch bag or whatever you carry with you to work or school and together we'll bless them and one another.