



THE HERALD  
January 2021

## A Letter from the Pastor

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

*There's nothing more beautiful than a life well lived.*

- Brandy Clark, Singer Songwriter, 2021

*The glory of God is a living person and the life of each living person is the vision of God.*

- Irenaeus of Lyon, 2nd century

They lived two thousand years apart, but it seems that Brandy Clark and Irenaeus were on the same wavelength. The recognition of the goodness of life. The affirmation of the goodness of people. The celebration of a deep, necessary, inviolable connection between God and human beings.

The idea that humans live with an original blessing, instead of being weighed down with original sin.

Did you know that the church flourished for four centuries without the concept of original sin? The overriding affirmation of Scripture is that God chooses, out of love, to create. God declares creation to be “good” and lives in an abiding relationship with all of humanity, sustaining all creation.

Go back and re-read Genesis 3. There is nothing in there about “original sin” being the destiny/curse of humanity. Nothing. Adam and Eve do not upend God’s plan for creation, God’s love for creation, or God’s love for human beings.

Consider Irenaeus again, “The glory of God is a living person and the life of each living person is the vision of God.”

In this time following the twelve days of Christmas, let us reflect more deeply upon the meaning of “Epiphany.” How is God’s love shining forth in the Birth of Jesus in our time?

Consider an idea from the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was martyred by the Gestapo in 1945: Jesus did not come to help us transcend our humanity (as though our humanity were base and vile), but to help us become fully human, or in the words of Irenaeus to live in the knowledge that we are “the glory and vision of God.”

This year, and always, remember that you are the glory of God and your life is the vision of God.

God bless you,



GOOD BYE, 2020!

HELLO, 2021!

Auld Lang Syne

*Should Old Acquaintance be forgot,  
and never thought upon;  
The flames of Love extinguished,  
and fully past and gone:  
Is thy sweet Heart now grown so cold,  
that loving Breast of thine;  
That thou canst never once reflect  
On auld lang syne.*

*Chorus:*

*On auld lang syne my Jo,  
On auld lang syne,  
That thou canst never once reflect,  
On auld lang syne.*

As we greet the new year, singing Robert Burns' 18th century Scots poem, "Auld Lang Syne" ('old long since,' or 'for the sake of old times' in English), we all know that 2020 was a year of great trial, testing, and tragedy and we have been eager to see it pass into history, with the hope that 2021 will be a "better" year.

In a recent post, Fr. Richard Rohr noted that 2020 was apocalyptic, but not in the way we might think. We tend to associate apocalypse with violence and conflict. But the true meaning of apocalypse is revelation.

The apocalyptic year of 2020 revealed many deep and troubling truths about our society. The Coronavirus did not create the ills that afflict our nation, but has revealed them as they really are. So, before we rush off headlong into the New Year, we must remember what we have experienced in the last twelve months. The looking back is necessary to understand how we must move forward to repair the world (Tikkun Olam in Hebrew) and build a society of justice and equity.

Please take a look at the video "For the Sake of Old Times" in the link below. You might be ready to forget 2020. This film reminds you why you shouldn't.

[https://www.npr.org/sections/pictureshow/2020/12/30/950636647/you-might-be-ready-to-forget-2020-this-film-reminds-you-why-you-shouldnt?utm\\_campaign=npr&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_term=nprnews&utm\\_medium=social](https://www.npr.org/sections/pictureshow/2020/12/30/950636647/you-might-be-ready-to-forget-2020-this-film-reminds-you-why-you-shouldnt?utm_campaign=npr&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_term=nprnews&utm_medium=social)



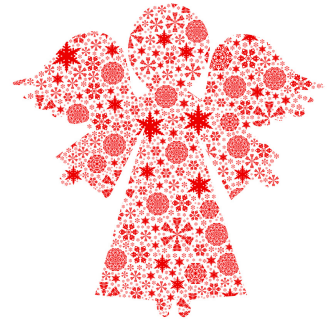
# OUTREACH

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR YMCA ANGEL GIFTS

I would like to thank the 18 First Church families who donated Angel Gifts to 12 of the families that are a part of the Alpha Community Services YMCA Families in Transition shelter program in Bridgeport which is a branch of the Central Connecticut Coast YMCA. We gave 14 parents and 19 children lovely gifts to brighten their Christmas holiday.

Thank you so much for your generous spirit and outreach to our neighbors in need bringing JOY for this 2020 Christmas Season during this most challenging year. Again, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Debby Dwyer



Thank you to all who came forward to donate Christmas gifts to the children of Covenant to Care. Your ongoing generosity and support of this ministry brought Christmas joy to more than thirty children. Blessings to everyone for a Happy and healthy New Year. Stay well Marilyn, Kim and Jessie

## Christmas Gifts for Covenant to Care



OPERATION  
**HOPE**

## MEALS for 25 People

Providers needed in the coming months signup with [signup genius](https://www.signupgenius.com) or call or email Lauren Winston at [ohfcmeals@gmail.com](mailto:ohfcmeals@gmail.com)  
914 860 6095

Lauren will drop kits by your house once you sign up. She also is happy to help with transporting the food to church. Cooking for 25 may seem like a lot but here's an opportunity to get the family and friends to join in!

Thank you!

# Children & Youth Ministry



Contact Wendy at  
[wendymuschett@optonline.net](mailto:wendymuschett@optonline.net)  
for more information

Hello Middle Roaders,

We look forward to kicking off 2021 with all of you! Here's to the hope of a brighter new year!

During the colder months, we will plan to gather on Zoom at 10:30 on Sunday mornings. If temperatures make an in-person meeting possible, I will email earlier in the week to let everyone know.

We look forward to more faith building, Faces of Peace exploration, and fun!

We will meet on all the Sundays in January: 1/3, 1/10, 1/17, 1/24, and 1/31.

Take care,  
Wendy and Melissa



## HIGH ROAD

(9th-12th Grade Youth Group)

Meets Thursday Evening  
6:30 PM

Outside on the lawn  
(weather permitting)

Contact Vanessa for more information  
[vrose@firstchurchfairfield.org](mailto:vrose@firstchurchfairfield.org)



A Safe space and loving community for LGBTQIA+ teens and friends. Fridays at 4:00 p.m. on ZOOM. Please contact the [Rev. Vanessa Rose](mailto:vrose@firstchurchfairfield.org) for more information.



### Monday Night Faith Discussion Group

Starting this Monday, January 11th, Deacon David McKinnis will lead a discussion group over Zoom for six weeks using Rob Bell's acclaimed NOOMA videos as our jumping off point to discuss issues of faith. Each of the NOOMA videos are expertly crafted short, spiritual reflections. "NOOMA"- or pneuma - is the Greek word for wind... life... breath... Spirit. We will gather to socialize starting at 7:30 with the program starting at 7:45.

Zoom meeting link is -<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85822632622?pwd=NjBqWndOM3ZNaUYrYUUVKTVc0TWQ5QT09>

Meeting ID: 858 2263 2622

Passcode: 523345

Contact David via email at [david@bethanddavid.org](mailto:david@bethanddavid.org) or call/text 203-246-8138 if you want more information.

### Me and White Supremacy

*Create the change the world needs by creating change within yourself --- Layla Saad*



You are invited to join a group of 10-12 First Church members in intimate conversation about white supremacy.

Beginning Thursday January 21 (7-830 pm), the Working for Racial Justice strategic pathway team is hosting a 12-week Me and White Supremacy Zoom workshop series to combat racism, change the world and become a good ancestor.

To learn more, or to register, please contact [clara.harmon@sbcglobal.net](mailto:clara.harmon@sbcglobal.net)  
203 816 7318 (cell).

### New Conference Minister Requests Prayers, Prayer Shawls

In his first week serving as the first Executive Conference Minister of the Southern New England Conference, the Rev. Darrell Goodwin released a video asking people of the Conference to pray for him and for the staff, and he asked that churches send prayer shawls to the Conference offices. "The first thing I need from you is to be a prayer partner with me," he said. "I need you to pray for all of the staff who are returning, pray for our staff who are transitioning out of their roles, pray for those who won't be here right away in January, but they're on their way in February. Pray.

"Read & Watch 5 Min Read; 7 Min Video:

<https://www.sneucc.org/newsdetail/new-conference-minister-requests-prayer-shawls-14923748>





## Congratulations Harper Treschuck!

Winning 2nd place in the 8th Annual Volunteer Square Essay Contest. In her essay she shares her experiences volunteering at the Operation Hope and Fairfield community gardens as a way to reconnect with her community during isolation and responding to the growing issues of food insecurity due to the pandemic. "What started as a project to nourish families in need also nurtured my sense of purpose. While the seeds I sowed did not solve the problem of food insecurity, I joined in solidarity with others to grow an impact that was bigger than myself." Read Harper's full essay at: <https://patch.com/connecticut/norwalk/winners-8th-annual-volunteer-square-essay-contest>



*Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!*

Thanks to all who made Advent and Christmas so special in 2020. In the midst of the pandemic so many people worked together to create season and Christmas celebration that touched our hearts and lifted our spirits.

Particular Thanks go to Cheri Evan and the Belk Choir for their wonderful ministry of music. The joy of the season was so enhanced by the sound of the bells ringing within our hearts in the praise of God.

Special thanks to Alex Ackley who applied her intelligence, creativity and enthusiasm in creating the online Christmas Eve pageant. It was Alex's vision and ability to think outside the box that helped us engage scores of children and reach hundreds of individuals with the Good News of God's love in the birth of Jesus.

Great thanks to Sean McCabe and Carrie Ferrante McCabe for providing the professional and technical expertise to record and edit the pageant for an online presentation. We literally could not have done it without their good and generous spirits.

Great thanks to Robert Codio and John Williams for their wonderful ministry of music at the piano and organ. Our worship of God gained a depth of feeling and expression of love that was fit to the season!

Deep thanks to the Reverend Vanessa Rose, Student Pastor Heidi Butler, and Member in Discernment Rachel Spollett for creating and leading worship and their inspired and inspiring preaching throughout the seasons that have directed our hearts and minds to a deeper encounter with the God who is love.

Unending thanks to each of you for your wonderful generosity that provided over 40 \*packed\* Reverse Advent boxes of food for the Operation Hope and Mercy Learning Center emergency pantries; provided gifts for children through Covenant to Care and the YMCA Alpha Homes; scores of gifts of warmth for the clients of Operation Hope; over 50 Christmas meals provided by the Deacons' Emergency Assistance Fund; the countless acts of love that marked the season, exemplifying the power of God's love in Christ.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!  
David Spollett



## BUSINESS NEWS

Thank you to all who have submitted a pledge card for 2021. This helps us determine our budget for the year. If you pledge through VANCO or haven't submitted a pledge card there's still time. This helps immensely with record keeping for the year.

Pledge envelopes for 2021 are on the table in Wakeman Hall near the office. If you would like me to mail yours, please call 203-394-8738 or email me at [mferrante@firstchurchfairfield.org](mailto:mferrante@firstchurchfairfield.org).

End of year statements will be going out within a couple of weeks, if you need yours prior please let me know. Your support and commitment to First Church is always greatly appreciated.

You can reach out to me at any time with questions.

Blessings for the New Year to all,  
Maria

Maria A. Ferrante  
Business Manager  
203-394-8738 cell  
203-259-8396 X106 office  
[Mferrante@firstchurchfairfield.org](mailto:Mferrante@firstchurchfairfield.org)



## News from the Personnel Board

Hello Church Friends,

I want to give an update from our Personnel Committee. The Director of Music search committee has conducted its preliminary round of interviews. They will be holding follow-up interviews and auditions with the three finalists in January. Again, we all look forward to finding the right person who will enrich and deepen our worship experience through music.

As we continue worshipping remotely, Robert Codia will remain our temporary Worship Music Leader. As always, please feel free to reach out to me at [jmuschett@optonline.net](mailto:jmuschett@optonline.net).

Thank you. God's peace to you.

Jim Muschett  
Assistant Moderator Chair, Personnel Committee

ALL CHURCH MEETING MINUTES  
Monday,  
November 16  
7:30 pm on Zoom  
Fellowship began at 7:15 p.m. and meeting began at 7:30 p.m.

Invocation led by Reverend David Spollett

Zoom protocol: David McKinnis went over protocol.

**Treasurer's Report: Jacque Paige** reported for 2020, we had budgeted a loss of \$55K due to the severance package given Vern. As of the end of October 2020 she is forecasting a loss of \$25K for a whole variety of reasons! We should be able to cover that with PPP monies we received at the end of April with a good amount leftover to help cover any shortfall in 2021. Maria and Jacque just submitted the paperwork to convert the PPP monies from a loan to a grant. We probably won't find out until early next year whether that has happened.

**Personnel Report: Jim Muschett** Search for our next Director of Music: The search committee is made up of: Sally Chandler and Sue O'Donovan (co-chairing), Jane Barnes, Paul Cahill, Pertrinea Cash, Tim Clark, Vanessa Rose, and two youth members Harper Treschuk and Louis Hain. They are in the process of scheduling preliminary interviews with four candidates from the larger initial pool of applicants. Finding the right person is what is most important. They are looking to find the right person who will encourage broad congregational participation while using a wide range of music to deepen our worship experience. The goal is to hire someone to begin in the spring. In the meantime, Robert Codia will remain our temporary Worship Music Leader.

**The Store: Amy Watson** reported The Store along with many other businesses closed its doors temporarily in March during the first COVID lockdown. The Store management team as well as the Church leadership continue to monitor the situation and together, they determined that there is no way to safely reopen for shopping or donations until a vaccine is available, for the following reasons:

1. Our volunteers are among the most vulnerable population and most at risk if they contract the virus
2. Our limited space does not allow for required social distancing for shoppers or volunteers
3. Donations need to be quarantined for 48-72 hours before being sorted and we do not have the space to accommodate that.

Hopefully once a vaccine is widely distributed and rates of infection are low enough, they will be able to resume our operations in some way. They will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates. In the meantime, they desperately miss being together and the wonderful community that the Store provides!

**Live Streaming: Cheri Evan** gave an update on the audio/video, she said the Sanctuary is done except for a couple of microphones which will be installed today, the Chapel's audio is completed and Wakeman Hall will be installed early January.

Power Sound of New England began work in the Sanctuary on October 5th and had us up and running to broadcast with the new system that Sunday! They have been back and completed the audio update in the Chapel with new speakers and microphones. This week microphones will be installed in the choir loft and a few audio adjustments will be made in the Sanctuary and then they are back again beginning January 11, 2021 to install audio, visual and livestreaming in Wakeman Hall. This will give us the opportunity to livestream from both the Sanctuary and Wakeman. Share what is happening in the Sanctuary, on the screen in Wakeman Hall and much more as we learn and grow in this new ministry full of possibilities.

Tech Ministry team includes Alan Fuehring, David and Andrew McKinnis and Cheri.

**Stewardship: Maria Ferrante** reported we have received 110 pledge cards totaling \$326,254, would like to get 40-60 more pledge cards by next month to reach our budget.

**Fund Raising: Clara Harmon** reported - Alone we are smart, together we are brilliant. Clara and Charlotte Dyslin, co stewards for resource development, are looking for ideas from the congregation to help generate funds during the Covid -19 pandemic to help replace lost revenue from 3 Kings Bazaar, the in-person Pasta Dinner, The Store operations. Please submit suggestions to clara.harmon@sbcglobal.net. More to follow as we identify 2 or 3 ideas and reach back to involve the congregation in new ways to share their talents and help First Church through these unusual times.

**Choir: Heidi Butler** reported these past few months have been hard on everyone for many reasons, but one of the most difficult losses in church life amidst the pandemic is the joy of singing and making music together. We are so blessed at First Church to have talented individuals to provide music for our worship; Robert Codio has been a wonderful part of our worship for the past few months with his beautiful piano playing, and Cheri Evan has been doing a fantastic job with the Handbell Choir. It remains difficult, however, that there is no way for the choir to safely gather to sing together, as – sadly – singing is one of the more dangerous ways of spreading COVID-19. But we wanted to be creative and find a way for the choir to work together over this holiday season!



We are in the process of putting together our first attempt at a virtual choir performance piece. This process involves individuals recording themselves singing along to a video of me conducting to the accompanying music, and then me editing those videos together into one big performance. As this message goes out to the congregation, I am receiving recordings from many choir members, and hope to have this piece put together by the end of the first week of December. As long as it goes well, we will hopefully do more pieces this way over the next few months! Any suggestions or creative ideas are welcome, and if anyone is interested in participating, please let me know! While things will certainly be different this holiday season, with the grace of God and the participation of many talented individuals, we are still able to share as a community in the gift of music and to worship and praise God with our whole hearts.

**CONNECT: Rita Skog** reported in 2020 First Church joined CONECT, Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut. We became involved with CONECT through our membership in the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport.

CONNECT is a collective of churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and civic organizations from New Haven and Fairfield Counties that have joined together to take action on social and economic justice issues of common concern. CONECT has made an impact on issues as varied as gun violence, health insurance rates, police reform, immigrant rights and more. They also build relationships, develop leaders, strengthen congregations and make an impact through their collective voices.

You are invited to join leaders from other new member congregations in CONECT, via ZOOM, at the Winter Assembly on December 2nd and for two nights each in December & January at 4 leadership training sessions. We will be learning together about effective organizing for concrete community improvement and change that is consistent with our faith traditions and values, around our common concerns, and for the common good. Contact Rita at [rskog@hotmail.com](mailto:rskog@hotmail.com)

**Racial Justice Team: Anna Marotti** reported that the Racial Justice Team has continued to work via zoom refining our purpose, mission and vision and welcome any new members to join us in our work to educate and provide consciousness raising opportunities for members of First Church and the community, strengthen our relationship with First Baptist, and increase our anti-racist capacity by working with the CCGB and CONECT. Please contact [annamarotti@yahoo.com](mailto:annamarotti@yahoo.com) for information/details if you are interested.

**Youth: The Reverend Vanessa Rose** reported Youth of all ages have had many opportunities to participate in faith formation, fellowship, in-reach to church members, and outreach to the wider community these past few months. She said it has been such a joy to be with our teenagers during this time. Despite the many struggles due to the pandemic, the community we have at First Church has been more necessary for the youth to help them stay connected.

For faith formation and community, she has been leading confirmation classes for 9th graders each Sunday over Zoom. She is using Rob Bell's Nooma Series to spark our discussion topics each week. Alex Ackley continues to lead all young children in Disciple Road over zoom and find new ways of engaging them in bible studies and crafts. Our dedicated volunteer leaders, Wendy Mushett and Melissa Hain, have been leading the Middle Road sessions in person at church during the 10:15 worship. This is their 5th year offering these classes for the Middle Road and it continues to be Both ages spend some time using Sandy Bromer's Faces of Peace to inspire our youth with their faithful living. The confirmation class will also move to in person gatherings in the church in the coming weeks.

The Youth Group – renamed High Road – has been newly designated as group just for High School aged youth and we have had between 5 and 12 teens at our gatherings. We communicate by text over “What’s App” and we meet every Thursday at 6:30 in person. We have constructed a temporary fire-pit on the front lawn of First Church, which will give us a safe way to gather through the winter. We have been to the Discovery Museum to experience the Adventure Park ropes course, which was a big highlight of our fall, and I hope to take them back in the spring. We are also continuing their outreach work. They were out in costume in a downpour to collect groceries for their annual Trick or Treat for Operation Hope. For faith formation we did a two-week workshop on the Enneagram and we refer back to it on occasion as we think about who we are and who we are called to be. They are a wonderful supportive community – sharing highs and lows and dreaming up ways to serve the community.

The Loft continues to meet over zoom on Fridays at 4 (after one well attended fall meeting outdoors in person) and it is, as they say, in its “12th season.” The Loft continues to be a loving, welcoming community and provides a space for people to come together and listen to each other and support each other through these hard times and through a political climate that was increasingly hostile to the LGBTQ community in recent years. They had a guest workshop leader offer a session of guided meditation to support mental wellbeing through the Inspire non-profit in Fairfield which was a powerful experience. They continue to invite new members to join the group and seek ways to gather outside of our scheduled times.

Alex Ackley reported they have been busy in Disciple Road getting a few projects done and meeting on Sunday mornings on Zoom for lessons and craft projects. Since September, they have worked on three different Bible lessons and have made some awesome crafts based on what they have learned. They also have been preparing for our Annual Advent Reverse box event which will be held outside in the church parking lot this Sunday Nov 22nd at 2PM.

(All Church Meeting Minutes page 3)

Alex has been working with a friend who is a producer and they are putting together the screenplay for our Christmas Pageant Movie to be released on Christmas Eve on our website and social media. Although they had to reschedule 3rd grade Bible Sunday, they are hopeful that they can have it in the spring of 2021 in person. However, if we are still practicing social distance and cannot meet in person, they have a plan B and we will set it into action if necessary.

**Facilities Report:** HVAC and gas consumption **Casey Mulqueen** reported the progress of the audit of HVAC (Heating, ventilation, air conditioning) being conducted by Controlled Air Early in March we ordered Level 1 Report - defining opportunities to reduce gas consumption and improve ventilation and meet current ASHRAE (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers) standards for efficiency and ventilation. July 14th received Level 1 and elected to proceed with ASHRAE Level 2 Report: Design plan with cost, estimated energy savings, and project outline including rough draft project schedule. Expect to receive report this Friday the 20th It will address ventilation in the Sanctuary that as many of you know will help insure our safe return to worshipping together. Before proceeding with Level 3 Implementation The Congregation will vote Solar & Lighting: Casey Mulqueen and Craig Way reported that we have received two proposals. Working with Controlled Air / design engineers we have learned that we have potential issues confirming availability of roof surface and that it would be premature to move ahead with the installation of panels. Here is the rational, solar applications need to remain installed and undisturbed for 15 years the term of the contract or savings are lost. In addition to locating the panels our service may need to be upgraded. We have tabled for 12 to 18 months. We are moving ahead with a lighting upgrade, zero cash outlay, positive day one, and payback 1.5 years

Respectfully submitted,

Patty Bilotto



## Deacon's Fund Pasta Dinner



Celebrate the gift of love on Valentine's Day and share that love with your neighbors and friends in need!

The Deacons' Emergency Assistance Fund helps with food, rent, medicine, and the expenses of living to folks facing hard times... and \*these\* are hard times, indeed.

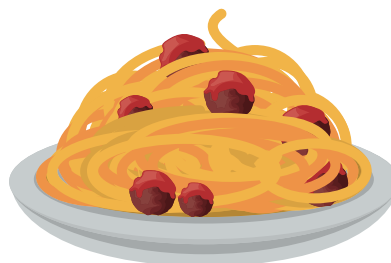
This year's Pasta Dinner (take out due to the Coronavirus) will be on **February 14**. You can woo your loved one with a delicious Chip's Pasta Dinner and reach out with God's love with your donation fit the Assistance Fund.

The meal is free. Preorder by email [pastadinnerfirstchurch@gmail.com](mailto:pastadinnerfirstchurch@gmail.com) before **February 7**.

Pick up your dinner on the 14th between 4:00-6:00 PM and drop off your generous donation.

100% of your gift will go right to work right away providing help, hope, and love.

What better way to celebrate Valentine's Day!





# 10th Annual Deacons' Fund Pasta Dinner

**Sunday, February 14th 2021**  
**First Church Fairfield - 148 Beach Road**

COVID-19 has impacted everyone and everything but, the First Church Deacons' Fund continues to help people through these uncertain times. We invite you to order food from the 10th Annual Pasta Dinner! Come drive up and pick up food for you and your family from 4-6pm. A free will donation will be collected to benefit the Deacons' Emergency Assistance Fund.

**All Food Generously**

**Provided by**



**Reservations are a Must!**

Email [pastadinnerfirstchurch@gmail.com](mailto:pastadinnerfirstchurch@gmail.com) to order food. We offer Gluten-Free and Vegetarian options. Please let us know if you need these when making reservations.



First Church Congregational  
**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
148 Beach Road • Fairfield CT • 06824