

GABRIEL'S HORN



First Congregational United Church of Christ

April 2019



Introducing our new Interim Minister, Rev. Michael Durst

On Sunday, March 24, at a special meeting, the congregation agreed to contract with the Rev. Michael Durst to be our interim minister. Mike was raised in a Jewish household, and came to Christianity through his marriage to Carol Emig. He spent a number of years worshipping in an Episcopal Church before finding his home in the UCC. He's currently a member of Cleveland Park UCC.

Mike's first career was as a tax lawyer. A significant part of his practice in recent years has been helping the world's poorer countries raise revenue by more effectively taxing multi-national businesses. As part of this work, he has traveled extensively internationally, seeing first hand and responding to the effects of colonialism and racism around the world. He attended seminary part-time while working full-time as a lawyer. He received his Master of Divinity degree from Wesley Theological Seminary in 2012. He completed his Clinical Pastoral Education at Goodwin House in Northern Virginia. Mike has served Plymouth UCC in Wheaton as both the Interim Minister and the Associate Minister of Christian Education and Experience.

Karen Byrne and John Marsh will be serving on the Interim Ministry Team to provide support and advice to Mike. Council asks that as he settles into his role as Interim that any concerns or suggestions go through the Interim Ministry Team or the Ministerial Relations Team. The Rev. Durst's first official day in the office will be April 2 and his first Sunday will be April 7. We hope you will all join us in welcoming him.



Church Council

Council Capsule

Council Business Meeting on March 5, 2019:

- **Youth Drop in Center (YDIC)** Sasha Bruce is working on the text of a new agreement with First Church. Council will name a team to determine the feasibility of First Church hosting a second YDIC night per week as requested by Sasha Bruce assuming funding can be found.
- **Treasurer's Report** Nora Marsh noted all commissions, except Christian Education, are under budget by 16% as of Feb. 28, 2019.
- **The Interim Minister Search** team is positive about reaching a decision soon. When the team recommends a candidate Council will hold a meeting to meet and approve the recommended candidate. Council will call a Congregational meeting on a Sunday [March 24] after church to approve hiring of the candidate.
- The **Called Search** Committee has received names from the congregation for a team to carry out the called pastor search. The committee will review names and make recommendations to Council.

Facilitated Listening Conversations

Council hired facilitators Tarek Maassari and Paula Cole Jones to lead members of council in exercises and listening conversations for two hours on Wednesday, March 5. Council members each contributed items to a timeline of significant events in First Church history. Facilitators lead a review of the timeline, encouraging personal perceptions of events and conflicts. Facilitators shared helpful concepts: for example, the "dominant culture paradigm" many churches experience, and the "multi-cultural paradigm" to which many churches aspire, and some achieve. Council members left with many questions. Most obvious is: does the First Church congregation as a whole aspire to function as a multi-cultural paradigm congregation and what might that look like? Council agreed to widen this discussion to the broader congregation, but to prepare well for that discussion by completing the listening conversation, begun on March 5, in a second session on April 9 with the facilitators.

Facilities Commission

Report from the Facilities Commission:

The Facilities Commission continued its regular duties of reviewing building maintenance and repair needs and expenses with Byron Adams, our building manager. Each month, we also review outside requests that have come in to use the church space and make sure we have a schedule in place for sound board duty at Sunday service. In the last couple of months, we've been trying to get to the bottom of the mystery that is our building's recycling stream so that we can implement signage improvements and education to help the congregation improve our waste management practices.

Anisa Heming, chair
anisaheming@gmail.com

Worship Commission

Report from the Worship Commission:

We have met regularly with Rev. Sam McFerran and John Horman to plan worship services for the Lenten season on the theme "A Recipe for Lent: Courage, Compassion and Community." A major focus has been to assure continued strong pulpit ministry while we remain in a time of transition. We are particularly grateful for Sam's leadership in bringing vibrant voices to our worship, and, as always, to the clergy within our congregation for their willingness to step forward and keep the word fresh in their preaching for us.

More mundane, but just as important, we also planned and assured coverage by Commission members and others for communion table set-up and take-down as well as ushers for each service. We have also made and carried out assignments to provide the communion elements for services where communion is celebrated.

During the Lenten season there is also planning for special services - Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday - which is well under way. Maundy Thursday will be a simpler service this year conducted entirely within the sanctuary. We have begun the process for taking orders for Easter flowers which again this year will include many lilies, for sure, but other multi-colored flowers as well, reflecting the brightness and excitement of the Easter message and the arrival of spring in our faith journey.

This is a wonderful, active commission tending to core elements of our time together as a community of faith. Please feel free to email me your thoughts for improvement, wishes for future services, and any praise (always appreciated) for what has given you special meaning on a Sunday!

Peace and love,

Nick McConnell, Chair

NmccConnell@jackscamp.com

Care of Parish Commission



Easter Pancake Breakfast

It is our tradition at First Church to have a pancake breakfast on Easter Sunday. To complement the traditional pancakes, we would like to invite any pancake enthusiasts in our community to add to the festivities with a specialty pancake offering. We are looking for some specialty flavors that have traditionally enhanced the regular pancakes that come from the kitchen. Some flavors from the past have included: Banana Nut, Lemon Ricotta, Savory cheese, Buckwheat (gluten free), Maple ... *to name but a few.*

Donations of fruit are also welcome. We can also benefit from the loan of griddles and extension cords for this celebration. If you are able to contribute in any way, please contact, Susan Anderson, ssba92@gmail.com, and let me know your flavor or how else you may help.

Coffee Hour Sign-Ups

Care of Parish also asks that you take a look at the Coffee Hour Sign-up (click on the link below) for now through the end of the year and sign up for at least two Sundays. Our committee will be reviewing the 2019 sign-ups and possibly assigning Sundays to ensure our weekly coffee needs (really strong needs) are met.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0b45a5a92ca3f94-coffee>

Coffee Hour Hosts

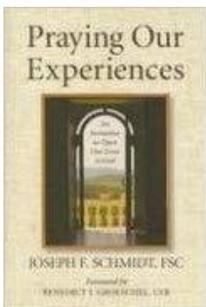
April 7				
April 14	Anderson	Anderson	Bushmiller	Bushmiller
April 21				
April 28	Anne Mascolino	Tom Mascolino	Susan Saudek	

Christian Education Commission

Easter Egg Hunt Easter Sunday at 12:30 In the first floor of the Sanctuary

Please join us for this fun First Church Easter tradition! Hopping all the way to DC, the Easter Bunny will be dropping off lots of eggs for our children to collect!

As the pancake lunch winds down, the children will be invited down to the sanctuary. In "waves" with the youngest collectors going first, the egg hunt will begin! Bring your Easter baskets and join the fun!



Theology Reading Group: Wednesday, April 10, at 6:30 PM

The Theology Reading Group will next meet on Wednesday, April 10, at 6:30, to discuss a classic book of spiritual direction concerning prayer, *Praying our Experiences* by Joseph Schmidt. The author's premise, presented in direct and succinct prose, is that we can come to know God through reflecting on the emotional and ethical character of our individual experiences. Everyone is welcome.

Social Action and Awareness Commission

Report from the Social Action and Awareness Commission:

The Social Action and Awareness Commission seeks to coordinate and facilitate the ways First Church demonstrates love and care for our neighbors and helps change our community and world. The SAAC works within a framework of an overarching SAAC body, and the Anti-Racism Task Force, Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth, Home for All Task Force and Sanctuary Working Group.

Members of the Anti-Racism Task Force attended an exciting off-site training for racial justice facilitators. Also, on February 8-9, First Church hosted a Washington Interfaith Network training to teach “capacity, skills and tools to advocate for justice.” First Church members attended the March 2, 2019, follow-up training and will attend further training on April 13, 2019 (location TBD).

The Drop-In Center (DIC) for Homeless Youth hired a coordinator to serve as the First Church liaison and on-site supervisor.

The Home for All Task Force members and friends participated in tours of city-owned sites that are priorities for affordable housing.

The Sanctuary Working Group actively supports advocacy for the Dream and Promise Act (H.R.6), and members are joining the “Overground Railroad” to meet and offer food, clothing and help in contacting family or friends to asylum seekers who arrive by bus at Union Station in DC. Planning is ongoing for a fundraising concert on May 17, 2019, to support various sanctuary causes.

The SAAC body approved funding and is providing support for the Sanctuary Working Group fundraising concert. The group has begun reviewing the DIC, in preparation for developing a “DIC sustainability plan,” and is identifying other SAAC goals.

Second Sunday Offering on April 14:

As in past years, the April Second Sunday offering will be split between two important environmental stewards: **Anacostia Watershed Society and Interfaith Power and Light.**



Despite centuries of development and pollution, the **Anacostia River Watershed** is still a remarkably rich natural area. A recent inventory of species, called a BioBlitz, counted 522 unique species, including rare and endangered species, birds, fish, mammals, amphibians, insects and many more. Journey along the river and you might see bald eagles, beavers, ospreys, cormorants, white perch, striped bass, crayfish, herons, turtles, egrets, otters, red fox, shad, kingfishers, catfish and even mussels!

Covering 176 square miles of the District of Columbia, Prince George’s County and Montgomery County in Maryland, and home to over 1 million people, the Anacostia River Watershed is a river on the mend, recovering from centuries of industrialization and pollution to become an urban oasis in the middle of the National Capital area.



Our local **Interfaith Power & Light** is a project of the InterFaith Council of Metropolitan Washington. Since 1978, IFC has been bringing together the diverse religious communities in the DC area to promote dialogue, understanding, and a sense of community. Eleven faith communities, from Baha'i to Zoroastrian, collaborate through IFC to deepen understanding and to build a just community in metropolitan Washington.

Support a Religious Response to Climate Change! Please support Interfaith Power & Light's powerful grassroots work with congregations to save energy, go green, and respond to climate change. Would you take a moment right now to deepen your commitment to Interfaith Power & Light's powerful grassroots work? Every dollar you give will go to work providing unique environmental programming that touches hearts and changes practices in hundreds of congregations

Moving the Racial Justice Agenda Forward

By Lucille Dickinson

From Friday evening, March 1, through Sunday morning, March 3, seven members of First Church participated in interactive training for racial justice facilitators, developed by the Central Atlantic Conference's Justice and Witness Action Network. We seven joined 21 other trainees from throughout the CAC, four CAC staff (including the new conference minister, Freeman Palmer), and five trainers, for a very full weekend at Camp Wabanna on the Chesapeake Bay in Edgewater, Maryland. The very able lead trainer was Vivian Jackson, a member of Peoples Congregational UCC and a semi-retired member of the faculty of the National Center for Cultural Competence at the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development.

The goal of the training was to provide "baseline preparation for persons desiring to facilitate congregational and community discussions and actions to promote racial justice." The training provided both informative content and insights into the process of facilitating (and participating in) the difficult conversations this work entails. In chronological order, the weekend covered:

- The story of the United Church of Christ around anti-racism.
- How we promise to be with each other in these conversations – what ground rules do we agree on?
- How faith might inform anti-racism work – what does the Bible say and how do we deal with contradictory texts? How does theology inform this work (from such theologians as Walter Wink, James Cone, others)?
- Who I am in this work -- What is my racial biography? What are my implicit biases?
- Understanding institutional and systemic oppression – How do we assign responsibility for outcomes to various actors? In a fictional exercise we assessed the responsibility of the one who broke a rule to tragic effect, the underling who enforced the rule, the party that set the rule in the first place, friends and associates who could have helped the rule-breaker/victim along the way.
- The continuum on becoming an anti-racist, multiracial/multicultural church – where is First Church on this continuum (from seeing racial and cultural differences as deficits, to tolerating racial and cultural differences, to seeing racial and cultural differences as assets), and what needs to change to become a fully inclusive?
- The training materials that exist and how to judge their usefulness, and what skills to cultivate.

The three-day session ended with a list of aspirations for going forward. To highlight just a couple from the whole group:

- Re-gathering for more opportunities to focus on practical facilitation skills;
- developing a step-by-step process for a church to use to affirm itself as an anti-racist church, which General Synod in 2003 called us to be (i.e., guidance similar to the open-and-affirming process in the 1980s).

Our group from First Church ended the retreat wanting to continue this work. A couple of us committed to joining the CAC Racial Justice Leadership Team. We brainstormed next steps during the retreat and stayed a bit after the retreat concluded to brainstorm some more. We divided some research and other tasks among ourselves and agreed to gather again soon and bring ideas to the anti-racism task force, the Social Action and Awareness Commission and Council.

These sacred conversations are difficult, and this was no exception. Throughout the weekend the white participants learned – or relearned – how some discussions and language can and do retraumatize the participants of color, and that great care must be taken to both have the conversation and promote healing.

Please feel free to ask any of us about our experience – Lucille Dickinson, Sharlene Castle, Priscilla Waters, Karen Byrne, Cindy Mazur, Janneke Ratcliffe, and Gail Sonnemann. Here we are below. Standing between Karen and Cindy is Audrey Price, supply pastor at First Church in early 2018 and now on the conference staff.





News from the First Church Archive

By Judith Gray

Periodically the First Church office is contacted by someone seeking information from the church's archive. One of the most interesting – and informative – inquiries came this year from Peter Porsche, a Ph.D. student in the History Department at Texas Christian University. His research focuses on Reconstruction and the relationship between religion and race during the latter half of the nineteenth century. “I believe the story from First Congregational is one that sheds light on black activism in the post-war years, the importance of Oberlin to that movement and the advocacy by Rev. Boynton of an early ‘separate but equal’ doctrine almost 30 years before *Plessy v. Ferguson* would make segregation the official policy of the nation.”

Peter stated “I got interested in First Congregational while reading about Oliver Otis Howard and his connection to the church, especially his efforts to see African Americans welcomed into membership over the objections of Rev. Charles Boynton. I’m trying to understand and flesh out a bit more about that story and the resulting church split and congressional investigation into Howard.” His initial sources were Oliver Otis Howard’s mention of First Church in his autobiography and a chapter from John Carpenter’s biography of Howard entitled *The Sword and the Olive Branch* which briefly notes the dispute and resulting church split. He was then able to find and purchase a copy of the *Centennial History* online, now supplemented by relevant sections from the church’s 50th anniversary booklet.

One task was helping track down the full names of three African Americans (2 men and 1 woman) who applied for membership in First Church in 1867. The church minutes from the November meeting that year report the discussion concerning “two colored persons recently examined on their own request, for admission to this church and found by the proper examining board duly qualified and worthy to be recommended for admission.” The church’s board then passed the following: “Resolved: That in order to settle an apparent misunderstanding in regard to the attitude of this Church relative to the admission of colored members, we hereby declare that the doors of the Church are open to all true believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and we welcome such without distinction of race or color.” Copies of the resolution were directed to be sent to “our colored brothers,” O.S.B. Wall and John H. Cook. (There is no reference in the minutes to a woman, however, and her name remains unknown.) Both men were eventually added to the rolls in 1869.

Peter has been able to find additional information about the two men: “What I have begun uncovering is that these two gentlemen: O.S.B. Wall and John H. Cook, are no ordinary African Americans. They both hail from Oberlin in Ohio. Cook attended the staunchly abolitionist and Congregationalist-founded school as did Wall’s relatives. Both men worked to advance the rights of African Americans and both men were employed by Howard at the [Freedmen’s] Bureau’s Washington headquarters. Howard kept up a decades’ long correspondence with both men (most of which I am still working through now). At the moment, I don’t have any clear-cut findings, but I am tracing the connection between Oberlin, black activism post-Civil War, and individuals like Howard, Wall, and Cook who appear to be working together to integrate First Congregational and make it an example throughout the land that black and white are equal before God.

“What makes First Congregational particularly interesting is that newspapers across the country are following the dispute. As the name implies, it is the only Congregational Church in D.C. and since it had received funding from perhaps the most famous preacher of the era: Lyman Beecher as well as countless other Congregational Churches from across the country, letters were pouring in saying that it would be a disgrace for the church to deny these men membership when the Congregational Church had fought

against abolition for years to only now turn around and deny these men membership. The hypocrisy of Rev. Boynton's position would bring shame to the [entire] movement it was feared."

And, in response to my comments about Howard's subsequent career with Native Americans and especially his relentless pursuit of Chief Joseph and the peaceful Nez Perce people, Peter was able to send a recent article in the *Journal of Military History of the West* (vol. 47, 2018) by Dr. Scott Stabler, a friend of his who teaches at Grand Valley State University in Michigan. Stabler's article, "Two Paths to Peace: Oliver Otis Howard, Negotiator to Cochise and Joseph," illuminates the very different approach Howard was able to employ with the Apache leader, resulting in mutual respect and a workable solution. A copy of the article is now in Howard's biographical file in the church archive.

2019 Church Leadership

Council: Nan McConnell (Moderator), Kim Darling (Assistant Moderator), Gail Sonneman (Clerk), Nora Marsh (Treasurer), Dwight Davis and James (JD) Okorie-Dunn (At Large) and representatives from Commissions below:

Worship Commission, Meetings TBD
Nick McConnell, Chair
Dianne Brenneman, Representative to Council

Facilities Commission, Meetings Fourth Thursday 6:30 PM
Anisa Heming, Chair
Jamie Moore, Representative to Council

Social Action Commission, Meetings TBD
Priscilla Waters, Chair
John Smeltzer, Representative to Council

Finance Commission, Meetings First Sunday 11:45 AM
Polly Gordon, Chair
David Greer, Representative to Council

Christian Education Commission, Meetings second Sunday 9:15 AM
Mark Jensen, Chair
Joey Meyer, Representative to Council

Care of the Parish Commission, Meetings TBD
Susan Anderson, Chair
Mike Zawada, Representative to Council

Outreach and Membership Commission, Meetings TBD
Ann Bushmiller, Chair
Lucille Dickinson, Representative to Council

Calendar

Monday, April 1

- 6:00 pm Downtown Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth
- 6:30 pm Sanctuary Task Force, *Comm. Hall*

Tuesday, April 2

- 6:00 pm Church Council, *Comm. Hall*

Wednesday, April 3

- 12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*

Thursday, April 4

- 6:00 pm Worship Commission, *Chapel*
- 7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Sunday, April 7

- 9:15 am Bible Workbench
- 9:30 am Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*
- 10:15 am Child Care provided, *Ed. Suite*
- 10:30 am Sunday School, *Ed. Suite*
- 10:30 am Morning Worship, *Sanctuary*
Rev. Michael Durst preaching
- 11:30 am Coffee & Fellowship, *Narthex*

Monday, April 8

- 6:00 pm Downtown Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth

Wednesday, April 10

- 12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*

Thursday, April 11

- 7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Sunday, April 14

- 9:15 am Bible Workbench
- 9:30 am Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*
- 9:45 am Christian Ed. Commission, *Ed. Suite*
- 10:15 am Child Care provided, *Ed. Suite*
- 10:30 am Sunday School, *Ed. Suite*
- 10:30 am Morning Worship, *Sanctuary*
- 11:30 am Coffee & Fellowship, *Narthex*
- 12:00 pm Adult Nurture, *Comm. Hall*
- 12:00 pm Care of Parish Comm., *Chapel*

Monday, April 15

- 6:00 pm Downtown Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth

Wednesday, April 17

- 12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*

Thursday, April 18

- 6:30 pm Maundy Thursday Service, *Sanctuary*
- 8:15 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Saturday, April 20

- 10:00 am Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Sunday, April 21

- 9:15 am Bible Workbench
- 9:30 am Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*
- 10:15 am Child Care provided, *Ed. Suite*
- 10:30 am Sunday School, *Ed. Suite*
- 10:30 am Morning Worship, *Sanctuary*
- 11:30 am Pancake Breakfast, *Comm. Hall*
- 12:30 pm Easter Egg Hunt, *Sanctuary*

Monday, April 22

- 6:00 pm Downtown Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth

Tuesday, April 23

Church Office Closed

Wednesday, April 24

- 12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*

Thursday, April 25

- 6:30 pm Facilities Commission, *Chapel*
- 7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Sunday, April 28

- 9:15 am Bible Workbench
- 9:30 am Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*
- 10:15 am Child Care provided, *Ed. Suite*
- 10:30 am Sunday School, *Ed. Suite*
- 10:30 am Morning Worship, *Sanctuary*
- 11:30 am Coffee & Fellowship, *Narthex*



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Ministers – Friends & Members of the Church
Interim Senior Minister – Rev. Michael C. Durst
Minister of Faith Formation – Rev. Sam McFerran
Director of Music – Mr. John Horman
Building Manager – Mr. Byron Adams
Administrative Assistant – Ms. Cindy Dobbs
Members in Discernment – Dwight Davis, Lynaya Morris
Nursery & Childcare Staff – Luis Murillo, Timur Murillo, Ziyah Holman, Mia Young

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