

# HAPPY NEW YEAR

First Church Congregational, Fairfield  
United Church of Christ



## A Letter From the Pastor

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

“Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.”

As we draw ever closer to Christmas Day (I write this on December 15; you will probably receive it after Christmas) my mind and heart keep going back to this quote from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest, paleontologist, theologian, and philosopher who died in 1955 at the age of 73.

Each Sunday in Advent we have focused on a different theme or spiritual truth: hope, peace, joy, and love. This year I have been deeply struck by the power of joy. The essential nature of joy in Christian life.

I have decided to give myself something for Christmas this year. Starting now and throughout all the New Year, I will be giving myself the spiritual discipline of always looking for joy. Joy is not the denial of the hard realities of life. It is not banal jollity in the face of evil. It is a gift which comes with the presence of God. It is the recognition that we are not alone in this world that God in Jesus is with us. Always. With. Us.

It has been my joy to serve as one of your pastors for most of my adult life. It has been a joy because you have always known and exhibited your knowledge of God's presence in your commitment to being a Servant Church. In the care and compassion you extend to each other in times of trouble. In your dedication to our beloved church.

So, let's be a joyful people in the year ahead. Let our joy overflow, because we know the angel's song is true,

*Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.*

Merry Christmas and a Joyful New Year!



# OUTREACH

## Thank you from Covenant to Care

Thanks to the continued generosity of this wonderful congregation, Covenant to Care collected 27 Christmas gifts for children in need. For some, these were the only gifts they received. We are truly grateful for all of you.

Best wishes for a blessed New Year.

Marilyn, Kim and Jess



2022 TAKE OUT DINNER



FIRST CHURCH FAIRFIELD  
9TH ANNUAL

## PASTA DINNER

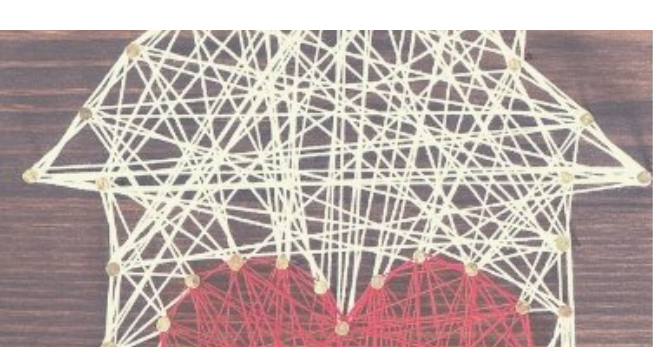
TO BENEFIT THE DEACONS'  
EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FUND

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6TH  
5PM TO 7PM PICK-UP**

FIRST CHURCH FAIRFIELD  
148 BEACH ROAD

**DONATIONS COLLECTED FROM THIS EVENT PROVIDE FINANCIAL  
SUPPORT TO THOSE IN NEED IN OUR COMMUNITY**

**EMAIL RESERVATIONS TO: [PASTADINNERFIRSTCHURCH@GMAIL.COM](mailto:PASTADINNERFIRSTCHURCH@GMAIL.COM)  
TO HELP US PLAN PLEASE RSVP BY 2/1 - "TAKE OUT" EVENT FOR 2022**



# WELCOME THE STRANGER

## Interfaith Refugee Resettlement and CIRI

This past few months have been an busy time for the Welcome the Stranger committee. Thousands of Afghan evacuees have started to make their way to their final US homes, and many of them are resettling here in CT. At First Church, we are fortunate that we have many ways we can serve.

Through the Interfaith Refugee Resettlement Committee, we continue to support our cosponsored Afghan family of 11, who are settled in their Black Rock apartments and beginning their new lives in CT. Our coalition members are working to support the boys in their new school, helping the family with health screening, clothes shopping, resume building, interview prep, and getting ready for employment. There is much work to be done and many passionate coalition members willing to do it.

First Church also continues to support CIRI (Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants) by setting up apartments for their clients as they settle in the community.

In November and December, First Church worked alongside partner church members to setup 17 apartments (to date) to refugees from Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These setups are happening in rapid succession – 1 week in December had 3 separate arrivals. For each setup, First Church provides supplies and people power to wash the floors, make the beds, and fill the cupboards. In addition, our church coalition has also worked to gather the furniture needed – lamps, dressers, end tables, etc – and store it for CIRI, saving CIRI staff time.

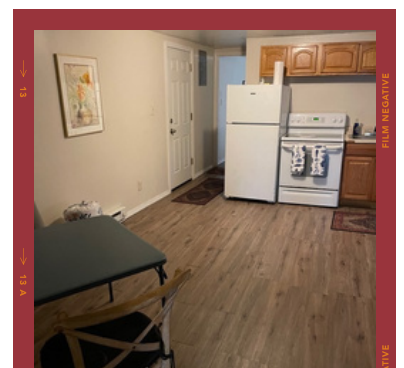
You can donate the supplies that First Church provides each setup – including First Aid kits, welcome mats, paper blinds, kitchen mats, and clock radios. Full list of supplies and where to deliver them can be found at

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/30e0e4fa9ad2fa6ff2-stock>. Please contact Julie Mughal ([jmughal@live.com](mailto:jmughal@live.com)) for a list of most needed items.

You can donate furniture (small dressers and side tables are always in need) – contact Patty Gregory ([pzarra@optonline.net](mailto:pzarra@optonline.net)) for the list of current needs.

You can volunteer to help setup the apartments – most happen during the weekday but let us know your availability. Contact Nikki Kenney ([treschukenny@gmail.com](mailto:treschukenny@gmail.com)) to be put on the list.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/J332ttpWgqNhS3W77>





## **The Gift of Opportunity!**

As you may know, Interfaith Refugee Resettlement Committee (IRRC), a community coalition of seven faith-based organizations in our area, was formed in October with the purpose of resettling Afghan refugees in Bridgeport, CT. In November we welcomed an extended family of 11, including father, mother, five adult daughters (ages 18-28), a son-in-law (34), and three children (ages 8, 5 and 18mos). The father had a senior position with a women's rights organization, and helped coordinate government activities in Jalalabad and the east. He has the scars to show for it (literally)! The young adults are sophisticated, educated and, yes, bi-lingual. They were HR and Communications professionals, Teachers, Doctors in training, and College students. While not directly assisting the US Military or State Dept, their efforts contributed indirectly to standing up and strengthening a fledgling democracy. Earning them the wrath of the Taliban.

Their stories are heartwarming, and at the same time, heart breaking. Yet we see in them the combination of kindness, compassion, courage, resourcefulness and resiliency that will help them build a brighter future for themselves, and enhance the communities in which they live. Indeed, four received Certificates of Appreciation from Ft Dix, where they lived from late August to early November, for contributing to the broader resettlement effort by assisting the US Airforce, the CDC, IOM and DHS as teachers and interpreters.

We are grateful for the many that have already helped with their contributions of time, talent and money. But as these young adults take their first steps forward, your help in aiding their search for employment could be the very best gift you give this holiday season.

### *What's next for them? They need jobs!*

They have substantial resumes, impressive recommendations, speak multiple languages (fluency in English, Pashto, Dari and Urdu), and are eager to work. Their professional experiences span HR, Finance, Communications and Administration with provincial government and major international NGOs, Teaching (elementary and middle school), and healthcare services. All are computer literate and proficient in Microsoft Office.

Contact us for a top-line summary of each work-eligible family member. If you know of a job opening that aligns with their skills or prior work experiences, or can make introductions to potential hiring managers, please be in touch [IRRC.Jobs@gmail.com](mailto:IRRC.Jobs@gmail.com) Additionally, feel free to share this more broadly with your network of colleagues, friends and family. It takes a village!

If we feel there is a good match, we will forward their full resumes, with the hope of arranging an interview. And with our sincere thanks!

May Peace, Joy and Love be your gifts this holiday and your blessing all year long.  
Interfaith Refugee Resettlement Committee (IRRC) Employment Task Group [IRRC.Jobs@gmail.com](mailto:IRRC.Jobs@gmail.com)

# A Bittersweet Ending and a New Beginning

Dear Families,

How bittersweet! I know you want to join me in congratulating Alex and her new job opportunity while also having so many feelings about what this change means for us and for our children. Since many of them were only babies and toddlers, Alex has been the one to create that safe haven of community here and to share her faith with them. It will be hard to say goodbye to her in this role.

Her new position will begin on January 3rd, and so she will be transitioning throughout the coming weeks. The good news is that while this Sunday, December 19th, was her final day leading Disciple Road, it is certainly not goodbye. Alex will continue to be a member of First Church and to call this place her home although she will no longer serve on the Pastoral Team. We will have a going-away party following worship on Sunday, January 9th, to honor Alex and send her off with all our love and thanks.

While this will be a season of change for our Disciple Road children, you all can rest assured that Disciple Road will continue with new leadership. More information will be forthcoming, but for now, we extend our deepest gratitude to Alex for her servant leadership and all the joy she has brought to our team and our church family.

Peace,  
Vanessa



## Choirs Resume in January

**Chancel Choir** rehearsals resume Thursdays at 7:30pm beginning January 13. Come and enjoy singing with us! Or, join us for Holy Week and Easter, beginning March 10! Contact Frank with questions: [fmartignetti@firstchurchfairfield.org](mailto:fmartignetti@firstchurchfairfield.org), or (203) 259-8396, x. 102.

**Children's Choir** is back in action on January 13 at 4:00pm meeting in the chapel space. Come join us for a fun time of singing, creative movement, and instrument playing. Ages K-3rd Grade Contact Cheri Evan for more information [cevan@firstchurchfairfield.org](mailto:cevan@firstchurchfairfield.org) or 203-259-8396 x 100.

**Bell Choir** will be ringing away again beginning January 13 at 6:00pm. Bell choir curious? Come see what it's all about and give it a try. 7th Grade to Adult (music reading and prior experience not necessary)

## From the Church Moderator

Hello Church Friends,

As I write this, we are in the middle of Advent, but I can't help looking ahead to the exciting start of 2022 at First Church.

- Work will continue in the Sanctuary so we can once again worship together there.
- We will have important time with Vanessa as she shares with us her vision for the future of First Church.
- We will further grow our relationship with our Afghan families.

There is much to come!

Wishing all of you a blessed and healthy New Year.

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

Moderator

## Pastoral Search Committee Update

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The interim pastor search committee is continuing its work to ensure a successful transition in our pastoral leadership following David's retirement and the termination of the existing co-pastorate with David and Vanessa effective September 1.

As previously shared, Vanessa has expressed her strong interest in serving as our next Senior Pastor, and we have sought guidance from the Southern New England Conference of the UCC with respect to conducting a pastoral search when a qualified internal candidate has expressed such interest. Associate Conference Minister Michael Ciba has assured us that our situation is not without precedent, and the Conference has an established protocol for dealing with it. It is Rev. Ciba's recommendation that we singularly discern on Vanessa's candidacy before commencing a search involving external candidates. In other words, the Conference believes it would be in the interest of First Church to determine whether to call Vanessa to be our Senior Pastor before engaging with external candidates. That means if the Congregation decides to call Vanessa following a period of discernment, there would be no need for an external search. The search committee has decided to defer to this precedent and follow the recommendation of the Conference.

Vanessa has expressed her support for a period of discernment with respect to her candidacy and has worked with the search committee to plan opportunities for the congregation to hear from her directly with respect to her vision for First Church. There will also be opportunities for dialogue and for questions to be posed to both Vanessa and the committee.

## Pastor Search Committee Update (cont.)

We believe this process will enable the committee to make a recommendation with respect to Vanessa's candidacy in a timely manner. If the recommendation is to call Vanessa and the congregation approves, then she will be in place as of September 1. If the recommendation is to consider external candidates, then it will be necessary to retain an interim pastor by September 1.

There will be additional communications in January with respect to the continuing discernment process and the scheduling of specific events. Please take advantage of these opportunities to learn more about Vanessa's candidacy and her vision for First Church and to share your opinions with the committee so that an informed decision can be made with respect to our future leadership.

May God's peace be with you all.

Very truly yours,  
Mark Engstrom, Chair  
Teresa Harris  
Patty Gregroy  
David McKinnis



## Rooted in Love

January may not be the best for planting a tree, but is a great time to put down deep roots for the springtime blossoms.

The people of First Church are like an orchard of trees, each bearing fruit. And we know that when our roots are intertwined, we are all stronger and more fruitful.

YOU are needed. Make no mistake!  
Don't sit on the curb, wondering how the orchard will do without you.

It won't do well.

Your roots, your commitment, your pledge to support the church financially is critical to the fruitfulness of our orchard.

Thank God for First Church. Thank God for you. Thank God you are one of the trees in the orchard.

If you have never made a pledge before, this is the year to do so!  
How can you best financially support our orchard, First Church?

Come on! Put down some roots and let's see what fruits will grow!

Please return your pledge card as soon as possible. Thank you!



SAVE THE DATE

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