



Sunday Notes

February 18, 2024



Looking Towards Sunday

"Lord, who throughout these forty days for us did fast and pray, teach us with you to mourn our sins and close by you to stay." – Chalice Hymn #180

Dear friends:

Many years ago, I gave up Lent for Lent. Let me explain...

I never really understood how fasting and praying would ever matter or make any difference. But, I tried it wishing for elevated faith. I thought that penitence and penalty meant the same thing. So, I attempted to quit carbohydrates and chocolate; and to curb certain unhealthy and unhelpful appetites. I thought such sacrifices were the price of repentance.

I memorized and rehearsed prayers – committed to reciting them first thing in the morning and before bed...once recorded a personal best five days in a row! I've since forgotten every prayer; but I do remember the feeling of failure. Which is the reason why I gave up.

I rededicated myself to Lenten devotion when I learned that this sacred season is supposed to be life-giving not soul-crushing. It's a time to commemorate the testing that Jesus endured in the wilderness – forty days that prepared him for his public ministry and his passion. It's a time for ridding ourselves of regret and remorse so that we're ready for Easter. I'll say more when I see you on the first Sunday of Lent. The sermon (based on Psalm 51) is entitled: **Clean Heart. Clear Path.**

Be blessed. Be a blessing.

Rev. Fredd

Today's Altar Flower Dedication

Our altar flowers this week were donated by the Whitney family, in loving memory of Loretta Lombardi.

Light the Steeple

Our steeple this week was lit by:

Tandy Jarvis, in loving memory of Josephine Riley Medlin.

The Briggs family, in loving memory of Gary Briggs.

Please join us for the following Lenten activities at First Church:

- February 18 – 1st Sunday in Lent – 10 a.m. worship service
- February 20 – Open Chapel – 5 to 6 p.m. in the Chapel
- February 25 – 2nd Sunday in Lent – 10 a.m. worship service
- February 27 – Open Chapel – 12 to 1 p.m. in the Chapel
- March 3 – 3rd Sunday in Lent – 10 a.m. worship service with Communion & Open Chapel from 5 to 6 p.m.
- March 10 – 4th Sunday in Lent – 10 a.m. worship service
- March 12 – Open Chapel – 12 to 1 p.m. in the Chapel
- March 17 – 5th Sunday in Lent – 10 a.m. worship service followed by Soup and Sharing at 11:15 a.m.
- March 19 – Open Chapel – 5 to 6 p.m. in the Chapel
- March 24 – Palm Sunday – 10 a.m. worship service with music and palm fronds
- March 29 – Good Friday - 6 p.m. service in the Meeting House & Open Chapel from 12 to 1 p.m.
- March 31 – Easter Sunday – 10 a.m. worship service featuring a brass quintet

*Continue reading Sunday Notes or click [HERE](#) for more information and detailed descriptions of upcoming events.

Upcoming Events

The Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner has been postponed!

Due to the snowstorm, the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Dinner has been postponed to Sunday, February 18. Join us after worship for a pancake *lunch* (gluten free options also available) and some "Fat Tuesday" fun!



Sunday Bible Study

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

Join Rev. Tom Carr each Sunday before worship for an in-depth look at the Bible. All are welcome to stop by!

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!

Chamber Music Concert

This Sunday, February 18 at 3 p.m. in the Chapel

This program is designed to bring great music performances to an audience in an intimate setting. Each presentation offers a variety of musicians, often including flute, oboe, piano, and others. Thank you to our Director of Music and Arts Jim Boratko for coordinating this opportunity. The concert is free. A free will offering will be received at the door.

Introducing "OPEN CHAPEL": sacred space for quiet reflection and prayer

Beginning on Tuesday, February 20, the Spirit Team will offer an alternative way to experience Lent. We are calling it "Open Chapel." Although it will take place in our chapel, it is not a typical worship service. There is no sermon or singing, or even talking, although you may hear a whisper or soft music now and then. Simply put, Open Chapel offers a still and quiet place for silent reflection and prayer.

Open Chapel was inspired by the need for stillness amid the tumult of our world and the demands of our daily lives. Open Chapel welcomes you to come in to sit quietly for just a little while or for the whole hour. You may choose to leave a written prayer request in our prayer basket or pick up a Lenten card on which to reflect. Our weekly schedule will be flexible, and we hope you will find a time that is convenient. Join us to experience the sacred silence of Lent.

Tuesday, February 20 -- 5 to 6 p.m.

Tuesday, February 27 -- Noon to 1 p.m.

Sunday, March 3 -- 5 to 6 p.m.

Tuesday, March 12 -- Noon to 1 p.m.

Tuesday, March 19 -- 5 to 6 p.m.

Friday, March 29 -- Noon to 1 p.m.

Dialogue Circles with Peacebuilders from Hartford International University for Religion and Peace (HIU)

Sunday, February 25 at 11:15 a.m. in the JPW Library

You're invited to participate in Dialogue Circles with Master of Arts in International Peacebuilding (MAP) students from HIU. The conversations are conducted as part of the MAP curriculum. Students are training to become community change agents by developing proficiency in conflict transformation and fluency in the religious traditions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The ability to facilitate fruitful conversation is an essential skill for MAP students and all peacebuilding people. Which is why your participation is vitally important. We will form break-out groups to consider the topic 'Beyond Thoughts and Prayers: How does our faith shape our approach to national and international issues when we gather?' The goal is to get 20-25 volunteers. The hope is that everyone who gives to the circles will gain lessons and blessings! [Register here!](#)

Sunday School Students in Grades 1-6 will attend a special Communion workshop next **Sunday, February 25** during class time. They will learn why we share communion, and why it is an important sacrament for Christians.

Harvest Pack Meal Packing 2024

Saturday, March 2 from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Meal packing events are an incredible way to highlight our community, generate positive energy, and foster pride in working together for the benefit of others. Come by yourself or with a friend and join a team to pack meals for a few hours. We'll feed you a pizza lunch for all your hard work. Recommended donation is \$10 per family. [View Flyer here.](#)

REVISED Mission Trip Plans: Jennifer is planning a mission trip to Providence to work with [Incredible Days](#), a service planning organization that partners with the Southern New England United Church of Christ (SNEUCC). We're planning to stay at [Edwards House](#) in Framingham, and volunteer in soup kitchens or shelters in the Greater Boston area. The trip is scheduled for Friday (afternoon), April 19 – Sunday, April 21. Interested students aged 12 and up, and any interested adults, should contact Jennifer in the JPW Library.

Writing Workshop with David Pontrelli

Wednesdays, February 28 - April 3 from 4:30 to 6 p.m. in the John P. Webster Library

David Pontrelli of Writing Works is offering a writing workshop starting Wednesday, February 28! Write in the form of your choosing – poetry or prose or a little of each. We do group warm-up activities, and then write alone – together. There will be an optional time for sharing with the chance to receive safe, positive feedback from other group members. If you are looking to connect with a community, these workshops will allow you to do just that. No experience is necessary, and all genres and skill levels are welcome! Free workshop -- sponsored by the library. [Register here](#).

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 to either group! For more information, please contact Jennifer or Molly at 860-232-3893 or jpwlibrary@whfirstchurch.org.

- **Awakening the Spirit**, please note, this group will not meet on February 19. Awakening the Spirit, led by Rev. Tom Carr, meets on Mondays from 12 to 1:30 p.m. Bring a bag lunch; beverages and desserts are provided. The group is currently discussing 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 (adonaishalom.com).
- **Food for Thought's** next meeting is March 5 from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. (Note the time change!) to discuss [The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store](#), James McBride's "boisterous hymn to community, mercy, and karmic justice" (kirkusreviews.com).

Announcements

Lenten Devotionals are available at the entrances to the Meeting House and in the Rotunda entrance hallway. This year's devotional "Bent" was written by the Still-Speaking Writers Group of the United Church of Christ. "*Jesus modeled flexibility: hardship and persecution bent but didn't break him. Change and challenge strengthened his ministry. Impossible situations yielded to healing and release.*" You may also access a daily devotional from the United Church of Christ [here](#).

Other Online Devotionals & Studies for Lent

- [Home-Brewed Christianity](#) presents a series of live and asynchronous lectures beginning 2/20 and hosted by John Dominic Crossan. Guests include Brian McLaren, Jennifer Garcia Bashaw, and Diana Butler Bass. [More information and registration here](#).
- [Unbound: The Intersection of Faith and Justice](#) offers an online Lenten [daily devotional](#). Unbound is "an inclusive and welcoming platform, no matter one's gender, sexuality, race, religion, age, ability or creed."
- [The Upper Room](#) offers a daily devotional [here](#). The site also provides links to readings in over 30 different languages and opportunities to leave prayer requests.

Souper Bowl Sunday was a great success! With an original goal of 250 cans, then moving the goal posts to 300, 384 cans of soup were donated by First Church members. The soup is being distributed to the Loaves and Fishes Soup Kitchen and the West Hartford Food Pantry. Monetary donations came to \$36 and will be given to Loaves and Fishes on behalf of the winning team, the Kansas City Chiefs. Thank you for participating in this collection. We hope you will continue to remember your neighbors when you grocery shop. The Outreach Team.

FCAYC February Love Collection

The First Church Academy is collecting items to be donated to South Park Inn. Items needed include **Everyday Supplies**: laundry detergent, cleaning supplies, white cotton towels and face cloths. **Housewarming Baskets**: pots and pans sets, dishes, silverware. **Retail Gift Cards**: Stop & Shop, Big Y, Target, Walmart. For more information about the South Park Inn or to see the complete list of needed items, click [HERE](#). For more info., contact Dawne Quinn at: dquinn@firstchurchacademy.org or 860-233-9605 ext. 133. Thank you for your support!

Acolytes

Church acolytes play an important role in our Sunday services. Children will be lighting the candles before worship as well as putting the candles out to conclude the service. This can be a meaningful way for our children to serve their faith community. If your child is interested in helping out, please see or email Amanda Bethune at amander14@gmail.com.

First Church Online Technology Assistance is Available!

Struggling with using CCB, online pledging, or trying to create repeating payments on our website? The First Church office staff is happy to help! Please reach out to us in person, via email or call the main office and we can walk you through it.

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. We 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](#).

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

February Reach Out: South Park Inn

South Park Inn's Emergency Shelter provides a safe, temporary residence to individuals that are literally homeless. The shelter welcomes individuals from all walks of life and has space to accommodate up to 85 men, women, and children every night. They are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, never closing their doors. Their emergency shelter, veterans' programs, respite, and supportive housing provide personalized support to each of the men, women, and children that enter their doors. South Park Inn offers many services, including nutritious meals, personal hygiene supplies, laundry facilities, and bus passes for transportation. South Park Inn's goal is to provide a safe, temporary place to stay as individuals identify the support and opportunities that lead to their own long-term housing solutions. For more information: www.southparkinn.org. To donate on line thru the church: [HERE](#) or you can donate directly at: www.southparkinn.org. Thank you for your support!

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

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.

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 the 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.

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 - sarah.kopp@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

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

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