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Living in Spirit • Committed to Service • Open to All



first church

WEST HARTFORD

TIDINGS

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

“So that the righteous might not stretch out their hands to do wrong.”

The quote above is taken from Psalm 125:3, one of the scripture readings used in our Black Lives Matter prayer walk. What does it look like when the righteous do wrong? Among other things, it may look like:

- Racial profiling
- Redlining
- Segregated public schools
- Disproportionate numbers of people of color in the prison system
- Systemic racism which has been handed down through the generations – so insidious that white people of otherwise good will, by and large may easily spend most of our time unaware of it.



Psalm 125 reassures us that when we walk in faith, trusting in God, we will not be led to commit injustice. Faith holds humility and purpose together with what God is doing in our own lives and in the

wide world. This is a great moment to lean into the issues of our day and to give ourselves permission to go deeper in prayer, study, and reflection.

As the calendar turns to summer and we continue in this season of pandemic and protest, here at First Church we are also seeking to move ahead with managing the transition between settled Pastors. These are very separate events, requiring different responses from each of us. Nevertheless, each of these areas requires us to take a step back and re-evaluate what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how we will move forward compassionately and purposefully – on so many levels.

What are the values of faith that are important to you? How are you reclaiming the moral high ground? Who are the companions that you have, and that you will need on your spiritual journeys?

Psalm, page 2

Please worship with us online on Sundays, and join live Zoom “cyber coffee” time at 11 a.m. Links are here: https://bit.ly/FC_Sermons

<p>JULY 5 Fourth of July weekend Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 Amie Giguere preaching “Unforced Rhythms of Grace” Virtual communion service during coffee time</p>	<p>JULY 12 Susan Izard preaching</p> <p>JULY 19 Romans 8:12-25 Erica Avena preaching “Beyond Compare”</p>	<p>JULY 26 Romans 8:26-39 Erica Avena preaching “All Things Work Together for Good”</p> <p>AUGUST 2 Matthew 14:13-21 Amie Giguere preaching “Miracle Moment”</p>	<p>AUGUST 9 Romans 10:5-15 Erica Avena preaching “Say the Word”</p> <p>AUGUST 16 Guest preacher</p>	<p>AUGUST 23 Silver Lake Sunday Erica Avena preaching “Bear hunt” in worship for children of all ages</p> <p>AUGUST 30 Erica Avena preaching Back to school Blessing of backpacks/laptops</p>
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Church Family News

■ Happy 50th Anniversary to **Joel and Lynn Huntington!** They were married on 7/7/70, by the lake at Joel's family's house at Columbia Lake in Columbia, CT. Their daughter Susan Kint wanted to surprise them with this greeting, and says "I wasn't there, of course, but from the pictures and what I've been told it was a beautiful day."

■ Long time church member, **Ellen Fisher**, passed away Feb 28.

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

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

Psalm from page 1

Being part of a worshipping community is one of the best things you can do for your own spiritual well being, and the well being of your family.

You will see many opportunities to be involved here at First church in this newsletter. Join us!

Summer blessings,

Erica

The Reverend Erica Wimber Avena, Interim Senior Pastor

In-Person Worship

The church leadership is paying close attention to the recommendations for in-person worship when we are able to resume. If you are interested in looking at some of this information a few of the sites we have found helpful are:

<https://www.sneucc.org/coronavirus>,

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/community-faith-based/faq.html>

<https://coronavirus.churchmutual.com/resource/safely-returning-to-worship/>

Pandemic Voices

Since mid-March, we have given special attention during the Time for Prayer in each worship service for concerns related to the pandemic. During August, we will take that practice a step further!

We are making space in each service to hear from church members about what the experience of the pandemic has been like for them. Examples of who we will interview: parents who are being challenged to take on the role of educator, health care workers, grocery store workers and maintenance/custodial staff who are on the front lines, teachers who have had to shift to distance learning and volunteers who are doing their best to lend a much-needed helping hand.

We want to hear about what each are seeing and doing during this difficult time, and learn how we can continue to pray with and for them. If you or someone you know would like to be interviewed, please reach out to Pastor Amie amie.giguere@whfirstchurch.org.

DUE DATE for TIDINGS: The next deadline is AUG 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.

From the Moderator

First Church leadership currently is focused on supporting four major initiatives within our church: discerning the future direction of our church, searching for our next settled Senior Pastor, providing appropriate oversight to the First Church Academy for Young Children in this pandemic time, and determining when to start using First Church's building for worship, programs and gatherings of all kinds while maintaining safe practices and social distancing.

And, if these four issues were not enough, we now have the added desire to discern how we, as a faith community in the center of West Hartford, respond to the call for social justice. What does our faith in God ask of us – and even demand of us? In this season of pandemic and protest, as Erica refers to this time, she encourages (admonishes?) us to "work together, where we are, to make a change."

If the events of the past few weeks or the past few months have opened your heart and galvanized your desire to live your life with having your faith guide your actions, then now is the time to find at least one thing each day that supports your view of Jesus and justice.

Our pastors, our staff and our leadership teams, are all providing us with opportunities to examine our Christian teachings and to put our faith into action: Movie discussions, book groups, sermons, food collection, rally support, and monetary donations to organizations that are working towards a just society. These are all opportunities that allow us to act. Beyond First Church's suggestions, the UCC offers a perpetual desk-top calendar called *JustAct, the 3 Great Loves Daily Action Calendar* (www.uccresources.com/products/justact-calendar-365-daily-actions). But where do we start? We pray. We listen. And we act. – *Judy Schmitt, Moderator*

Transition Workgroup Formed

The Interim time provides an opportunity for First Church to look back and acknowledge where we have been on our journey and to look forward to envision where we want to be in the future.

Working under the guidance of our Interim Senior Pastor, Rev. Erica Wimber Avena, a new workgroup – the Interim Transition Workgroup – will be taking a realistic, though not necessarily painstaking, look into our First Church history which will provide us an opportunity to acknowledge our growth and transformations. They will look back at challenges we've faced in the past and acknowledge lessons learned. The 2015 Forward in Faith document will be one starting point. Additionally, and most significantly, through a survey and/or small group discussions, they will gather our congregation's perspective on who we are and where we want to be in the future.

The group will develop goals for the congregation's transition season which we will present to the First Church Coordinating Team before beginning any moves toward implementation. The work of the group will be completed at the end of the Interim term.

The group members are **Rev. Avena, Lisa Bugos, Ed Lennig, Jimmy Quinn, Wendy Wigglesworth, and Eleanor Wight.**

Reflecting on where we've been, and looking ahead, will prepare us to welcome our new settled Senior Pastor with fresh ideas of where we want to stretch our congregation and what we feel is important for our future in faith! As we now know from recent experience, our world changes very quickly and with it our First Church priorities and responses may also change. We look forward to sharing energizing and insightful conversation with all First Church members and friends. – *Eleanor Wight, Vice Moderator*

Outdoor Carillon Series Starts July 9th

The annual summer carillon series is on for July! Here is our list of recitalists and performance dates. All concerts will be on Thursday evenings (weather permitting) from 6-7 pm. Bring a chair or blanket AND your own refreshments to the lawn of the church in West Hartford Center. We ask family groups to space out 6 feet apart to practice social distancing.

7/9 - Ellen Dickinson, a past performer at our church, will be back for an encore performance! Ellen is the College Carillonneur at Trinity College in Hartford, Director of Bell Programs at Yale University, and co-artistic director of Music on the Hill. As a composer, performer, and teacher, she creates space for people to feel the joy of playing, hearing, and learning music.

7/16 - Tatiana Lukyanova – Tatiana was born in Leningrad, Soviet Union, and lived in the Netherlands. She has a Masters Degree in physics and is an author and concert performer.



7/23 - Paul Butler – Local carillonneur Paul Butler is no stranger to recital attendees at First Church. He has performed for our series on multiple occasions, and frequently conducted tours of the carillon following recitals in the past. (Sorry, not this year due to COVID-19 limitations.)

7/30 - Jon Lehrer - Jon has performed numerous concert tours spanning Europe and North America, has been a frequent guest artist at the annual North American Carillon Congresses, and has performed the

Cast in Bronze theatrical carillon show on the Mobile Millennium Carillon at Renaissance festivals across the US. In 2018 he served as Carillon Fellow at the carillon of Bok Tower Gardens, one of the premier carillon destinations worldwide.

In 2008 Jon graduated with great distinction from the Belgian Royal Carillon School 'Jef Denyn' where he studied with Eddy Marien, Geert D'Hollander, and Koen Cosaert.

Sun Is Shining Series: Coming to a Screen Near You in August

The Sun Is Shining Series in August on Tuesday nights has become a tradition in the last few years. We are happy to announce that it will continue this year, although it will not be held outdoors in front of the church on the labyrinth. Instead, we will be livestreaming the event from our Facebook page on Tuesday nights at 5:00.

Tentative line up:

8/4 - Ed Fast and Congabop

8/11 - 1974

8/18 - Dan Liparini Jazz Group

8/25 - Still Kicking and the Big City Horns

Please watch for precise details, updates and changes on our website and Facebook page in August.



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



On behalf of First Church, a total of \$450.00 was contributed to the Celebrate West Hartford FUNd RUN. Over all, with a "Run Apart, Give Together" theme, \$12,000 was raised and will be divided between the West Hartford the Town that Cares and Leisure Services Scholarship Fund. Thank you.- The Outreach Team.

This poem by Rev. James Gordon Gilkey was hand-lettered by Alice Cook from the original publication of the November 26, 1951, issue of "Advance." Alice Cook was a First Church member and long-time religious educator who died at the age of 93 on April 14, 1999. She was the aunt of Barb (and Charlie) Goodwin.

If You Stand Very Still ...

If you stand very still in the depths of a wood
You will hear many wonderful things:
The snap of a twig, the wind in the trees,
The whirl of invisible wings.

If you stand very still at a difficult hour
And wait for silence within,
You then will be led in wisdom and strength
Through a world of confusion and din.

If year after year you keep inwardly still
God will bring you the help that you ask.
In the silence God gives, you will find what you need –
God's wisdom, and God's strength for each task.



The poem inspired the following prayer,
written by Charlie Goodwin, dated February 10, 2000.

Help us to take the time to quiet our
minds,

To listen carefully and caringly to each
other,

To listen NOT just to the words and in-
formation offered.

Help us to listen more deeply to hear the
personal beliefs and values.

The personal wisdom and faith that
each one of us as individuals

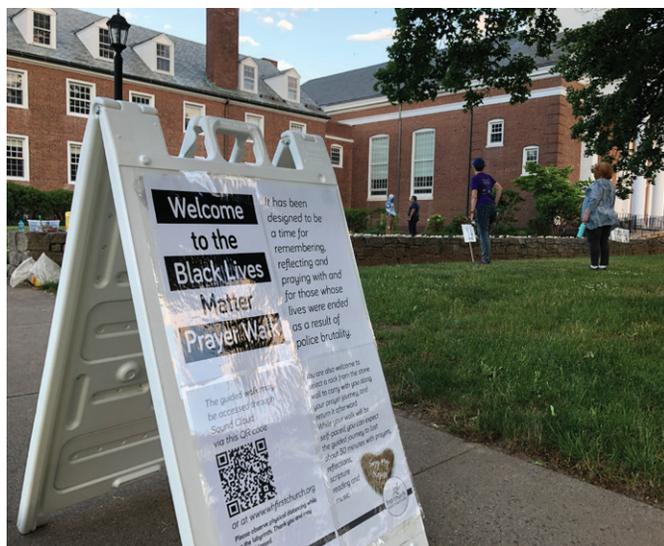
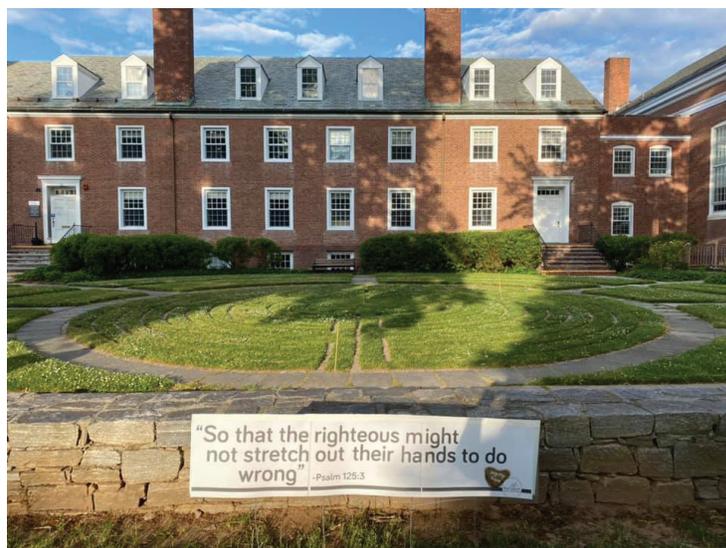
Brings to this group and the community
that is First Church.

Rev. James Gordon Gilkey, "Advance" – November 26, 1951 (lightly edited for 21st century communication)

Black Lives Matter Prayer Walk

How do we respond faithfully to the death of George Floyd on May 25 and the many and varied protests which have followed? This question was pondered by the group gathered for cyber coffee and conversation on May 31. A collaborative effort during that next week resulted in the creation of the Black Lives Matter Prayer Walk being offered on our labyrinth. Our youth and their leaders wrote many names of victims who were killed as the result of police brutality. Those who participate in the prayer walk are invited to select a rock, and symbolically accompany that person as they travel along listening to prayers, reflections and scripture reading with music in between. The recording is accessible by using a QR code made available on site, or through the link on our website. Those who have walked have reported that it is such a meaningful and touching experience.

One participant exclaimed that she hoped everyone would take the time to participate! Even if you are unable to make it to the labyrinth, the Soundcloud recording is available wherever you are. There is so much to process; so much to pray about. We invite you to begin the journey toward understanding, healing, reconciliation around issues of racism so that we might take strides toward those outcomes. We expect that the Prayer Walk will be available throughout the summer.





Class of 2020 - Salute to Seniors

Thank you to all who participated in the car parade on June 10 to honor and celebrate our high school and college graduates! It was a lovely (albeit VERY windy) evening. The creativity and enthusiasm of church members was very much appreciated by our graduates and their families. We wish them all of God's blessings as they begin the next chapter of their lives!

First Church Scholarship Awards

First Church has been awarding scholarships for many years. However, this year the process was refreshed. Each applicant completed an application form, submitted their high school transcript and wrote an essay demonstrating involvement in the church, particularly in its service and mission life. The applications were re-

viewed by **Kelly Munroe, Ryan Mannix, Wendy Wigglesworth and Amie Giguere**. On the evening of the Salute to Seniors, First Church was able to award scholarships for three of our high school seniors: **Corinna Chang, Robert Schunder and Dasha Sitkowski**. These three young people really impressed us with their applications! Each was able to articulate not only what this church community has meant to them, but also how they each have set the intention to put their faith into action in the world.

- Corinna wants to "be a catalyst for change" as she studies Environmental Science at William and Mary;
- Robert intends to share the spark of God's love and grace as he studies Finance at Bryant College;
- Dasha is excited to uplift the uniqueness of each person as she prepares to be a Special Education teacher at The University of Hartford. Congratulations all!

GHIAA Update: Please join the discussion on July 9th

In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, people of faith and conscience seek to take action. GHIAA (of which First Church is a founding member) is an organization founded on eradicating systemic racism through actions.

On June 12, 2020, GHIAA's Clergy Caucus supported Hartford residents in their demand of Hartford's Mayor, Deputy Chief of Police and the President of the Hartford Police Union to reinstate the Civilian Police Review Board and to make the process of filing complaints against police transparent and responsive. You can find a full reporting of this action in the June 12, 2020 *Hartford Courant* story "Clergy March in Hartford Friday, Calling for Police Accountability as Mayor Agrees to Fly Black Lives Matter Flag Over City Hall."

Over the summer, our J.P. Webster Library will be offering a book discussion group, and a traveling sermon series, (G)race Speaks. They are also exploring racial justice training opportunities for the fall.

In addition, your GHIAA Core Group invites you to a one-hour Zoom Meeting from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 9, 2020 so we can discuss our intentions about what it means for us as peo-



ple of faith to understand and meaningfully confront racial injustice. Please register for this Zoom meeting <https://whfirstchurch.ccbchurch.com/goto/forms/80/responses/new> by Wednesday, July 8. You will receive details on how to join the meeting in response to your RSVP.

We look forward to seeing you!





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

Staff Hours: Monday-Thursday, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
JPWL Archives are open by appointment. **The Library will be closed to the public, until further notice.** Please stay in touch! 860-232-3893, jpwebster@whfirstchurch.org
Jennifer deSimas, Library Director: jpwebsterdir@whfirstchurch.org
Karla Grafton, Assistant Librarian: jpwebsterlib@whfirstchurch.org   

When Will the JPWL be Open?

The many questions we've received about the JPW Library re-opening are heartwarming. We're pleased to provide a service that you'd like to see resume!

At this time, we are actively discussing when to reopen as we meet with Coordinating Team members, church staff, and the JPW Library Work Group. Through these discussions, it has become clear that our resources may not allow an immediate return to the same levels of service we once provided.

Here are some of the things that need to be addressed before we can reopen in a way that is safe for both visitors and staff:

- Secure adequate Personal Protection Equipment for library staff and visitors
- Place possible limits on the number of people in the building
- Place possible limits on the amount of time visitors spend here
- Redesign or adapt spaces where people interact face-to-face, such as check-out desks
- Plan for disinfection of shared surfaces multiple times during each work day

We are hopeful to return to BC ("Before COVID-19") practices, but are mindful of the need to make radical changes that will significantly alter some of the things you love most about the JPWL, such as cookies, conversation, and coffee. But rest assured that while we work to figure out the new practices, we will continue to help you by phone or email, and will continue to expand "no-contact services" such as curbside service and virtual programming.

While libraries received the State's permission to open during Stage Two of the reopening plan, the JPWL will not open until we have adjusted the environment to make it safe for all, and have the full support of the church staff and the Coordinating Team. Please check for updates in Sunday Notes, and on the First Church website!

Curbside Pick-Up

The procedure was outlined in the June Tidings and is simple. Contact us after you find what you'd like to borrow at <https://jpwebster.biblio.org/eg/opac/home>. Please call us for assistance.

(G)race Speaks

Let's do some safe travelling together this summer - virtually!
Wednesdays July 1, 15, and 29 at 3:30

The pandemic has created a new opportunity for us to visit other churches and hear other voices. We're able to get a glimpse of what is happening in communities beyond West Hartford and hear how people of faith are thinking about their circumstances.

In "(G)race Speaks," we are pausing in this moment to visit and listen in to voices we would otherwise not be hearing. Erica Avena and Jennifer deSimas will put together a guided trip and invite you to join the journey. All you need to do, at your leisure, is to visit our chosen destination and then join the Zoom gathering the following

Wednesday for afternoon tea at 3:30. Sign up for the discussion via our website or Facebook Event page.

First Church READS

As we dig more deeply into understanding race in the United States, we invite you to a six-week, church-wide book discussion. *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo is an "actionable exploration of today's racial landscape that offers straightforward clarity that readers of all races need to contribute to the dismantling of the racial divide." Books are free to use (you may purchase one for \$10, if you wish) and will be available via JPW Library pick-up. To join the group, please email us or register via our website, newsletter, or Facebook page.

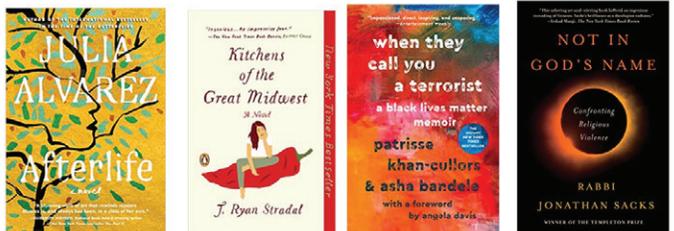
Device Advice

Do you find yourself struggling with Zoom, or hesitant to even try using it? Does the online church directory at My First Church confuse you? If you are having trouble using Zoom, navigating the JPW Catalog, accessing the My First Church directory, or creating your own Facebook page, Jennifer and Karla are available to help you. Contact us: 860-233-3893 or jpwebster@whfirstchurch.org

Black Lives Matter Resource List

The JPWL and First Church Staffs have created a list of resources to jumpstart conversations about Black Lives Matter with different age groups, including adults. You can find the list on our website. Items are available at the through curbside pick-up.

Adult



Tween





Children



Drive-by, Drop Off



July 28 and August 1st
August 25 and August 29
September 22 and 26

Your participation is needed now, more than ever! Please bring non-perishable food donations to the church parking lot, near the Rotunda entrance, any of the above Tuesdays and Saturdays, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. each collection day

Shopping List

These items are most needed at this time:

- ✓ Canned fruit/applesauce
- ✓ Cold cereal-non-sugary varieties
- ✓ Canned Tuna
- ✓ White rice – 1 lb. packages
- ✓ Baked Beans & Other Canned Beans
- ✓ Canned Pasta with meatballs
- ✓ Pasta Sauce
- ✓ Peanut butter – 16 oz. to 18 oz. jars
- ✓ Canned hash
- ✓ Macaroni and cheese (boxed)
- ✓ Canned soup
- ✓ Granola bars
- ✓ Tissues
- ✓ Toilet Paper
- ✓ Toothpaste

All donated items will be delivered to the West Hartford Food Pantry and Loaves & Fishes for their Meals to go. If you want to help, but are unable to come to the church, but want to contribute, please call an Outreach Team member to make arrangements:

Jenny Clark: 860-402-4851

Dottie Stone: 860- 521-0554

Ginny Vocelli: 860-205-1794

THANK YOU!

What Are You Making?

We hope you are finding time for spiritual nourishment, perhaps that means praying, making music, making art, baking, volunteering, or learning something new.

Please share what you have made, learned, performed or read by emailing photos to joy.taylor@whfirstchurch.org.

Let us know if we have permission share them on the church social media pages. Thank you.

Treasures & Hearts

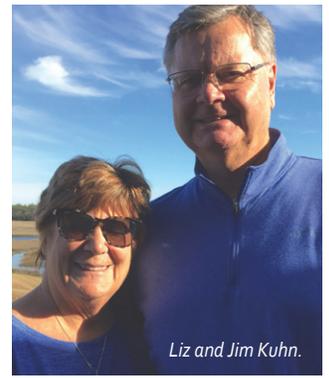
I was raised in the Catholic church where I was baptized, confirmed and married. Shortly after our youngest daughter was born, my husband Jim and I decided we needed to search for a new Church home. We visited several churches. Since Jim had attended the Congregational Church in Manchester where he grew up, we decided to visit South Church in Granby (where we were living at the time). We had good friends who were members and they highly recommended that we visit. We found South Church to be very welcoming and it offered many opportunities for young families. We became members in 1986. Geordie Campbell was the senior minister.

Fast forward many years and a few moves and we are living in Bloomfield. (We later moved to West Hartford.) It was time to find a new church. Geordie had since moved to First Church West Hartford so it was an easy choice to consider joining there. Not only was the minister a personal friend and wonderful preacher, but we found the congregation welcoming, the music wonderful and the range of opportunities to become active in the church many and varied. We had found a new church home. This was in 2008.

Over the years, Jim and I have served on several boards and participated in a range of activities. I was on the JP Webster Library board for many years, including serving on the committee overseeing the renovation project. I have participated in the Monday book group with Susan Izard, and the monthly book group Jennifer facilitates. I find the church library to be an incredible gift to our congregation and the wider community. It is a treasure which has provided many worthwhile, thought-provoking and informative programs. It is so much more than books, CDs and magazines.

I continue to help serve lunch through the Loaves and Fishes program when I am available. Jim and I both enjoy helping with the Festival of Trees each December. We have participated in the Gather Round the Table dinners. We enjoy coffee hour where we can catch up with church friends. Although we now spend several months in North Carolina, First Church continues to be our home church. Whenever we return after being away it feels like coming home. The opportunities for spiritual growth, personal growth, socialization and ways to contribute to the wider community are unlimited.

Although we greatly miss hearing Geordie preach each Sunday, we look forward to what a new minister can bring to First Church. A wonderful place can only get better. – Liz Kuhn



Liz and Jim Kuhn.

Men's Fellowship

Join the men of First Church for a time of sharing, lively discussion, and supporting one another and our church. We usually meet each month in the JP Webster Library for coffee and an occasional guest speaker. Because of the pandemic we have been meeting via Zoom again. For more information or the Zoom link to the next meeting, contact Joseph Tobin at 860-916-1923 or jmtobin@gmail.com.



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WEST HARTFORD

12 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107



Church School News

Our Church School will continue to meet online Sunday mornings at 10 am throughout the summer. Lessons will follow the lectionary, and will be an adaptation of the Action Lab originally planned for Vacation Bible School. Students will learn faithful ways of being in community, building authentic and empathetic relationships and making change through the organizing process. Students will also intentionally and explicitly learn about the 13 guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter Movement during these lessons.

Check ins will also continue on Tuesday and Thursday Mornings at 10 am. Over the summer, students will meet with different guests and will be guided through different spiritual practices, ranging from music, to knitting to campfire sing-alongs. If you are interested in being a guest, please reach out to Lauren at Lauren.dube@whfirstchurch.org.

- 7/5: No Sunday School
- 7/12: Listening to our Neighbors
- 7/19: Telling our Stories
- 7/26: Research Project
- 8/2: Power and Change: Part 2
- 8/9: Taking Action: Part 1
- 8/16: Taking Action: Part 2
- 8/23: Evaluate and Celebrate!
- 8/30: Building and Celebrating Community: Part 2

You are invited to join the Bible Study group as they finish their exploration of the book of Genesis on July 12 and begin reading Exodus on July 19. Led by **Jim Warner**, the group meets via Zoom Sunday mornings at 10. For more information, please contact Jennifer deSimas at 860-232-3893.

**BIBLE
STUDY
FROM
HOME**

Yoga classes are open to all

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@deepeacect.com for links and fees.