



Sunday Notes

December 24, 2023



Looking Towards Sunday

Hello loved ones,

A few thoughts about Christmas Eve 2023...

First, I'm not sure that I've ever felt as settled during this frenzied, frenetic time of the year. See what I did there? A little play on words in celebration of our relationship as pastor and people. No? Okay then, moving on.

Secondly, Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday every five or six years (the variance depends on Leap Year). Whenever it does, a small segment of the congregation will be disappointed or frustrated. Which is to say that it's impossible to please all of the people all of the time. I promise you, this year we've tried to create two enticing evening worship experiences. Depending on your situation and schedule, you can choose between 4:30 p.m. (festive, family-oriented service featuring a walk-on Christmas pageant) and 9:00 p.m. (quiet, contemplative service, featuring lessons and carols). Christmas Eve is observed all day, of course; but we decided to forego morning worship. If that turns out to be a misstep, we'll try again in 2028!

Lastly. It took several years of attempting and falling short before I realized that "preaching" on Christmas Eve is a troublesome proposition. The trouble is that a sermon is no substitute for the story itself. When Christ comes down to earth from heaven -- love incarnate for us all -- the faithful thing to do is get out of the way. I'll say more (but not much more) when I see you.

Love you madly,
Rev. Fredd

Light the Steeple

Our steeple this week was lit by:

The Abel family in loving memory of Marion Trout, their Grammy and Gigi.

Bob and Jane Cave in loving memory of their parents.

Susan Ross in loving memory of Josephine Mary Bush.

Holiday Closures

- The office will be closed on Monday, December 25 for the holiday. The office will also be closed on December 26 and 27 due to scheduled electrical work. We will be back in the office on Thursday, December 28.
- The JPW Library will be closed December 26-January 2. See you in 2024!

With Sorrow

Sadly, Glenna Burnett passed away on November 21, 2023. A memorial service will be scheduled in the new year. To view her obituary, click [HERE](#).

Upcoming Events

Please join us for the following Christmas Eve Services at First Church! Click [HERE](#) for more information.

December 24 – Fourth Sunday of Advent, *Love* – We will have 2 Christmas Eve Services of Lessons and Carols

4:30 p.m. – Festive Service with a walk-on children's pageant (in-person only).

9 p.m. – Contemplative, candle-light service (live-streamed and in-person).

*(Please note there will be no 10 a.m. worship service on Dec. 24 and there will not be a service on Christmas Day, Dec. 25.)

Coffee and Conversation - Wednesdays at 10 a.m.

Join Rev. Fredd and friends at the Hartford Baking Company in West Hartford Center for coffee and conversation!



Ring in the New Year with Colossal Mary and Joseph!

They're Baacck! The Colossal Puppets of St. Michaels Church (Litchfield) are returning to First Church Sunday, December 31 for the 10 a.m. service! Come see this collection of massive shepherds, angels, kings (both good and bad), and the Holy Family as they march throughout the Meeting House. It's a memorable way for children of all ages to commemorate the end of the Christmas season and look forward to greeting the New Year. Want to get involved? Volunteers are needed for the following:

- Assembling/preparing the puppets Tuesday, December 26 from 2 to 4 p.m.
- Puppeteers for the December 31 worship service. This involves rehearsing on Saturday, December 30 from 10 to 11:30 a.m.
- Disassembling and transporting the puppets back to St. Michaels Tuesday, January 2 at 1 p.m.

Sign up for any of these spots [HERE](#), or speak to Jim Boratko.

Book Group News

The church's John P. Webster Library coordinates and sponsors two regular book groups that meet in the library. Copies of the books are provided for participants. New members are always welcome! For more information, please contact Jennifer or Molly at 860-232-3893 or jpwlibrary@whfirstchurch.org.

- **Awakening the Spirit**, please note, Awakening the Spirit will not meet on 12/25/23, 1/1/24, or 1/15/24. Also – Potluck Lunch on January 8. Bring a side dish or dessert.
This group, led by Rev. Tom Carr, meets Mondays from 12 to 1:30 p.m. Bring a bag lunch; beverages and desserts are provided. On 1/22, the group will begin a discussion of Amy-Jill Levine's [The Difficult Words of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to His Most Perplexing Teachings](#). Levine addresses *some of the interpretive challenges presented by what she aptly terms the 'most perplexing teachings' of Messiah Jesus recorded by the Gospels* (adonaihalom.com).
- **Food for Thought's** next meeting is January 2 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. to discuss Geraldine Brooks' latest novel, [Horse](#). Based on the remarkable true story of the record-breaking thoroughbred Lexington, *Horse is a novel of art and science, love and obsession, and our unfinished reckoning with racism...A discarded painting in a junk pile, a skeleton in an attic, and the greatest racehorse in American history: from these strands, a Pulitzer Prize winner braids a sweeping story of spirit, obsession, and injustice across American history.*

Faith Formation Notes and News

DID YOU KNOW?! You can watch the livestream of the worship service in the JPW Library every Sunday morning!

Come, have a coffee, and relax in our beautiful church library. We also have a fun play area (with books of course) for toddlers!

Sunday Bible Study

Sunday mornings from 9:00 to 9:45 a.m. in the World Fellowship Room (Room 303)

Please note, Bible Study will not meet on December 24. Join Rev. Tom Carr each Sunday before worship for an in-depth look at the Bible. The group is currently doing a special Advent-focused study. All are welcome!

Announcements

"Give a little bit"Please!

Members and friends of our church have made great strides toward this year's stewardship campaign goals. At this point, we have 94 people/families who have pledged a total of \$259,330. Thank you all!

Our goal is to get to at least \$315,000 in order to support the vision and ministries of First Church. We can do it! And we need everyone who has not yet pledged to send in their cards or go online. The programs, music, and safe spaces we all know and love depend on our shared financial support to sustain them. So, get ready to "Give a little bit"!

Thank you, from your Stewardship Team: Lisa Abel, Bob Van Der Wende, and Terry Schmitt.

If you would like to make your 2024 pledge online, you can do so by filling out the online pledge card [HERE](#).

The 2023 Festival of Trees was a great success, thanks to the generosity of the community and our church members. 54 trees were donated this year, and these were viewed by over 1,330 people who attended the Festival, many of whom purchased raffle tickets for a chance at a tree or gift card. We are thrilled to tell you that \$5,530.00 was raised to support multiple local charities including Gifts of Love, Interval House, Loaves and Fishes, Foodshare, Habitat for Humanity, Covenant to Care for Children, Freshplace, My Sister's Place, South Park Inn, Hands on Hartford, and the Bridge Family Center. Thanks go to the First Church choir, Whitechapel Handbell Choir, and Jim Boratko, all who performed throughout the evening. We are grateful for their time, your generosity and volunteer spirit! It was a wonderful evening!

The Festival of Trees Committee

Darling Calendars – a great gift!

In collaboration with the JPW Library, Joyce Darling has created a 2024 wall calendar. Darling, whose paintings were displayed in the JPWL Gallery last spring, is donating all proceeds to the First Church Steeple fund. Calendars are available at the JPW Library during business hours, and at the Book Mobile during Sunday coffee hour. *Free Will Donation.*

New Emergency Response Fund

First Church has established an "Emergency Response Fund" which replaces the old Deacon's and Pastor's Discretionary Funds. The account was re-established (and renamed) to address more urgent financial needs for members of the community. Reverend Fredd, in collaboration with the Deacons will manage the use of the funds in order to serve its highest purpose. Should you wish to make a contribution to the account, please notate "Emergency Response Fund" on your donation.

Calling all Crafters, Artists, Collectors

Do you have something that you've created or curated – something you'd like to share with others? Consider a display in the JPWL Gallery! There is plenty of wall space, a flexible hanging and lighting system, and a secure display case. Please see Jennifer if interested.

Light The Steeple in Honor of a Loved One

For a \$25 donation, you are invited to "Light the Steeple" for one week in honor of a loved one. Similar to making a flower donation we will ask that you pick a date at least one week in advance of the desired week, and all donors will be acknowledged in our weekly *Happenings*. Please note more than one donor can fall on any given week. Donations will be added to the Save the Steeple fund. Click "Light The Steeple for a loved one" found on the "Save the First Church Steeple" web page or [click here](#).

Covenant to Care Hat & Mitten Drive

The Annual Hat and Mitten Drive is underway and will continue through the end of the year. Please bring new or gently worn mittens, hats, scarves, and other winter clothing for children through our Covenant to Care partners. Marked boxes will be available in the Narthex and outside the auditorium to collect your donations. Any new or used winter outerwear or clothing in good condition is welcome.

Altar Flower Donations Needed!

Sponsoring altar flowers is a meaningful way to honor or remember loved ones and is also part of our In-reach ministry. **We have dates available for 2024**, including these upcoming dates: 1/21, 1/28, 2/4, 2/25, 3/3, 3/17, and 3/24. Please contact the church office for details at general.mail@whfirstchurch.org or 860-233-9605. Please note, the price of a seasonal altar flower arrangement has increased to \$90.

December Reach Out: Christmas Fund

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years. Funds provide direct financial support to those who serve the church and are facing financial difficulties. Active and retired clergy, lay employees, and their surviving spouses may be eligible for the Supplementation of Small Annuities, Supplementation of Health Premiums, Emergency Grants, and/or Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks. Your generous support will be a blessing to servants of the church old and young, retired and active, lay and authorized". Thank you for your support!

For more information: https://www.ucc.org/ocwm_special-support/ To donate online thru the church: [HERE](#) or you can donate directly at: [Giving Opportunities - United Church of Christ \(ucc.org\)](#)

Family News!

We now have a family news page on our website: [click here](#). Family news will be shared when it is submitted to [Amy Melvin](#) or [Joy Taylor](#). Send your photo(s) with caption(s) any time! We may edit content to fit. Check it out under the Inreach Menu! (Please note, this is a public page. In other words, it is not password protected).

Taking Photos in Church and Sharing Policy

Taking photos and documenting life events is commonplace now and more and more common in church settings, so we came up with some guidelines. Most important: be sure phone is in silent mode and skip solo selfies when tagging church events! Laminated copies of guidelines are at each entrance to the Sanctuary and at the auditorium entrance, or [view policy here](#) or go to website>Photo Gallery page. Thank you, Amy and Joy.

Submit Prayer Requests at http://bit.ly/FCprayer_request.

Spreading Your News

The Communications Team is made up of members of our Outreach Ministry, and the church Office Administrators.

Sunday Notes/Happenings submissions are due by noon on Tuesdays to Sarah and Linda.

- Sarah Kopp, Office Manager, sarah.kopp@whfirstchurch.org
- Linda Clark, Office Manager, FCWHAdmin2@whfirstchurch.org

Website, flyer, and Social Media additions or changes can be sent to Amy and Joy anytime.

- Amy Melvin, Communications, Communications@whfirstchurch.org
- Joy Taylor, Communications, Communications2@whfirstchurch.org

Four Ways to Give

1. **Give by Text:** Text GIVE to (860) 222-7870. **You can now donate using ACH!** If you have already used Txt2Give, text update to change payment type from credit card to ACH.
2. **Give Online:** Visit our website at <http://www.whfirstchurch.org/giving/give>.
3. **Give by Mail:** Mail checks to First Church, 12 S. Main Street, West Hartford, CT 06107.
4. **Give Gifts of Securities:** Contact local Financial Advisor Sue Banville at Edward Jones in West Hartford at 860-521-2119.

Office Hours: Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Contact: general.mail@whfirstchurch.org or 860-233-9605