

GABRIEL'S HORN

First Congregational United Church of Christ

August 2020



Beloved Community,

Our summer theme, “Unraveled: Seeking God When Our Plans Fall Apart,” has reminded me of seasons of my own life when everything came undone—times when my theology collapsed in the face of a hurricane, when I didn’t get the job and my father died of cancer, when parenting has brought me to my knees and my work didn’t get published. These times of great unraveling have been marked by pain and prayer, despair, and grief, as well as a profound interrogation of God and self. They have also, looking back, functioned as gateways into gratitude, pathways into praise, and fertile ground in which new seeds took root.

This time, the Great Unraveling is a collective experience—a season marked by mortality, the isolation of distancing, and an uprising for Black lives. We are, once more, driven to our knees and moved to reconnect with one another. In August, preparations would normally be underway for our children to return to school as summer travelers returned to worship. In 2020 we instead face uncertainty and a marathon of unraveling. I give thanks for the visionary leadership of our Council and especially our Moderator, Kim Darling, for prayerfully discerning and compassionately communicating the decision to continue worshipping virtually through the end of the calendar year, even as we hope to livestream from the sanctuary this fall.

The gift of this moment is that there is no better time to lean into God’s arms of love, knowing we do not have next week figured out, let alone the rest of the year. We are invited to claim our journey as home, since we cannot yet regather in the building. In our weariness, may we be reminded that God carries us. The weight that sometimes crushes our hearts or shoulders is not so heavy that God cannot handle it. Trusting in the divine love more powerful than ourselves requires admitting we can’t always find our own way through the night. Let us live, then, for a time in that liminal place where we wait on the arms of love to lift and carry us; the hands of love to stitch and weave our loose ends together into a new tapestry. There is mercy beyond what we are capable of offering to ourselves or one another. There is a deeper well. My prayer is that our hearts are broken open to this truth in ways that transform us completely.

This month launches with an Inquirers’ Gathering on August 2 as we continue to welcome newcomers into our midst and connect them to our community life and ministries. On August 9, we will enjoy our second Nurture experience on the “Unraveled” theme, hearing personal stories from members of our congregation. On August 23, we will welcome a faith-rooted organizer, the Rev. Vahisha Hasan, as our guest preacher. Then on August 30 we will gather virtually in the afternoon for a discussion on the

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church-wide summer read, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*. I invite you to take part in these meaningful opportunities to tie our frayed ends to one another in worship, discussion, and fellowship. We just might find that amidst the chaos, the fabric of our times reveals a far more beautiful and intricate design than we can presently imagine.

In Grace,
Amanda



Inquirers' Gathering: August 2

[Click here](#) after worship on Sunday, August 2, to join Rev. Amanda, Rev. Sam, Moderator Kim Darling, members of our Outreach & Membership Commission, and newcomers for our Inquirers' Gathering. This will be a time of getting to know one another, sharing stories, exploring the history of First Church and the UCC, and answering any questions about membership. All newcomers are welcome to attend!

Guest Preacher on August 23: The Rev. Vahisha Hasan

On August 23, we will be blessed to hear a word from guest preacher the Rev. Vahisha Hasan, who lives in Memphis, TN. Rev. Hasan is a faith-rooted organizer working at the intersections of faith, social justice, and mental health. She serves as the founding director of [Movement in Faith](#) which provides training and resources for faith community-led efforts in justice work. She is also an Assistant Professor of Human Services at Union Seminary and Director of the Mental Health Advocacy Institute. We welcome Rev. Hasan with gratitude!



Book Discussion on *Between the World & Me*: August 30

Mark your calendar and plan to join us by Zoom at 4:00 on the afternoon of Sunday, August 30, for a rich discussion of the church-wide summer read, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World & Me*. All are welcome!

Church Council

Council Capsule

First Church Council met on July 7, 2020. Amanda Hendler-Voss, Designated Senior Minister, reported on summer worship planned on the theme "Unraveled: Seeking God When Our Plans Fall Apart." Guest preachers this summer will be Lynaya Morris, Ron Hopson, and Vahisha Hasan, and two other guest preachers in the fall. Many thanks to Alyx Cheng and Allison Truhlar for the Zoom meeting magic they work to make worship possible each Sunday.

Amanda reported on community connection activities. Three small groups will begin meeting regularly: one weekly, one monthly one quarterly. Nurtures which feature members' own stories are planned for July 19 and August 9. One-on-one opportunities to meet with Amanda have begun.

Amanda is assisting with the Summer Institute on Sacred Conversations to End Racism starting July 8, which will be repeated in the fall. She will share reading lists for members who may wish to prepare in advance for the next session.

Associate Minister Sam McFerran reported that young adults met to discuss the film *Just Mercy* and will hike Roosevelt Island on July 12. A small thoughtful core of children and youth meet regularly and have been discussing pilgrimage. This Thursday, they will discuss the Underground Railroad, a sacred pilgrimage. Sam is using Mr. Rogers "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" curriculum and videos with the elementary children.

A July 19 nurture will be "Unraveled: A Vocational Response to This World," at which Hannah Long-Higgins, Peter Tracey, and Melissa Ho will speak. An August 9 nurture will offer three members speaking on "How has this pandemic shifted how we live and our priorities?" Jasmine Martie, the volunteer coordinator for Simply Smiles, will talk about challenges at Cheyenne River Reservation on Sunday August 30.

Council approved the choice of Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* as the all-church summer read 2020 selection. The book is available in many formats. Discussions will be held in late summer.

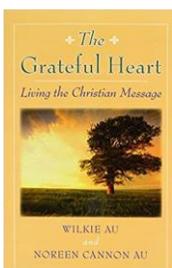
After study and with the information at hand, the Congregation Regathering Taskforce sent to Council recommendations for the return to worship in the building. Council approved the taskforce recommendation that the congregation not re-gather for in-person worship at the least for the remainder of 2020. The congregation will not meet in person in 2020. Interviews and surveys lead the taskforce to believe that most of the congregation is in favor of this recommendation. This decision frees staff and commissions to make plans to meet the congregation's needs. Worship leaders will stream from the sanctuary beginning on Homecoming Sunday in September.

David Greer gave the Treasurer's report and reminded commissions that budget adjustments for 2020 are due in July. Budget requests for 2021 will be requested in early fall, so that an asking budget will be ready for Pledge Sunday and the Fall Congregational Meeting in November. The bylaws require that a balanced budget be passed at the annual meeting in January.

The next Church Council meeting is Tuesday, August 4, 2020

Prepared by Gail Sonnemann, Clerk

Christian Education Commission



Theology Book Group: Wednesday, September 9

The Theology Book Group will meet again on Zoom at 6:00 PM on Wednesday, September 9. We will discuss Wilkie and Noreen Au, *The Grateful Heart: Living the Christian Message*. The authors, a theologian and a psychologist, explore how cultivating habits of gratitude enrich our lives and bring us closer to God. All are welcome.

Here is the link: [Theology Book Group](#)

Social Action & Awareness Commission

As the nation reflects on late U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-GA)'s legacy, we're reminded of his staunch commitment to voting rights. With both Lewis' legacy and continuous voting suppression efforts in mind, the Social Action and Awareness Commission is focusing on one of the most important rights in our land.

SAAC plans to support both Central Atlantic Conference's Faith & Democracy campaign as well as lift up the National setting's Our Faith, Our Vote campaign. With that said, we'll focus on some issues particular to D.C. including:

- Making certain D.C. residents receive mail-in ballots in a timely fashion.
- Supporting D.C. statehood
- Volunteering to become poll workers, as many are those most vulnerable to COVID-19.

Please reach out to any SAAC member for information.

By Rev. Jason Carson Wilson



Our Faith, Our Vote 2020

Countdown: It's less than 100 days to the election. Are you registered to vote at your current address? Confirm you are still registered (not purged from the voter rolls), update your street address and email for updates from your board of elections.

DC <https://www.vote4dc.com/ApplyInstructions/Register>

Maryland <https://voterservices.elections.maryland.gov/OnlineVoterRegistration/InstructionsStep1>

Virginia <https://www.elections.virginia.gov/registration/>

To participate in non-partisan Get Out the Vote efforts in collaboration with the Central Atlantic Conference--phone banking, post cards, and texting campaigns, [click here](#).

October 13

Is the official voter registration deadline in the DMV. Make it happen. (Yes, all three do have same day registration available on Election Day or early voting days for those who might need it. Why wait?)



Thank you from Social Action and Awareness Commission

Thank you to all who participated in the June 2020 emergency olive oil sale. It raised over \$3,000 to benefit Palestinian organizations confronting the COVID-19 crisis, in addition to other donations to the area. First Church participated in this multi-church effort organized by Westmoreland UCC. Thank you again, and thanks to Karen Byrne and John Smeltzer for organizing on short notice.



Second Sunday offering on August 9: Congregation Action Network

The Congregation Action Network (CAN) is a network of faith communities in Washington, DC, and the Maryland and Virginia suburbs acting in solidarity to end detention, deportation, profiling, and criminalization of immigrants and demanding and upholding justice, dignity, safety, and family unity.

In early 2017, when the Trump Administration announced the Muslim ban and began broadening deportations beyond the already inhumane practices of the Obama administration, two organizations brought a vision for faith-based immigration advocacy to life. [Faith in Action's LA RED](#) campaign and [Sanctuary DMV](#) founded the DMV Sanctuary Congregation Network to put the power of faith to work for immigration justice. Renamed the Congregation Action Network (CAN) in 2019, this collective of more than 70 Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Humanist, Hindu, Buddhist, and other congregations has brought its faithful resistance to bear in the DC/MD/VA region to provide support and solidarity to neighbors, friends, and family who fear being detained, deported, or profiled. The Congregation Action Network is a program of LA RED, Faith in Action's immigrant justice initiative. Faith in Action is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

Membership in and support of CAN are expressions of First Church's decision in May 2017 to be a Sanctuary Congregation and become involved in the New Sanctuary Movement. One CAN congregation - [Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in Bethesda, MD - has hosted Rosa Gutierrez Lopez](#) in physical sanctuary since December 2018. Other congregations are ready to become physical sanctuaries if the need arises. Still others (like First Church) support Cedar Lane and Rosa. Here are other activities CAN members engage in to resist detentions and deportations and keep families united and free in our communities:

- Advocate to support, for example, DACA recipients.
- Accompany people to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) check-ins, court hearings and ankle monitor check-ins.
- Serve on rapid response networks that respond to, report on, and offer assistance to those targeted by ICE raids.
- Hold "Know Your Rights" trainings or community canvasses.
- Press local jurisdictions to get ICE out of schools, jails, and courts, and to end all policies that racially profile and over-incarcerate people of color.
- Press local jurisdictions and officials to resist ICE's and DHS's attempts to open new immigrant detention facilities in our communities.
- During the pandemic, providing much-needed meals and life supports. The [CAN COVID-19 Emergency Fund](#) supports immigrant families identified by faith communities across the DMV who don't qualify for local, state, or federal support. Funds will be used to replace income and pay for immediate health expenses, rent, groceries, utilities, tuition, and work authorizations.

Please give generously to support the work of CAN on behalf of immigrants.

Go to www.congregationactionnetwork.org to learn more.

Lucille Dickinson for the Social Action and Awareness Commission

Outreach & Membership Commission

Outreach & Membership invited “distance-worshippers” with a connection to First Church to reconnect with a paragraph in Gabriel’s Horn. Mary Catherine Hayes responded with the attached paragraph:



First Church is one of the things I miss most about DC, so it’s been wonderful to be able to attend again, and even sing in the choir, through Zoom. I grew up in the church, as did my mother (my grandparents met in the choir), and it’s always felt like home. I have been living in Costa Rica since 1988, playing in their National Symphony Orchestra and teaching violin in the National Music Institute. Right now, the orchestra is rehearsing in small groups for video performances, and our music lessons are all virtual. I am fortunate to be spending time at my home in the mountains above San José. Costa Rica is a very special place, with warm and friendly people, and no army (abolished in 1948), as well as beaches, jungles, and volcanoes. I’d love to have some First Church visitors when traveling is again possible!

Adult Nurtures

A Vocational Response to an Unraveling World Sunday, August 9 (5 minutes after worship)

- Remembering our Baptism
- Re-Aligning Our Life with Our Values
- Responding with Conviction

Sharing:

- Karen Tramontano, Global Fairness Initiative
- Andrew Hamilton, SEIU
- Troy Bent, Wheatley Education Campus
- Elise Villemez, Lasalle Backus Education Campus



Please join us for another exciting conversation about how we are responding to an unraveling world – a world unraveled by pandemic, violence against people of color, climate change, and social and economic challenges. We are so grateful that Karen, Andrew, Troy, and Elise will share their stories from the frontlines of international development, a national union, and DC public classrooms. After hearing their testimony, we will open the conversation to the community. The nurture will be on Zoom and begin five minutes after the worship service ends (approximately 11:35).

What's Up with WIN? Washington Interfaith Network News

In an unprecedented budget season in the District, leaders from over 80 WIN congregations and organizations have been involved in the Mayor's budget hearings from February through yesterday's vote. WIN efforts, alongside the work of allies around the District, resulted in a passed budget that maintained over \$150 million in increased funding for crucial housing, immigration support, and community safety initiatives, including:

- \$25 million for public housing repairs
- \$88 million for the Housing Preservation and Housing Production Trust Funds (from allocated federal funds, which we are continuing to research)
- \$12 million for eviction prevention
- \$7.4 for tenant based LSRP vouchers
- \$8.6 for homelessness services
- \$20 million for community safety priorities, such as mental health resources and violent interruption
- \$9 million for the Excluded Workers Fund, which provides funds for undocumented workers and others excluded from Unemployment Insurance
- \$6.6 million for the DC Healthcare Alliance, which provides healthcare for undocumented residents and others excluded from Medicare and Medicaid

WIN set out with bold demands in our Budget to Build a Beloved DC, aiming to redirect over \$300 million in funding from projects that accelerate gentrification to programs that create opportunities for good jobs, affordable housing, and community control over public safety. WIN made some progress, but this is not a fight we can win in one week, month, or year.

What Comes Next? [Reimagine DC Organizing Sessions](#)

There are two Reimagine DC Organizing Sessions coming up! Each session is an opportunity to ask questions, to learn and share ideas, and get clear on how you can take next steps. As we build on our momentum and strategize for the months to come, we want to hear from you, your fellow congregants, your neighbors, your co-workers, your fellow Washingtonians. Learn more about Reimagine DC Organizing Sessions here: <https://www.windc-iaf.org/reimagine-dc-organizing-sessions/>

To sign up for a session, click on the date that works best for you below:

[Thursday, August 13, 6:45-8:15 p.m.](#)

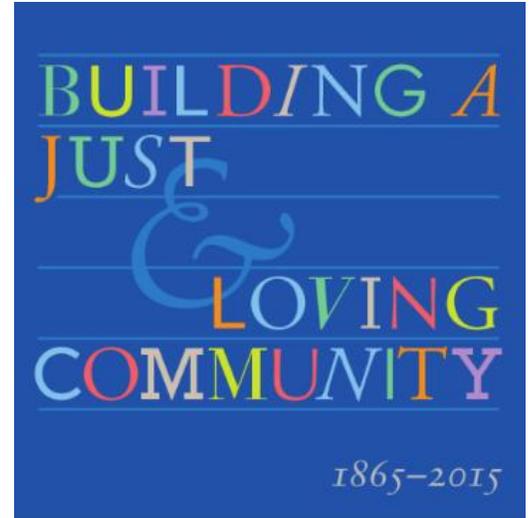
[Tuesday August 25, 6:45-8:15 p.m.](#)

Send your questions to Gail Sonnemann, First Church WIN Coordinator, gsonnemann@gmail.com

Great Summer Read!

Building a Just and Loving Community, 1865-2015
Celebrating the 150th Anniversary of First Congregational United Church of Christ

This glossy 150-page book includes a collection of historical milestones, events, never-before-revealed reflections, music, sermons, and lectures. Whether you are a long-time church member, a newcomer, or a visitor, you will learn more about First Congregational UCC than you ever thought to ask! The cost is \$20 plus \$4 shipping. Contact Nora at knoramars@icloud.com to request a copy. You may mail a check to the church, payable to First Congregational UCC for 150th publication or pay online at: VANCO - [eservicepayments](#) or PayPal - [paypal](#)



Prayers of the People: Wednesdays at Noon

Join Rev. Amanda and our community for a brief sharing of the burdens we are bearing, the great joys we want to celebrate, and a time of prayer. We will gather through Zoom from 12:00-12:30 every Wednesday. [Click here](#) to join this standing call.



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Ministers – Friends & Members of the Church
Designated Senior Minister – Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss
Associate Minister – Rev. Sam McFerran
Director of Music – Mr. John Horman
Building Manager – Mr. Byron Adams
Administrative Assistant – Ms. Cindy Dobbs
Sexton – Ms. Ines Marquez
Members in Discernment – Dwight Davis, Lynaya Morris
Nursery & Childcare Staff – Timur Murillo, Ziyah Holman, Jordann Edwards, Patrick Darling-LaGamma

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