



A Letter from the Pastor

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I am writing to you, having just finished our Ash Wednesday worship on Zoom. It was truly a wonderful worship experience, highlighted by the duet of Middle Roder Louisa Hain and Student Pastor Heidi Butler singing “Amazing Grace.”

When you receive this letter we will be a couple of weeks into Lent. Lent reminds us of Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness after his baptism. When Jesus returned from the wilderness he proclaimed, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Good News.” (Mark 1:15) When we hear the word “repent” it can conjure up all sorts of feelings and images, many of them negative, painful, and dehumanizing. But repentance really means “turn around... re-center yourself... become oriented to God... reconnect with God... see the kingdom, the love of God, all around you.”

Connie Kristy shared with me the words she saw many years ago on a billboard outside a little church in the Carolinas, "If God seems far away, who moved?"

Like Jesus’ wilderness experience, “we can use Lent to reconnect with God and the fullness of our own humanity – the good and the bad – in some intentional way” writes the Franciscan priest, Fr. Richard Rohr. I believe that Jesus is inviting us to give up something this Lent. Not giving up chocolate, or some such thing. Deeper than that.

Let’s give up wandering away from God. Let’s stop moving away from God, and instead turn around (repent) and move toward God. To do that let’s stop thinking that God is harsh and judgmental, just waiting to catch us in sin, so God can punish us.

That, my friends, is not the Good News. The Good News is that you are the object of God’s desire; God wants nothing more than to be in a loving, reciprocal relationship with you. God is love and is reaching out to you in love all the time.

All we have do is turn around and move toward God, who will jump up like the father of the “prodigal son” to welcome us home. That is the Good News of Lent.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David", on a light yellow background.

P.S. If you missed Ash Wednesday worship, you can catch “Amazing Grace” on FaceBook and YouTube.

THANK YOU

A Pasta Dinner Thank You!

Dear Andrew, Michelle, and all the Deacons,

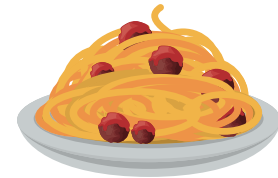
Thank you for such a wonderful Valentine's Day Pasta Dinner! We were so impressed with how you were able to re-envision the event for 2021! So great to have folks connect over Zoom pasta!

Big shout out to Team Evan – Pete, Cheri, Josie, Liv, Nick, Lindsey, Leah, and Jacob – who staffed the kitchen and served up all those dinners hot and tasty!

We are especially grateful thinking of all the needs we will be able to meet this year thanks to the Deacons' Emergency Assistance Fund. Thanks to your love and dedication **\$6,927.00** was added to the Fund!

Your faithfulness keeps us honest when we say that we are the church that says “yes!” We can say “yes” to our sisters and brothers in need because of your love and dedication.

Peace and Love, Vanessa and David



THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS!



160 pounds of food
delivered to nOURish Bridgeport

\$1500 + dollars collected



Exciting Music News

Welcome Frank Martignetti



Hello Church Friends,

I want to give two updates from our Personnel Committee. It has been a busy start to the year.

As previously announced, David will remain as our Senior Pastor for an additional year—he will now continue through August 31, 2022, instead of August 2021. This decision to stay an additional year comes after reflection on the heightened stresses of COVID and how it has impacted worship, as well as how it would affect the search for and transition to a new Senior Pastor. The Interim Pastor search committee has all agreed to help serve in a similar capacity when the time is right.

It is with great pleasure that we announce our new Music Director, Frank Martignetti, to begin April 15. Frank is a talented, experienced, well educated, and well connected music and choral director as well as an accomplished musician. He has the passion and proven ability to encourage broad congregational participation (especially in building a choir), and will bring a wide range of music to both enrich and deepen our worship experience. Frank and his wife, Heather, live in Fairfield, and they both look forward to calling First Church their spiritual home. Please read both Vanessa's and Frank's letters of introduction below.

Please join me in thanking the search committee for the extensive and prayerful process of bringing Frank to us: Sally Chandler (chair), Jane Barnes, Paul Cahill, Pertrinea Cash, Tim Clark, Sue O'Donovan, Vanessa Rose, and two youth members Harper Treschuk and Louisa Hain.

Until Frank begins, Robert Codio will remain our Worship Music Leader. I also wish to thank Robert for the beautiful gift of his music ministry to our congregation during a very challenging time.

As always, please feel free to reach out to me at jmuschett@optonline.net. Thank you.

God's peace to you.

Jim Muschett

Assistant Moderator/Chair, Personnel Committee



Dear Members of First Church,

I know you will join me in extending a warm welcome to our new Director of Music, Frank Martignetti.

This is great news! After many weeks of prayer, conversation, discernment, application review, interviews, and auditions, the Search Committee - made up of Co-Chairs: Sally Chandler and Sue O'Donovan, Deacon Pertrinea Cash, Choir Members: Jane Barnes, Tim Clark, Paul Cahill, and youth members: Louisa Hain and Harper Treschuk, and myself - recommended Frank to be approved by the Personnel Committee and Council who voted unanimously to hire him. The offer was extended, Frank accepted, and following his thoughtful decision to stay at his current church as the Director of Music Ministries and Organist at Advent Lutheran in Manhattan through Easter, he will join us on April 15th.

The reasons the search committee is so excited about Frank and the ways he will reinvigorate our music ministry at First Church will soon be obvious to you, but to name a few: He is first and foremost a choir director, having served in several music director roles in the past, with experience in growing and revitalizing a choir of all skill levels. He is a teacher at heart and is a professor of music at the University of Bridgeport. He loves working in many genres of church music and will greatly expand our repertoire as congregation singers. He has an excellent understanding of the organ and plays with sensitivity for a range of services, from worship, to weddings, to funerals. (con't)

He has an excellent understanding of the organ and plays with sensitivity for a range of services, from worship, to weddings, to funerals. He is familiar with our wider community and will use the Meeting House of First Church to gather in music lovers from far and wide for many annual events. He has enthusiasm for using music to support the ministries of First Church. And finally, with his warm and personable style, he will fit right in on the Pastoral Team! David, LaNeil, Cheri, Alex, Maria, Heidi and I are thrilled to begin working with him this Spring! We know his expertise will be invaluable!

I am so excited for you all to get to know Frank Martignetti and praying that soon we all will be signing our praises to God in the sanctuary to his accompanying and direction. Who knows, you may find yourself in the choir as well!

Peace,
Vanessa



A Note From Frank

Dear First Church Community,

It is an honor and a joy to become your next Director of Music, about six weeks from now. Through conversations with the search committee and the staff, I learned about the congregation's past and present, as well as its future plans, hopes, and aspirations. I look forward to hearing more as my wife Heather and I get to know many of you this spring. I have gotten acquainted with your community a little bit through the years, as a guest musician almost a decade ago, as an organ recitalist in 2017, and through attending and helping to produce the many events the Greater Bridgeport Chapter of the American Guild of Organists (AGO) has hosted here.

I'm a native of New Rochelle, NY, and have spent my adult life living in New Haven, Manhattan, Bridgeport, and now Fairfield. Heather and I purchased a house in the Brooklawn neighborhood in 2019. I've been a professional church musician for about 27 years, including 7 years serving at the former St. Paul's Lutheran in Bridgeport. I'm in my sixteenth year of teaching music and music education at the University of Bridgeport, where I'm currently department chair. I recently stepped down as conductor of the Mystic River Chorale after 13 seasons. Before I began Ph.D. studies in 2010, I taught high school music, mainly in the New Haven Public Schools; urban education is a major part of my research agenda.

Throughout the search process, I was struck by the vibrant, justice-focused, service-oriented, welcoming nature of your congregation. These attributes are very important to me. I come to you from a similar community on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, Advent Lutheran Church, where I have served for eight years, and worshipped for ten years. Advent is a friendly, bilingual church known by many in the neighborhood for its feeding ministries and its concert series. I have loved my time there, but the commute has become impractical, and limited the extent of my involvement in the community.

Corporate worship is the center of our life together as Christians, and it has been hard this past year not to be together in both time and physical space. How we miss the sound and feel of being part of a large congregation raising their voices in enthusiastic communal song! Such a feeling is why I am a church musician. I am proud of the online services I've helped create at Advent, but I've noticed, when I engage with them as a worshipper, a natural tendency to be a passive recipient of anything I am watching on a screen. This will be one of our great challenges as the church emerges from COVID-19: making sure liturgy lives up to its name, as the work of the people. It's something we do together, as the priesthood of all believers. I look forward to being among you and doing that work with the staff, the leadership, the choir, and each of you.

With gratitude,
Frank

OUTREACH

SUNDAY- MARCH 21
Minute for Missions

Let love flow.

"Nobody hungry, nobody thirsty, shade from the sun, shelter from the wind. For the Compassionate One guides them, takes them to the best springs"
- Isaiah 49:50

One Great
HOUR
OF SHARING



Helping Hands Near and Far

For those in need in our community, we are joining with Operation Hope to create "Move-In Baskets" for those clients transitioning into apartments. Our goal is to create 12 baskets filled with some of the necessary, helpful items needed in setting up a home. We have created a sign-up genius for the items we hope to collect and appreciate any help you can offer. There is a laundry basket in the back of Wakeman Hall labeled "Move-In Baskets" where you can leave your donations. We hope to have all 12 baskets put together by March 7th. Here is the Sign-Up Genius link:
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050B44ADA928AA8-operation>

For our "far" helping hands, we are starting a "Coins for Care" fundraiser to help support the on-going construction efforts of Simply Smiles and their Children's Village on the Cheyenne River Reservation. As founder Bryan Nurnberger shares, "the Simply Smiles children's village is a community of foster families offering a child placement option that fulfills the spirit of the Indian child welfare act by ensuring that native children who have been removed from their homes can remain with kin and community." One foster home is already built, the second one is underway now, and the hope is for more to come!

Please drop off your donations on THURSDAYS between 9-2 when Maria is in the office. The collection will continue through the end of May.

YOU'RE NEVER
TOO FAR AWAY
TO EXTEND A
HELPING HAND.

OUTREACH



Healthcare / Mental Healthcare Team:

- Update – Team is partnering with Health Equity Solutions in organizing for Race, Ethnicity & Language data collection in the health care system – HB 6424
- Please help the HC team reach its goal of sending 500 e-letters to state Reps & Senators in support of the REL data bill by sharing this simple tool in your congregations & communities:
https://actionnetwork.org/letters/support-rel-data-collection?source=direct_link&
- Next Meeting: Tuesday, March 2nd at 7pm via zoom.
Co-chairs: Beth Stenger (beth.stenger@comcast.net or 203-915-3479) & Yolanda Skinner (skinnery233@gmail.com or 203-667-8360).

Criminal Justice Team / Clean Slate:

- Update – continuing primary work on passing Clean Slate in CT, and also working on prison conditions, police accountability, etc.
- Please help us reach the goal of 1000 e-letters sent to Legislators on Clean Slate:
https://actionnetwork.org/letters/pass-clean-slate-in-2021?source=direct_link&
- Next Meeting: Tuesday, Mar 23rd at 7pm via zoom (typically 4th Tuesday evenings).
Co-chairs: Asti Jackson (astijackson91@gmail.com or 678-608-8748) & Phil Kent (pkent@susmanduffy.com or 203-530-

Once you submit the form, ask your friends and family to do the same!!

Council of Churches Greater Bridgeport

- **Gun Violence Prevention and By Back Program** in conjunction with **CT Against Gun Violence** and the proposed measure in the State Legislature.
<https://www.ccgb.org/content.cfm?id=9023>
- **Raising the BAR** - Becoming Anti-Racist - A conversation group that meets Thursday March 18th via zoom.
<https://www.ccgb.org/content.cfm?id=9040>



Children & Youth Ministry



Middle Road

Hello Middle Roaders,

Melissa and I are hopeful that, at some point soon, we will be back to meeting in person at 10:30. We will check the weather each week and include in our weekly email where we will be gathering. If it's on Zoom, the information is included below.

Our new gathering spot is on the Beach Road side of the church on the blacktop area by the mailbox.

We now have 2 new heaters to help keep us warm (yay!) but remember to dress warmly so you are comfortable. Blankets are fine, too.

We look forward to working on our 2 service projects, more faith building, Faces of Peace exploration, and fun!

We will meet on the following Sundays in March: 3/7, 3/14, and 3/21, and 3/28. Feel free to bring a friend!

Contact Wendy at
wendymuschett@optonline.net
for more information

Take care,
Wendy and Melissa

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86396877744pwd=VFNpY2dnWEhTSFFWNEd2Z3p4YTd4UT09>

Meeting ID: 863 9687 7744

Passcode: 905648



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



The Loft Community

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.



Lenten Devotionals

As Lent draws nearer, so does the milestone marking a full year of quarantine - a year that has been filled with challenges and pain, and in which we have all endured major changes in how we go about our daily lives.

Lent is a time to contemplate, to return to God, and to consider with seriousness what really matters in our lives of faith.

This year, more than ever, Lent will be a difficult season, but also one that hopefully presents opportunities for reflection, personal growth, and an outpouring of community support.

Beginning on February 22nd, student pastor Heidi Butler will be leading a devotional class on Monday nights throughout Lent focusing on spirituality and closeness to God through prayer, discussion, and exploration of art and written word using "Again & Again: A Lenten Refrain," from the company "A Sanctified Art."

Gathering time will begin at 7:30pm, with the program beginning by 7:50pm and finishing by 9:00pm. Please contact Heidi (heidi.butler@yale.edu) for more information! --

Log on to <https://zoom.us/j/91357117765?pwd=OGZFV2V2N3VnSytMdUIVb1piR25qdz09>

(Meeting ID: 913 5711 7765 Passcode: Fairfield1)

or call 1-646 -558 -8656 (Meeting ID: 913 5711 7765 Passcode: 6261225580)



UCC Lenten Devotional

Has God's steadfast love ceased? (Psalm 77:8)

"I promise." A phrase we have come to familiar with only to be left wanting. In turn making, it harder for us to trust in the promises God has for us.

This Lent bring your broken promises and wanting be filled again with hope and promise from a God who loves you exactly as you are. *Promises, Promises* includes a biblical text, reflection, and prayer for each day of Lent until Easter Sunday.

It is written by the writers of the popular online [Daily Devotional](#) by the United Church of Christ.

<https://www.thepilgrimpress.com/collections/resources-of-the-stillspeaking-writers-group/products/promises-promises-2021-lenten-devotional?variant=32171622072387>



We will meet March 24th at 6:30 via Zoom. We will read & discuss meditations 14 through 19 in Howard Thurman's Meditations of the Heart. Anyone who doesn't have the book can contact Rita Skog (ritaskog@hotmail.com) to receive copies of the February readings.



Clara and John Harmon

First Church Face Masks For Sale!

\$10 each

(money raised to support Racial Justice initiatives
...anonymous donor covered costs)

Free Delivery to your home or home mailbox on weekend or you can pick up in church office. Mask will be in envelope with your name on it.

Leave payment in Church Treasurer mailbox. Checks made out to First Church Congregational with memo of Face Mask(s)

Order by sending email to Jacque Paige at jpaige@smithhanley.com, or calling her at 203-763-9624.

Yes, black is the only color option...but isn't the cross beautiful?!



COME RING FOR LENT AND EASTER!

HAND BELL CHOIR



TUESDAYS 6:00-7:00PM
IN THE SANCTUARY

Contact Cheri Evan cevan@firstchurchfairfield.org for more details!



Join the Online Ministry Team

Are you tech savvy?

Would you like to be?



Our new ministry with online worship is looking for members! You don't have to have all the experience in world just some and a desire to learn as we grow. Basic knowledge on using a computer and I-Pad is helpful but not necessary.

Our current team is Cheri Evan, Alan Fuehring, Andrew and David McKinnis. Each Sunday two of us work together to help live stream worship: controlling the camera, microphones, monitoring our social media platforms and noting prayer requests. We also assist with Zoom meetings and other worship services as needed.



Training will be provided for those interested. Please contact Cheri with questions and to schedule a demonstration if you are interested.
cevan@firstchurchfairfield.org or 203-864-5969 (cell)



Holy Week

Worship Schedule

Palm Sunday ~ Lord's Supper

Sunday, March 28 at 10:15AM

Livestream on Facebook, YouTube and our Homepage

Maundy Thursday ~ Last Supper and Tenebrae

Thursday April 2 at 7:30PM

on ZOOM

Good Friday "Seven Last Words of Christ"

Friday April 3 at Noon

Livestream on Facebook, YouTube and our Homepage

Easter

Sunday April 5

Easter Worship at 10:15AM

Livestream on Facebook, YouTube and our Homepage



First Church Congregational

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

148 Beach Road • Fairfield CT • 06824