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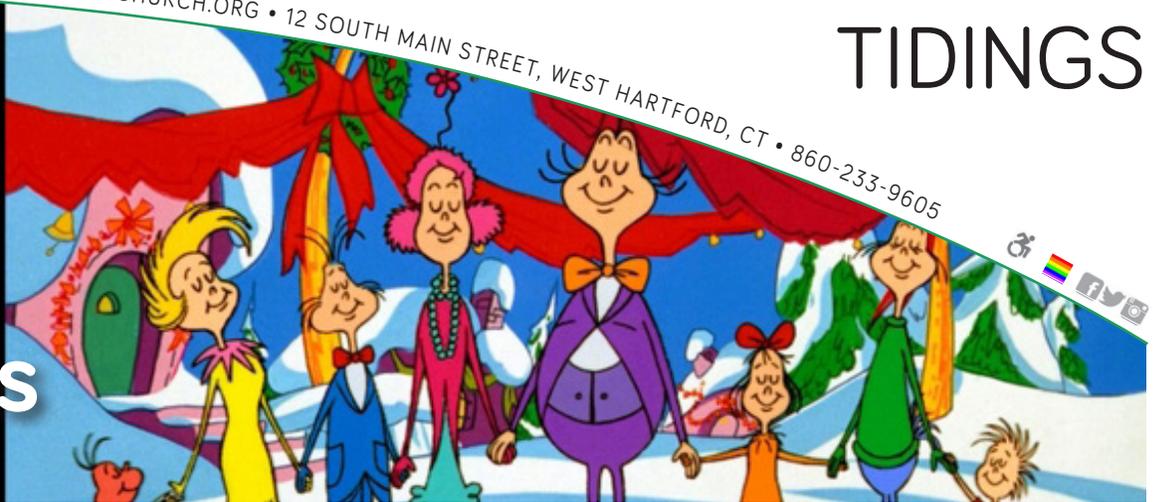
first church

WEST HARTFORD

TIDINGS

DEC. 2020 • NEWSLETTER • WWW.WHFIRSTCHURCH.ORG • 12 SOUTH MAIN STREET, WEST HARTFORD, CT • 860-233-9605

The Weary World Rejoices



How will you prepare a way for the Christ child in this final month of 2020? How will you rejoice, as we conclude this year when so many have struggled? As I write this in November, the COVID-19 metrics reveal that Hartford county is in "active or imminent outbreak," otherwise known as "in the red." At the same time there is news that a vaccine may become available in the early months of the new year.

Shall we raise a glass that is half empty or half full? Shall we take a cue from the Whos in Whoville as portrayed on the "Grinch who stole Christmas," and rejoice this Christmas despite what's missing?

Our theme for Advent 2020 is "The Weary World Rejoices" because although so much has been taken from us by the pandemic, beginning with the loss of loved ones to COVID-19, our faith invites us to place our hope beyond our experience of loss. This is not a season of hopelessness. This year may be the year when commercialism

does not overtake us, and we have occasion to reflect on the deeper meaning: the gift of the Christ child, born in Bethlehem to Joseph and Mary. And the nature of the hope that humanity has received in the form of Jesus of Nazareth.

One of the most beloved carols frequently sung on Christmas Eve is "O Holy Night" which says in part: "a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious dawn...fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices, for Christ is born..."

I am certain that God's providential care is with us even in ways that are outside of our awareness. Join us at First Church as you are able this season, the church has many important (and safe!) offerings this month – mostly online. Although the year has been one of fearfulness and struggle, Christmas is coming, and we have the greatest hope. Pssst...pass it on ;)

Christmas Blessings,

Erica

The Reverend Erica Wimber Avena, Interim Senior Pastor

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

<p>DECEMBER 6 Advent 2 Peace Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 Amie Giguere "The Weary World Rejoices in Peace"</p>	<p>DECEMBER 13 Advent 3 Joy John 1:6-8, 19-28 Erica Wimber Avena "The Weary World Rejoices in Joy" 5 p.m. Taizé</p>	<p>DECEMBER 20 Advent 4 Love Luke 1:46b-55 Erica Wimber Avena "The Weary World Rejoices in Love" 5 p.m. Celtic Lessons and Carols</p>	<p>DECEMBER 24 Christmas Eve John 1:1-14 Erica Wimber Avena The Weary World Rejoices in a Holy Night</p>	<p>DECEMBER 27 Christmas 1 Lauren Dube</p>
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Church Family News

■ Church member **Dorothy Goodwin** died on November 11. Her family plans a memorial service for her in the spring of 2021 with interment of her ashes in the church's memorial garden.

■ Church member **Rose Done** has asked for prayers for herself and her colleagues. Rose is a nurse, and they have had an uptick of Covid-19 cases on her floor at Hartford Hospital.

■ **Elizabeth Hall Illingworth Strelau** (Betty), 105, of Chester, died on November 13. Her daughter is Susan Strelau Tobin. Services will be held at a later date.

■ 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.

Christmas Fund

The Christmas Fund — formerly known as “Veterans of the Cross” — has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to their lower-income retirees.

Over the past nine months, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergency financial needs of many who serve the church have increased dramatically.

“Your generous support will be a blessing to servants of the church old and young, retired and active, lay and authorized.”

For more information or to donate:

www.pbucc.org/index.php/christmas-fund-home

Thank you for your support.

Reach Out Donations

Each month the First Church Outreach Team designates collections for a worthy organization of their choice.

Should you wish to add to our collection, please send in your check to the church and include “Reach Out” in the memo or make your donation online or through CCB.

If you wish to donate to a different cause, please send the payment directly to that organization. They will provide you with the proper tax documentation.

Lisa R. Reed, Business Manager

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.

From the Moderator

If November is considered the month associated with giving thanks, December is the month of waiting and anticipation. In reality, I hope you are giving thanks every single day. And I hope you excitedly await how the actions you take – no matter how big or small – are preparing the way for miraculous changes to happen.

The general meeting November 12th of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA) is one such example. Last year, our church signed on as a founding member of GHIAA. At this year's general session in November using Zoom technology, more than 600 screens (many with two persons) were tuned into the legislative discussion about specific actions to address social justice issues here in Connecticut. We are thankful to find and participate with so many partners in this work and we are excited to see that change is possible!

Similarly, members of the congregation have learned much more this year about the history of enslavement of persons in our community and state. We can support ideas for using the green-space in front of the church to ensure persons experience West Hartford as a welcoming community for all. We give thanks for this opportunity and anticipate something – we are not sure specifically what – will develop in the coming year.

In November, many church members expressed thanks by freely and generously ensuring food donations continued to flow into Loaves and Fishes, Covenant to Care, and the town pantry. In December, we can also participate in the Share-a-Gift tree to bring excitement to 42 children with holiday gifts. (See the church emails to learn how to sign up online.) Although this may be a time of physical isolation to protect our health, we can participate in the drive-through drop-off donation events so that we can express our thanks for our good fortunes and can keep the excitement of anticipation alive in others.

We each can do something. We are putting our faith into action. By doing so, we are making our community a better place. Give thanks, and anticipate something good is indeed breaking through. Although December may be a month of anticipation, what are we waiting for?

Steadfastly,

Judy Schmitt, Moderator



Volunteer Nancy Ball was part of a group that decorated the Meeting House for Christmas! Several helpers were on duty to “Deck the Halls” on November 28th, following Covid-19 protocols. Please pay attention to online services all month to see the final product!

Updates from the Search Committee

The Senior Pastor Search Committee met twice in November, with a focus on editing and proofreading the church profile. Once the results of the congregational survey are in, we plan to include them in the profile. Please be sure to complete your survey. Your views are very important in this process.

Our committee also began to look at a tool recommended in the profile template called "Welcoming Diversity Inventory." It is a self-assessment and asks questions about our perceptions, attitudes, and values as a way to reflect on how diversity is expressed in our structure,

worship, visuals, educational materials, and events. If you are interested in looking at it yourself, you can find a copy of the Welcoming Diversity Inventory on the Southern New England Conference, United Church of Christ website:

www.sneucc.org/files/files/documents/mis-missionjustice/welcoming+diversity+-+an+inventory+for+congregations.pdf

Our plans also include a meeting with our Moderator, Judy Schmitt and Vice-Moderator, Eleanor Wight for a conversation about next steps.

Thank you for your trust and prayers.

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



Steadfast in Promise: Keep it Up!

Thank you! Many of you have responded to the invitation to pledge your financial support for the coming year. Over half, to date, have done this online:

www.whfirstchurch.org/donate/pledge/

and others by mail. We appreciate every pledge received. Our goal is to maintain last year's level of contribution. However, at the time of this writing, we have received considerably fewer pledges than at the same time last year. We thank Bob Calef, Lisa Abel, and Bob Sitkowski for their personal messages of endorsement. Erica and Amie have reminded us about the scriptural foundations of generosity. We urge everyone to pull together so that we can sustain the work and mission of the Church. Be looking for weekly progress updates in the Sunday Notes.

With gratitude,

Don Clark, Jeff Mitchell, Julia Rosa, Judy Schmitt, Eleanor Wight, Erica Avena



STOCK PHOTO

Live Nativity!

First Church will be hosting a Live Nativity on Saturday December 19, 2020 from 1-4 p.m. on the front lawn. A tableau depicting the scene of the most holy of nights will be a lovely way for us to mark the week leading up to Christmas. There will be church members dressed in costume, live animals (including a camel, 2 sheep and more!), and a Soundcloud recording of the story with musical accompaniment (accessible on your cell phone using a QR code). You're encouraged to bring ear buds or ear phones, along with your cell phone, if you wish to enjoy the audio portion of the experience. All will be required to wear face masks and observe six feet between household groups. Please contact Amie Giguere at amie.giguere@whfirstchurch.org right away if you'd like to participate.

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



Drive-by,
Drop Off

THANK YOU!



Your on-going participation continues to be appreciated! Please bring non-perishable food donations to the church parking lot, near the Rotunda entrance, any of the following dates:

Mondays, 2-3 p.m. December 12th and January 9th, 10 a.m.-12 noon. Supporting West Hartford Food Pantry and Loaves & Fishes.



Wreaths will be donated in honor of, or in memory of, a loved one. The wreaths cost \$25.00 and will be hung on the doors of First Church during the season of Advent. The deadline is **Thursday,**

December 17th.

Please Place Order Online at
<https://bit.ly/ChristmasDonations2020>

If paying by check, please fill out this form and make checks payable to First Church with "Poinsettia" on the memo line.

Given by: _____

Dedication ("in honor/loving memory of..."): _____

Daytime telephone: _____

Email address: _____

Poinsettias

Poinsettias are available for \$18.00 per plant. The deadline for placing orders is **Thursday, December 17th.**

Please Place Order Online at
<https://bit.ly/ChristmasDonations2020>

____ This poinsettia will be used to brighten the holiday for another.

____ I will pick up on Monday, Dec. 21st at the rotunda during the JPWL curbside pick up from 2 to 3 p.m.

____ Delivery available if needed.

If paying by check, please fill out this form and make checks payable to First Church with "Poinsettia" on the memo line.

Given by: _____

Dedication ("in honor/loving memory of..."): _____

Email address: _____



Anyone wishing to donate to the **Organ & Carillon Reserve Fund** may do so by **ordering online at** <https://bit.ly/ChristmasDonations2020>, or by filling out and returning this form to the Church office with your donation. If you wish to have your donation listed in the Sunday bulletin, please make your contribution by **Thursday, December 17th.**

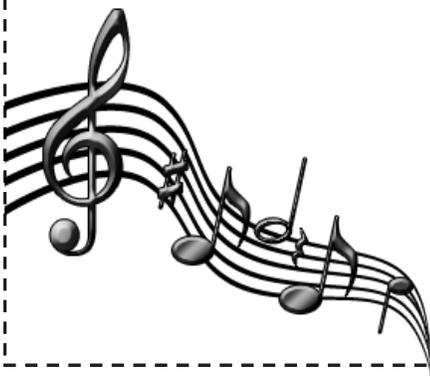
Given by: _____

Dedication ("in honor/loving memory of..."): _____

Daytime telephone: _____

Email Address: _____

Please make checks payable to First Church with "Carillon" on the memo line.



Goodman Green is Now Known as Unity Green

As a result of meetings held earlier this year about the green-space in front of the church (generally known as Goodman Green based on the name of the 1747 donor), a congregational meeting was held November 29th to endorse "Unity Green" as the new name.

Barbara Lewis, Jennifer deSimas and Judy Schmitt are the church representatives on a small community working group which includes Adrienne Billings-Smith (Concerned Parents of Color West Hartford), Roszena Haskins (West Hartford Public Schools) and Tracey Wilson (town historian). In addition, Matt Hart (West Hartford Town Manager) helps with town government actions (such as safety, traffic, and landscaping issues).

The group wrote a vision narrative to guide us towards the goal of a welcoming space: "Unity Green will inspire conversation, collaboration, contemplation and celebration of what community means by telling the stories of the land, acknowledging the past, and embracing the diverse and rich culture of West Hartford."



The expectation is to share this vision with others in the community and to connect in ways that facilitate community discourse on how to make Unity Green a special place for all.



Above: File photo of the Goodman Green. Inset: Zoom meeting on November 29, 2020 to vote on renaming the green to Unity Green.

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: Mary Jane Foster, Interval House. Marcia Watson, Covenant to Care. Sara Wilson, Journey Home. Barbara Shaw, Hands on Hartford. Allison Petrie, Loaves and Fishes.



News From Your Covenant to Care Team: Hats & Mittens Drive!

The Annual Hat and Mitten Drive is underway and will continue through the end of the year. Marked boxes will be available in the Narthex to collect your donations. If you continue to worship from home, we will be happy to pick up your donations from you. Any new or used winter outerwear or clothing in good condition is welcome.



Thanksgiving Baskets Were Filled!

Our food collection for Thanksgiving baskets was a success and we thank all of you who helped fill them for our families in need. -Janice Carter Hall, Carole Carter



DUE DATE for TIDINGS: The next deadline is **DECEMBER 14th**, for the **JANUARY** 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>

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

The JPWL continues to offer the following services throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic:

- Reference and reader's advisory services by phone and email
- Curbside Service Hours Change: Due to the onset of cooler weather and the shortened days, the JPWL is changing their curbside pickup procedures. Curbside service will now be 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

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

Crofut Café Moves to Zoom

The tradition of pre-worship breakfast in the JPW Library on the first Sundays of the month started in October, 2018. JPW Library staff began offering a light breakfast to help families get out the door on Sunday mornings, and to showcase this lovely and welcoming space and all we offer. The event quickly evolved when a crew of volunteers signed on. Soon we were serving full breakfasts with (real) maple syrup, little pats of butter, gluten-free options, and cloth tablecloths. The event was affectionately named the Crofut Café after the library's benefactor, Ms. Florence Sidette Marcy Crofut, whose generous bequest in 1978 allowed the establishment of the JPW Library. My, how we love our Crofut Café, and I like to think Ms. Crofut would have heartily approved!

Since the onset of the pandemic, we've missed this festive gathering, as we miss so many other First Church fellowship events. So, in a recent JPWL Work Group meeting, we decided to offer a trendy alternative: ZOOM lunch, or Crofut Café on Zoom.

Join us during your lunchtime on two December Wednesdays (December 2 and December 16) from 12-1 p.m. for lunch and chit-chat. The Zoom link for these events will be shared in Sunday Notes

Join us again Friday evening, December 11 from 5-6:00 for the Crofut Cocktail Hour ("cocktails" being any festive, wet drink, including a glass of chocolate milk, a cold Sunny D, or a Margarita. Please: Don't drink and drive). If you'd like, bring us a favorite Christmas story or family tradition to share. You could even decorate your tree while you schmooze at the Crofut Cocktail Hour. The Zoom link for this event will be shared in Sunday Notes.

New at the JPW Library!

Do you love doing jigsaw puzzles? How about a hygge (Danish for intentional, cozy fun) evening gathering around a board game? For many of us, wintertime means board games and puzzles – per-

haps even more so this year. And the JPW Library can help! We now have jigsaw puzzles and board games available to check out. Browse our online catalog to see our inventory, suitable for children and adults, and call or email the library to reserve one. You can pick up your game or puzzle during curbside service. These materials will follow our usual three-week loan period.

Advent Study

Jennifer deSimas will be leading an Advent Study via Zoom at 7 p.m. on Monday evenings in December. Using short videos and readings from Amy-Jill Levine's *Light of the World: A Beginner's Guide to Advent*, we will explore connections of the Gospel stories to the Old Testament; the role of women in first-century Jewish culture; the importance of Mary's visitation and the revolutionary implications of Mary's Magnificat; the census and the stable; and the star of Bethlehem and the flight to Egypt. Join us Monday, November 30 for our first session. Register <https://bit.ly/AdventJPWL>.

JPW Library Book Groups

AWAKENING THE SPIRIT meets every Monday at noon, and is led by Minister of Spiritual Life Susan Izard. Their next book is *Thomas Berry: A Biography* by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Andrew Angyal. Berry (1914–2009) was one of the twentieth century's most prescient and profound thinkers. As a cultural historian, he 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.

Books are available at the JPWL. To join this discussion, contact Jennifer deSimas, Library Director.

THE FOOD FOR THOUGHT book group's next meeting is Thursday, December 3 at 5:30 via Zoom to discuss *Nothing to See Here* by Kevin Wilson. Our next book is *The Vanishing Half: A Novel* 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, it's not just the shape of their daily lives that is different as adults, it's everything: their families, their communities, their racial identities. Many years later, one sister lives with her black daughter in the same southern town she once tried to escape. The other secretly passes for white, and her white husband knows nothing of her past." Books are available through the JPWL.

Advent Devotionals are available at the curbside pick up, or call to arrange receiving your copy!

Mark Your Calendars . . .

■ The Living In Spirit Lecture with Civil Rights Activist Dr. Bernard Lafayette: January 17, 5 p.m.

Lenten Series w/John Dominic Crossan:

■ February 18, 7 p.m.: The Crucifixion of Jesus

■ February 25, 7 p.m.: The Resurrection of Jesus

Academy News

November was a month filled with gratitude:

■ Grateful for warm days that allowed for more outdoor time - nature walks around the church, time with the leaves, exploring nature, climbing and digging, and watching our pumpkins turn to mush in the garden!

■ Grateful for the generous donations by Academy families to the First Church Food Drive.

■ Grateful for teacher conferences held via phone or Zoom, an invaluable time for teachers to share the children's growth and development with families.

■ Grateful for the continual support of our families as we operate under stressful conditions.

■ Grateful for a staff that understands and loves children and is 100% committed to providing the best care around!

We look forward to the adventures and joy December will bring!
Dawne Quinn,
Education Director
First Church Academy for Young Children



The Weary World Rejoices! You are Invited

Please share photos with us and we will share these images on social media. You may send photos and scans (as JPG or PDF files. Smart phone photos are fine as well) to Joy.Taylor@whfirstchurch.org, with subject: Advent Photos. Our four themes are below, and we are open to all seasonally appropriate images! Please send photos from your own collection and include your name, and the name(s) of the people in the photo when appropriate.:

HOPE, due November 26 at noon

PEACE, due December 3 at noon

JOY, due December 10 at noon

LOVE, due December 17 at noon

BONUS THEME: NATIVITY, send anytime after December 1 (Photos of your favorite nativity scene or crèche)

We look forward to seeing your photos and we hope you have fun with this as we approach an unusual Advent season together.

-Joy Taylor and Amy Melvin



Church School News

Advent Boxes

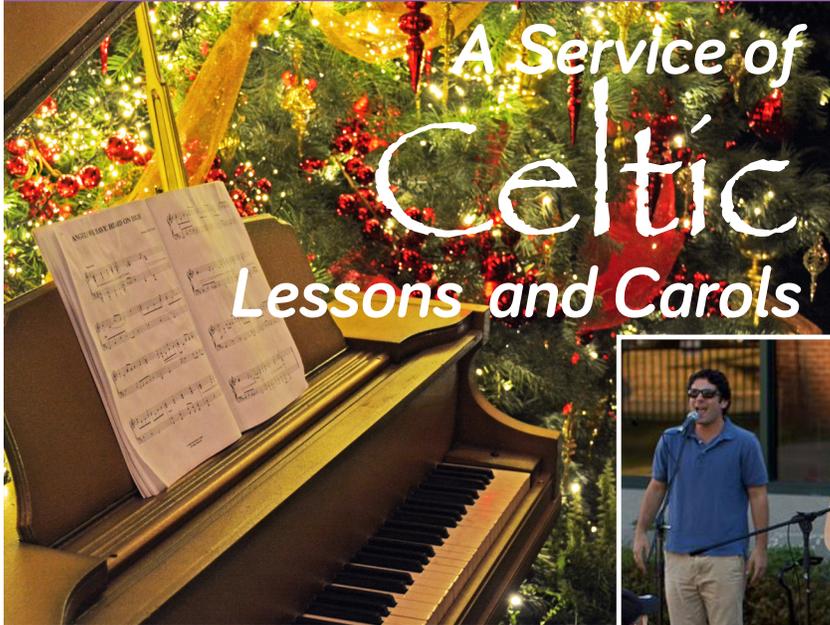
Sunday school classes will continue to meet at 10 a.m. on Sunday via zoom. Reach out to Lauren for the link!

Our at home lessons will continue as well, with special "worship-at-home" opportunities for our families! Advent boxes are available and will contain all the materials for these activities, as well as other crafts, games and coloring pages to prepare for Christmas. Please reach out to Lauren Dube to receive a box and the link to our virtual classroom.



first church
WEST HARTFORD

12 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107



This December 20th at 5 p.m., please light a candle at home and join us for a Celtic Christmas Service. Hear the Christmas Story. Sing along with traditional Celtic Carols, and listen to glorious music! Featuring The Jolly Beggars Celtic Band with Margaret Izard, soloist.



Taizé

Worship Services
DECEMBER 13



Taizé and Celtic worship services, led by Rev. Susan Izard, will continue to be recorded live in the Chapel and aired via our YouTube channel. Watch for notices via email, Facebook, and our website.