

GABRIEL'S HORN

First Congregational United Church of Christ

May 2019



Springtime at First Church

It was wonderful to see everyone at Easter. Our feeling of loving community was readily apparent: the service, with its wonderful music, exuded the promise of new life – and eternal life – that our planet projects in these latitudes every year at this Spring season. This promise, of course, pervades the Easter liturgy, which proclaims God's promise of ever-new life exuberantly and confidently: "Christ is risen indeed!"

The bursting forth of life at Eastertime is a joyful call to renewal in one's own life, whatever one's current circumstances. One of the lessons of Easter is that every new moment is a new creation of God, a new opportunity for us to follow the way of optimism and faith, regardless of anything that has happened in the past. Easter's promise to all of us, of eternal life with God, is the greatest builder of confidence imaginable for all of us. And this lesson is found not only in Scripture; it is built into the springtime display of natural beauty that surrounds us, even in the heart of the city.

At the same time, in the midst of the burst of new life and confidence surrounding us, we should always bear in mind that God's Creation is far from complete. Undoubtedly, there is spiritual growth still to occur in our own lives – in our relationships with others, and also in the solitude of our own hearts, where we converse only with God. In addition, violence and extreme poverty are present in many parts of the world, often inducing people to take great risks to seek to relocate in our country and other wealthy countries around the world. And we know that in our church's location in the heart of the City of Washington, we are in the midst of many people who need help of various kinds, people dealing with poverty and violence and untreated illness and homelessness.

We pray that the invigorating messages of Easter and the springtime will give us the confidence and hope to do our part in repairing God's world, to do our part in bringing Creation closer to what God wishes Creation to be. We pray that this work will begin internally, as we build greater strength in our own souls, and that we will follow through, as people in relationship with others both interpersonally and politically, in bringing help and healing to all our friends and neighbors, nearby and throughout the world. Let Easter and springtime, 2019, truly bring new life, and may that new life begin in the souls of each one of us.

Blessings,
Mike

(Photo courtesy of Willoughby B. Dobbs, IV, 2019)

Spring Congregational Meeting: Sunday, May 19 following church

LIVING OUT OUR MISSION AND VISION IN 2019
by Nan McConnell, Moderator with help from Council

Mission Statement

Approved at Annual Meeting, January 2013

We are a United Church of Christ congregation in the heart of Washington, D.C., led by the Spirit and in covenant with God and each other. We seek to understand and experience God and respond to the call of Jesus Christ as reflected in our heritage and today's experiences.

We welcome people of all ages, abilities, racial and cultural backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities, and beliefs to share and grow in faith through worship, prayer, education, social action, and community.

In so doing, by God's grace, we nourish each other; embrace spiritual transformation; stand for justice and peace; and strive to heal our city, nation, and the world.

In March and April, Council has held two sessions as part of an on-going discussion on how to more completely and intentionally live our mission, our MR/MC vision (Multiracial/multicultural Vision p. 5 of the 2018 Annual Report) and our priority to be anti-racist. As a member of Council said, "we now need to go beyond the words, all are welcome here" and explore more intentionally what that means for our congregation in 2019.

The MR/MC Vision was approved in 2003 and affirmed several times. In planning retreats starting in 2012, we developed and reaffirmed Eleven Actions for our life in the church (welcoming and inclusive) and the community (committed and prophetic) – some of which we have implemented and others we need to revisit (p. 7 of the 2018 Annual Report). The statement of the anti-racism working group (p. 48 of the 2017 Annual Report) contains processes endorsed by Council in 2017.

The Congregation has affirmed a vision reflected in these documents. The challenge is how to make more progress implementing our vision; this is what Council is discussing.

Council Conversation March 4, 2019 and April 9, 2019

The Council's first facilitated discussion began by lifting up our agreements for these sessions. Here are Council's agreements. We share them because they transcend our discussions.

- Take deep breaths and slow down
- Be open and honest
- Hold good intentions
- Get re-focused
- Safe space for mistakes and learning from them
- Open, authentic conversations
- Respecting different perspectives
- Keep trying
- Get support from facilitators
- Coffee, and phones on silent
- Call back the wandering mind
- Go hard on issues, not on people

If we are to build the beloved community, it is important to acknowledge there is a paradigm that maintains the dominant culture (DCP), and it differs from the multicultural paradigm (MCP). Most predominately white organizations operate within a dominant culture paradigm that existed before the current membership and staff were born.

Joel Barker defines a paradigm as a set of beliefs, assumptions, rules, mores and practices that tell us where the boundaries are and how to succeed within those boundaries. We can apply that definition to the process an organization will undertake to establish a vibrant multicultural community. Most U.S. institutions were not designed with boundaries wide enough for true multiracial, multicultural inclusion. We have yet to fully face how the history of segregation and marginalization established institutional and cultural norms that continue to operate as barriers to equality and inclusion. These institutional norms are almost impossible to examine, unless we can differentiate the dominant culture paradigm from the multicultural paradigm. Multicultural paradigms are structured for inclusion, and value cultural differences and cross-cultural relationships as qualities of the community. Does your congregation see itself as part of the multicultural community? How is that reflected in the membership, staff and external partnerships of the church? – Paula Cole Jones, Facilitator

Council has been supported by a team of two facilitators, Tarek Maassarani and Paula Cole Jones. Paula shared the concepts of “dominant culture paradigm” and “multicultural paradigm.”

After two facilitated sessions, Council has questions. Does the First Church congregation aspire to function as a truly multicultural congregation? What might that look like? And what next steps do we need to take to move our mission and vision forward.

The anti-racism statement from 2017 suggested next steps, including:

- 1) Continue to support discussion groups that focus on white privilege. When whites grapple with internalized racist superiority together, they identify (recognize and feel) the power of racism and its shaping of identity. The UCC curriculum released in late 2016 and has recently been augmented with guides for using the curriculum and is useful here.
- 2) Initiate a third, interracial discussion group. We are exploring various modes in an effort to discern the best way to do this (e.g., how to compose the group, the size of the group, frequency of meetings, etc.).

- 3) Review First Church's organizational policies to identify and address unconscious systematic racism. One way to address racism and white privilege within our church is to be intentional about our hiring decisions and when selecting people for lay leadership. This is particularly relevant as we move toward selecting a new settled pastor.

Some Next Steps for Council and the Congregation

We are engaging in a process. While it will take time, we are moving our vision forward:

1. Nurtures have been held on identity and belonging.
2. Seven members of FCC attending a Central Atlantic Conference session on racial justice facilitation training.
3. Our Interim Pastor, The Rev. Michael Durst, in his first sermon lifted up his commitment to working with us on our vision.
4. Council is meeting with The Rev Ron Hopson, a friend of First Church and now Designated Senior Minister at Peoples Congregational, to seek his help on next steps.
5. A subgroup of Council is meeting with The Rev. Freeman Palmer, the new Conference Minister, and The Rev. Marvin Silver, The Associate Conference Minister, on May 8 to discuss moving forward on a called pastor search and how congregations live out a multi-racial vision in ministry.
6. White privilege conversations are being scheduled for six Sundays, May 12 & 19, June 2, 9, 23 & 30, 2019 before church.
7. Conversations about race using some portion of the "Ally Toolkit" may be scheduled later this year. Several members of FCC attended training on this resource.
8. Council will discuss nurtures on issues such as:
 - What it means to live in covenant/unity/fellowship with one another in ways that facilitate open communication, kindness, civility and prayerful support of one another.
 - How to align different roles and relationships among clergy, staff, members and friends in order to achieve our shared vision and effectively carry out the work of the church.
 - How to be intentional about our hiring decisions and when selecting people for lay leadership.
9. Council will report on these important topics at congregational meetings and discuss how to measure progress.

As we as a Congregation are called to move forward to implement our vision, let us remember that "we covenant with God and one another ...to walk together in ways revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in sacrament and Word, study and prayer, fellowship and mission." We are a community bound in faith, love and joy. Let us celebrate our covenant with each other as we desire to be a beloved community.

For further reading:

<https://www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/articles/kyle-korver-utah-jazz-nba>

http://www.ucc.org/daily_devotional_growth_mindset?utm_campaign=dd_apr10_19&utm_medium=email&utm_source=unitedchurchofchrist

Care of Parish Commission

May Potluck Luncheon on May 19

Rather than the first Sunday in May, the monthly potluck will be held on Sunday, May 19, following worship, in conjunction with the Spring Congregational Meeting.



Coffee Hour Sign-Ups

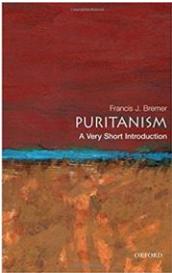
Care of Parish also asks that you take a look at the Coffee Hour Sign-up (click on the link below) for now through the end of the year and sign up for at least two Sundays. Our committee will be reviewing the 2019 sign-ups and possibly assigning Sundays to ensure our weekly coffee needs (really strong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

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

Coffee Hour Hosts

May 5	Kristy Goodfellow Mills	Barry Mills	David Greer	
May 12	Ann Saudek	Tony Saudek	Susan Goodman	Joan King
May 19	Nick McConnell	Nan McConnell	James Okorie-Dunn	Emmanuel Okorie-Dunn
May 26	Liz Warren	Lance Warren	Faith Brightbill	

Christian Education Commission



Theology Reading Group May 14, 6:30 PM

The Theology Reading Group will next meet on Tuesday, May 14, at 6:30, to discuss *Puritanism: A Very Short Introduction*, by well-regarded historian, Frank Bremer. Come discuss whether or how the preoccupations of our denominational ancestors persist today. Hint: they wanted to build a civil society that more closely resembled the Kingdom of God!

Finance Commission

"Be on the lookout for ways you can help the Finance Commission (and other commissions of the church) to help balance the budget before the Spring Congregational meeting. Thank you!"

Social Action and Awareness Commission

Music and Activism at *Music Without Borders* Concert on May 17

In an echo of the immigrant crisis today, [Lilo Gonzalez](#) fled from El Salvador in the 1980s with his family during the first sanctuary movement, leaving civil war and death squads behind them and an uncertain future ahead.

Now a successful musician in the D.C. area, Gonzalez and his band will perform at First Church at 7:00 pm on Friday, May 17. The *Music Without Borders/Musica Sin Fronteras* concert is free with all donations supporting [Sanctuary DMV](#) and the [Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition](#) as they fight for social justice and legal representation for immigrants seeking a better



life in the United States. As a guitarist and singer-songwriter, Gonzalez will share his uplifting Latino music along with stories about his life as a former undocumented immigrant who crossed into the United States with his wife, mother, and 2-year-old son in 1981. After moving to the D.C. area, they lived in a one-bedroom mobile home occupied by 17 El Salvadoran refugees. A former elementary school teacher in El Salvador, Gonzalez parked cars and washed dishes to survive while developing his music career. He now teaches music to children across the D.C. area and has performed at venues including the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, and President Bill Clinton's inauguration. He became a U.S. citizen after President Ronald Reagan granted amnesty to nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants in 1986.

First Church's Sanctuary Working Group organized the concert to share the vibrant music of Latin America and raise needed funds for local organizations that are opposing Trump's inhumane and xenophobic immigration policies. In a [unanimous motion](#) in 2016, First Church became a "sanctuary congregation" that "will work with partner organizations to resist any harmful or unjust policy proposals that undermine due process, lead to discrimination based on identity, or otherwise violate constitutionally protected rights" of immigrants and refugees.

Please visit [eventbrite.com](#) (search term Lilo Gonzalez) where you can donate to support the concert even if you can't attend. Donations also will be accepted at the door. We hope to see you on May 17 for a fun evening of music and activism!

Second Sunday Offering on May 12



Michael Joseph, Mission Co-worker CAFEPAZ

Justapaz, the Mennonite Center for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent action has been doing prophetic peace-building work in Colombia for over twenty-five years. Though they work from an Anabaptist framework, Justapaz works with many different denominations to meet the needs of the communities they serve in the midst of violent conflict. Colombia's internal armed conflict has spanned over 50 years, and while the motivation behind the conflict is political and not religious, Protestant and evangelical churches (which comprise 10-15% of the population) have been heavily affected by the fighting. Justapaz currently has projects in conscientious objection to forced military service,

human rights documentation, women's rights and community-based peace-building.

In 2017, Justapaz joined three other Christian organizations (World Vision Colombia, Prison Fellowship Colombia and CORSOC) doing peace-building work as well as the International Baptist University and Seminary in Cali to create the Cafepaz Peace Studies Center. I am currently the national coordinator of Cafepaz. Cafepaz studies the intersection of Christianity, war and peace-building in Colombia.



CAFEPAZ works for peace in Colombia, trains leaders in peacebuilding, and studies the role of churches in human rights defense.

This project is the result of work with communities of victims as well as with ex-combatants of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) as they reintegrate into civilian life. This project's goal is to contribute to the peace process that is currently ongoing in Colombia as a result of the peace accord signed between the FARC and the Colombian Government on November 24, 2016. The project seeks to contribute to the reintegration process of ex-combatants into communities that include victims of the armed conflict. This project will provide a series of six workshops in conflict transformation and restorative justice to ex-combatants and community members (including victims) in each community.

Despite a promising peace accord signed between the FARC guerrilla and the Colombian government in late 2016, Colombia is still in an armed conflict that takes the lives of hundreds of civilians each year. Colombia currently has the largest population of internally displaced persons in the world, estimated to be around six million. As churches live in the midst of these challenges and seek to minister to the needs of their communities they are often caught up in this violence. Justapaz and Cafepaz document this suffering and advocate on behalf of the victims, which can be dangerous and challenging. Please pray for continued courage and steadfastness for all churches doing this brave work in Colombia.

Please make a Second Sunday gift for this ministry in May 2019.

- 100% of your gift will be directed to CAFEPAZ
- You will receive updates on the work in this area as they become available.
- Share in the vision of God's abundant life for all people

White Privilege: Let's Talk Discussion Series

Six Sundays, May 12 & 19, June 2, 9, 23 & 30, 2019

8:45 – 10:15am

First Congregational UCC

Following on the success of the prior two *White Privilege: Let's Talk* discussion series, we are offering another, co-led by JD Okorie-Dunn, Janneke Ratcliffe and Karen Byrne. These conversations are intended to help white people strengthen their conceptual and interpretative tools for identifying the many ways whiteness is valued and rewarded at the expense of people of color. We are neither a book group, nor a task force; our focus is personal experience. Participants are supported as they explore deeply and honestly their own feelings about race within a safe, supportive, and mutually accountable environment. As with the earlier series, these conversations are part of First Church's commitment to anti-racism. We'll use (with creative modifications) the UCC curriculum, "White Privilege: Let's Talk". <http://privilege.uccpages.org/>.

Child care will be provided.

To participate, please sign up on the sheet posted on the bulletin board in the narthex, or let one of us know (contact information below). Participants are asked to commit to attending all six sessions, and to minimize absences. We are planning another series in the coming months, so if you are unable to join us this time, there will be another opportunity.

For more information, please reach out to one or more of us. Our contact information is below. We also encourage you to speak with any of the people who have participated in the *White Privilege: Let's Talk* discussions held in 2017 and 2018.

While planning this series, we have become aware of other related efforts at First Church, and encourage your support of them as well. These include the following:

1. On April 28th, Reverend Sam, Lynaya Morris, and Troy Bent will lead a third after-worship Nurture in the series on *Community Building*. Following the first two parts, *Exploring Our Identity* and *Exploring Hidden Bias*, the third will focus on the importance of belonging. This conversation, rooted in scripture, will involve sharing stories about when we have felt a strong sense of belonging and ask "what actions create a deeper sense of belonging, and what can we do to create a deeper sense of belonging for everyone at First Church?" For more information, contact Sam McFerran, mcferran.sam@gmail.com, 202.294.5437.
2. A discussion group is being explored for people of color at First Church. This would carry out one of the goals in the Anti-Racism Task Force Statement. Since the *White Privilege: Let's Talk* discussions were first organized, the Task Force has hoped that people of color at First Church would also form a group to discuss how racism has affected their lives, and that we could then have a congregation-wide interracial dialogue to discuss together our experiences and to discern next steps. Those of us working on the anti-racism effort at First Church want to support whatever our fellow members who identify as people of color consider useful, or at least worth trying. As our website says, "We believe we are called to push ourselves to discern, articulate, and act on what we need to do during the next 50 to 100 years to end racism in the church." Priscilla Waters, who is leading this effort, invites those who identify as people of color, and anyone else, to share their ideas for how to further shape this effort. She can be reached at priscilla.waters3@gmail.com, 240.601.6239.
3. We're also considering implementing in the future a program based on the UCC curriculum *Sacred Conversations on Race*.

We look forward to working with you to build our beloved, multi-racial, multi-cultural community!

Rev. Karen Byrne, revkarenbyrne@gmail.com, 202.365.0017

JD Okorie-Dunn, jddusmc@yahoo.com, 415.412.7749

Janneke Ratcliffe, janneke1018@gmail.com, 919.618.1018

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.
Broadway Presbyterian Church, NYC, street sign, 12.3.17.

Young Adult Pilgrimage to Palestine-Israel

The Olive Oil Ministry (OOM), which sponsored First Church's olive oil sale during Advent 2018, is leading a 10-day Young Adult Pilgrimage (ages 18 – 35) to Palestine-Israel for members of the Ministry's 23 partner congregations. Overlake Christian Church in Redmond, Washington is organizing the October-November trip in conjunction with Churches for Middle East Peace. The trip combines guided visits to important holy sites in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, learning and hearing first-hand the contemporary, multi-narrative story of the people of the Holy Land, and 3 days of volunteer work and residence at Tent of Nations, a Palestinian Christian family-owned farm near Bethlehem supported by the OOM. The Ministry is offering a limited number of \$1,000 scholarships.

There will be two information sessions for interested persons:

Sunday, April 28 - Rock Spring UCC, Arlington, VA at 12:45 PM in Room #205

Sunday May 5 – at St. Albans Episcopal Church, Washington, DC in the Library at 12:30 PM

Please see <http://www.westmorelanducc.org/2019-pilgrimage> for trip details and application materials. Contact Robert Mertz (ramertz@gmail.com or 301-229-0973) for updates and questions.



OCT. 30-NOV. 10, 2019 YOUNG ADULT PILGRIMAGE TO ISRAEL-PALESTINE

Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the Tent of Nations

Join this unique trip visiting important religious and historic sites in Bethlehem & Jerusalem, learning and hearing first-hand the contemporary, multi-narrative story of the people of the Holy Land, and doing 3 days of volunteer work at Tent of Nations, a Palestinian Christian family-owned farm near Bethlehem that receives OOM support. The trip coincides with the olive harvest, a unique time when multiple generations of Palestinian families come together to harvest the olive crop. Applicants should demonstrate a strong interest in the ongoing search for peace and justice in the region. All applicants are welcome, including anyone not requesting a scholarship.

Tent of Nations Cornerstone: "We Refuse To Be Enemies"



SIX \$1,000
SCHOLARSHIPS
AVAILABLE
FOR AGES 18-35

DEADLINE TO APPLY
MAY 15, 2019

PER PERSON COST
UNDER \$1,500
(EXCLUDES AIRFARE
INCLUDES GRANT)

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FOR MORE INFO
AND TO APPLY:

Robert Mertz
ramertz@gmail.com

301-229-0974

Calendar

Wednesday, May 1

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*

Thursday, May 2

7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Sunday, May 5

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*
Rev. Michael Durst preaching
11:30 am Potluck Luncheon, *Comm. Hall*
12:00 pm Finance Commission, *Living Room*

Monday, May 6

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

Tuesday, May 7

6:30 pm Church Council, *Comm. Hall*

Wednesday, May 8

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*

Thursday, May 9

7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Sunday, May 12

8:45 am White Privilege Discussion Group,
Community Hall
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*
12:00 pm Care of Parish Comm., *Living Room*

Monday, May 13

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

Wednesday, May 15

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*

Thursday, May 16

7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Friday, May 17

7:00 pm SAAC/Sanctuary Task Force
Benefit Concert, *Sanctuary*

Sunday, May 19

8:45 am White Privilege Discussion Group,
Community Hall
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, May 20

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

Wednesday, May 22

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*

Thursday, May 23

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

Sunday, May 26

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*

Wednesday, May 29

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*

Thursday, May 30

7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Ministers – Friends & Members of the Church
Interim 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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