



FIRST CHURCH
GUILFORD CT • FOUNDED IN 1643

Landmark

JANUARY 2021

First Congregational Church
An Open and Affirming Congregation
Vol. 67, Number 1

AULD LANG SYNE . . .

A phrase heard around the world as we say good-bye to 2020 is "What a year!" We move into 2021 carrying the consequences, the aftermath, the grief, and the lessons of a year of global upheaval, awareness, and opportunity too. As we reset ourselves in hopes of vaccines and ways to imagine some community gatherings in the future, may we embrace all we have learned. This adapted poem *The Layers* by Stanley Kunitz invites space to reflect on what has been, is, and might be. May we take some notes, offer some prayers, lean in to God, listen to our hearts, discover healthy rhythms to life, and imagine how we rebuild communities of love.

*I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.
When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned camp-sites,
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.
Oh, I have made myself a herd
out of my true affections,
and my herd is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?
In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face.
Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.
In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice*

directed me:
 "Live in the layers,
 not on the litter."
 Though I lack the art
 to decipher it,
 no doubt the next chapter
 in my book of transformations
 is already written.
 I am not done with my changes.

As the calendar flips to the idea of a hope-filled year, we are still changing. Even weighed down, many venture forward as people more aware of injustice, privilege, and need. We step out into a new year, layered with a loss from the last and share a cup of kindness as community to rebuild.

May God's love and grace surround you. Happy New Year!
 Peace, Ginger

JANUARY 2021 WORSHIP & PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Sunday, January 3: 10:00am

In-person worship- only if 35 degrees** or above at 10:00am on Sunday...limited to 70 – reserve a seat online at

www.firstchurchguilford.org – click on "Get Connected" then "Worship RSVP (date)

If the Penguin is out- you stay in ... and worship online.

Worship by email: an email with worship will be mailed on Sunday morning.

Worship by mail: hard copies of the worship bulletin and a transcript of the sermon will be mailed.

Sunday, January 10 at 10:00am

Sunday, January 17 at 10:00am

Sunday, January 24 at 10:00am

Sunday, January 31 at 10:00am

*****Peppermint the Penguin will appear in front of the church and on Facebook and the Church's webpage if it is colder than 35 degrees. Remember, if the Penguin is out – you stay in!***

PARISH CARE TEAM MEMBER

(formerly Deaconess) OF THE MONTH

Please notify Pam D'Amico (860-338-4811) of births, adoptions, or anyone who may need a note of sympathy or encouragement.

DEACON OF THE MONTH

Deacon for January is Mark Mitchell (215-435-6192.) If you have feedback or questions about church matters. Please speak with Mark.



IN MEMORIAM

Wilton O. "Bill" Holliday

February 16, 1935 - December 21, 2020

Edith Carlson Zabel

September 5, 1935 – December 26, 2020

FOOD COLLECTION

"I was hungry & you gave me food." Matt 25:35



Food insecurity continues. Though we won't collect the food at the worship service, we invite you to continue to support the Guilford Food Bank. Check the Guilford Food bank website for their recent needs. Food can be dropped off at Big Y and Palumbo's Automotive during their regular working hours. The Guilford Food bank receives donations on Friday mornings.

ANNUAL REPORTS DUE

Monday, January 11, 2021

First Church's Annual Meeting will be held in the Sanctuary on Sunday, February 7, 2021 after the 10:00am worship service. The Book of Reports prepared for the meeting is a compilation of reports on the year 2020 by all the Boards and Committees of the Church, as well as clergy and program staff. Please submit your report electronically by Monday, January 11th. Please contact Penelope in the Church Office with questions: 203-453-5249 or office@firstchurchguilford.org.

CHURCH COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS**December 8, 2020**

Treasurer Report: Bill Bailey

- Carrying a surplus - much of which is because of the Payroll Protection Plan loan. We are at 94% of the pledged Ministries Fund.
- Second Trustee distribution came through and is added to the Miscellaneous Fund Contributions.
- Have been approved for the Payroll Protection Plan loan forgiveness \$76,000. Only owe \$8,000 for the EIDL (second loan). See below for repayment.

Board of Finance: Larry Backes

- Will meet in early January to compare the projected budget with the Stewardship numbers.

Funding sabbatical fund: S. Dudley/B. Bailey

- There have not been proper payments going into the sabbatical fund. No explanation discovered. Underfunded by about \$12,000 over the past couple of years. Motion made and approved to fund the sabbatical funds now.

Discussion of PAJ request: Gay Harter

- Presenting resolution which comes from UCC Palestine/Israel Network. UCC hoping to present at General Synod next summer if enough churches accept the resolution. Motion made and approved.

Discussion of Federal loan payback: Bill Bailey

- Repayment of the EIDL loan. Bill wants to payback right away. Motion made and approved to pay back loan right away.

Discussion of payments to nursery employees:

Stephen Dudley/Judi Wallace

- Motion made and approved to give both of the Nursery workers \$200 before Christmas.

Ministers' Report: Ginger/Jake

- Ginger
 - Christmas Eve three services 5:00, 7:00, and 9:00 with windows open. Live nativity after 5:00 service. Need to register ahead of time on the church website.
 - Group of people have helped a Church member move from her home to Solstice. Absolutely a gift from God.
 - Church Staff is hanging in and hanging on. Prayers are always welcome to help them through the rest of 2020.
- Jake
 - Celebrating Shannon Clarkson and the Adult Education Committee. Series of Wednesday Night programs throughout the fall and now through Epiphany.

- Exciting things happening with confirmation beginning Dec. 14th: Zoom gift exchange, pizza party, class packets. Some retreats might be offered later...even after they are confirmed.
- Trustees considering their mission, vision, and strategies so that they work in tandem with Stewardship and planned giving.

Business: Peter Rebuzzini/Susan Leete

- Moving forward with expansion of driveway at Spencer House.
- Asked Historic District Commission about expanding the church parking lot, but there were concerns, so we are rethinking that idea.
- Last month we approved housing Guilford Center for Children for another month. Motion made and approved to allow GCC to use our space through the spring.
- Neighborhood Music School hasn't responded to requests, so we don't think NMS needs our space at this time.
- Hoping to keep windows open and services going so Sunday sexton Carlo can stay employed. We will keep services going with windows open down to 35 degree temperature.

Nominating: Gail Tomsich/ Peter Rebuzzini

- Working hard to call and fill the slate of committee members for the January Church Council meeting and then the Annual Meeting.
- Thanks to Nominating Committee for their hard work. Church Council is supposed to nominate and add two people to the Nominating Committee each year. **Homework:** come to January meeting with a couple of names each. Stephen will call the list to get the new committee members.

Review Prior Minutes November: Stephen Dudley

- Minutes approved.

New /Old Business All

- Environmental Ministry Team wants to add Creation Justice Church Covenant on the Annual Meeting Agenda. This is the last step before applying for Creation Justice designation.
- Vote on name of church penguin. Link to vote online on the website.
- Annual Reports should be submitted to Penelope by early January or even late December. Deadline is January 11.
- Stewardship: we broke \$500,000 this week. Still working to reach our goal. Remind everyone to put their pledges in. Talk it up. Send out the link to the committees.

Church Council Highlights, *continued*

- Christmas bakery Saturday, Dec. 19 & Sunday, Dec. 20. Contact Lisa Freund with donations.
- Annual mitten, hat & scarf collection is not going to happen because of pandemic.
- Labyrinth proposal: it needs to be flush to the ground. There have been donations to the Labyrinth already and we have not voted to approve it. It will be on the January agenda for vote. There has been sufficient publicity.

Larry Backes thanked everyone for help while his family battled Covid-19.

Meeting adjourned at 8:02 pm

**CHILDREN & YOUTH MINISTRIES**

Leaning into God for strength, comfort and joy this new year! Yet another season has arrived! Winter brings so many new things for us to see and do in God's creation!

January also brings a new story to study about Epiphany in our weekly "LIVE with Judi" Sunday School on First Congregational Church of Guilford's Facebook page. As we are filled with the emotion of these past months and hope for the pandemic to subside, we will keep you posted on plans for classes and nursery care. At this point, classrooms will remain closed on Sunday mornings.

Also, be sure to read the CE newsletter for events and small group activities being planned for 2021!

PF continues to engage small groups of high school students in volunteering and virtual gatherings. We head into 2021 with great hope for summer activities!!

Our annual PF Service Trip Sponsorship Drive will be happening this month. If you are interested in donating to the materials, supplies and scholarships for our PF service work trip (hopefully this summer!), please let me know, we will send a brochure with more information about where the money goes and the impact it has for so many!

Opportunities and announcements will be listed in the weekly Children, Teen and Family Ministries newsletter, PF Facebook page and PF's Instagram. Wishing you and your loved ones a wintery month filled with hope, peace and joy!

Judi Wallace, Director
judi@firstchurchguilford.org

DEACON DIGEST

The new year brings an invitation to consider ourselves and our faith journeys anew. And, this year, the concurrent introduction of vaccines for the coronavirus has sharpened that effect, setting it into relief.

With the newfound hope of reunion comes a sense of retrospection about what we've been through and what has changed. A lot? Nothing? It's still difficult to say for many of us, but the questions linger. Yes, the pandemic has separated us from one another physically and even from the space of our church, but it has also multiplied opportunities for reflection and openness to change.

As we strive to lean into God this year, prayer and scripture can help, focusing attention and offering starting points for self-examination. When I joined the deacons in 2019, Ginger encouraged us to focus our attention on scripture and to bring it into our daily lives and our service to the church.

After 2020, I feel profound gratitude for that guidance. I sometimes feel like a different person reading scripture, especially in the past few months. Every passage seems new and means something different. Just yesterday, it was Jesus' forty days in the wilderness in the Book of Matthew. As we (eventually) reach the end of our isolation, how will we face the challenges of a return to "normal?"

I'm simultaneously reminded of my favorite pandemic podcast, The Happiness Lab. It revolves around the reality that we often undermine our own happiness. Laurie Santos, the host, invites listeners to learn about and perhaps embrace some of the many small habits of mind and activity that lead to greater happiness and fulfillment in life. Gratitude, of course, plays a recurring role.

As we look ahead to the new year and the gradual return of our community life in person, I pray that we will each find renewed meaning and value in exploring our relationships with God and one another, taking conscious steps toward happiness, understanding, and love.

Mark Mitchell
Deacon of the Month for January

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE:

We are grateful for the response thus far to the Stewardship drive to fund our Ministry Budget for 2021, and are excited as we await the latest gifts to be made.

CREATION JUSTICE CHURCH COVENANT

Led by our ministers, church leadership and the Environmental Ministry Team over the last 10 years, FCCG has progressed through all three levels of becoming a UCC “Green Church” sanctioned by our UCC Conference, and recently, also by Connecticut’s interdenominational Interreligious Eco-Justice Network (IREJN), part of Interfaith Power and Light, the national faith-based environmental advocacy group. Our progress has included the following: new windows and/or insulation; replacing an inefficient oil-fired heating system; installing LED lighting; placing 74 solar panels on our roof, which produce almost 30 MWh of clean electricity, some of which is even fed back into the utility “grid”; a large organic garden providing food to local foodbanks; and steps taken to reduce and eliminate our use of plastic, polystyrene and other non-biodegradable and non-compostable materials.

Over the last several years, the Environmental Ministry Team, along with the Peace Affirmation and Justice Committee and the Board of Community and Global Justice and other committees with Church Council support, have intentionally led our now “Green Church” congregation to critical thinking about the socioeconomic dimensions of environmental justice, such as race, class and inequality. Our ministers and guest preachers have preached sermons about climate change and justice, and we have had after-church speakers, book study groups, and participated in youth forums, advocacy actions, marches and visits to and outreach to our elected leaders about humankind’s highest calling: to care for Creation and to seek justice for the oppressed and for those who have suffered from environmental racism at the local, state, national and global levels. Recently FCCG signed on to the UCC’s Congregation Climate Voter Challenge to encourage our members to take the Creation Care Voter Pledge and to think about Creation care whenever they vote.

For our 2021 Annual Meeting, the Environmental Ministry has proposed that the congregation consider and adopt the following **Creation Justice Church Covenant**:

We, the people of First Congregational Church, Guilford, Connecticut, commit ourselves, as individuals and as a congregation, to the intertwined responsibilities to care for Creation and to seek justice for the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. With resolve, we commit ourselves with an awareness of how the abuses of Creation and chance inevitably cause human suffering and of how factors such as race, class, and global inequality cause some to suffer more than others. We dedicate ourselves to this urgent calling, as humanity confronts the current and future crisis of damage to our climate. We desire that these deeply felt commitments be reflected in all the dimensions of our congregation’s life. We covenant to take ourselves beyond the walls of this church to uphold our promise to God, our Creator, to Jesus, the Redeemer of Creation, and to the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer of Creation, to be faithful stewards of this Creation.

We hope that you will consider and support this statement of our interconnectedness with all people and earthly animals and our movement toward right relationships among and with all God’s Creation and permanently establish Creation Justice as an integral strand in the DNA of FCCG.

*Thank you,
Jon Leckerling
Co-Chair EMT*

**GROCERY CARD MINISTRY
Wednesdays 10am-noon**

Our grocery card ministry continues. **Cards for Big Y, Bishop’s, and Stop and Shop are available to purchase by cash or check through the Finance Office window of Spencer House.** \$100 in cash or check purchases you \$100 worth of groceries and nets the church \$5 – a great fund-raising tool. Cards may be purchased and donated to the church for Ginger and Jake to distribute to those with food insecurity. We are exploring ways to creatively expand this ministry and fund-raising... *stay tuned!*



