

# GABRIEL'S HORN

First Congregational United Church of Christ

September 2020



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Beloved Community,

I give God thanks and praise for an incredible first summer with all of you. Despite physical distancing, we managed to gather for worship every single Sunday, enjoying talented guest preachers, deeply felt musical offerings, open-hearted nurtures on where unraveling intersects vocation, and welcoming new members. Three small groups have launched, a murder mystery was solved, and we found time to dig into our church-wide summer read. We engaged in comprehensive planning to dismantle racism within ourselves and the wider world and took part in sacred discussions, prophetic preaching, and healing conversations. We have begun our work to get out the vote with postcard campaigns and phone banking. We have prayed together, provided meals, and celebrated two weddings. I pray that you have also managed to do less this summer and rest more; to notice when your body wishes to move or your mind thirsts for silence; to get away—even if it is just to the backyard garden or nearby walking path. If we are learning anything, it might be an invitation to be gentle with ourselves and one another.

Odd though it might seem, the trees on my daily walk with Ginger the dog are beginning to hint of autumn. A scattering of leaves are brightening to hues of orange and scarlet, and a cool breeze occasionally finds me in the mornings. The wheel of time is preparing to turn once more, as summer recedes and fall focuses into sharp relief. Perhaps your children and teens are launching into online learning as we begin a new school year in an unprecedented fashion.

Our summer theme, “Unraveled,” will soon give way to our fall worship theme, “Grateful.” I pray it will be a natural succession, because when fully present to our state of unraveling, we become absolutely clear that we stand in need of God’s grace. In the frailty of our human condition, the preciousness of life truly calls forth our gratitude. The beauty of the earth, even in times of trial, tugs us into wonder and awe. In truth, gratitude is not a feeling, but a spiritual practice that blesses us with the fortitude to live and love fully in every season of life. For God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be.

As you will see in this newsletter, we have much to anticipate—our Homecoming service on September 13 which will mark our return to streaming from the sanctuary with a small crew of worship leaders. Special services such as Labor in the Pulpit and our Faith & Democracy 2020 focus. Fresh programming for children and a justice formation opportunity for our youth (we anticipate the youth of Peoples’ Congregational UCC may join us). This month we will also be planning for a congregation-wide Sacred Conversation to End Racism session with the Rev. Kris Watson in October as well as an exquisite World

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Communion service with nearly a dozen participating congregations across the Potomac Association and beyond. Through it all, there is no place I'd rather be than in community with you, serving as your designated senior minister. Thank you for this privilege and blessing. I hope you will consider signing up for a time to connect with me. As we look toward autumn, may God gather up our loose ends and weave us into the brilliant design of gratitude.

In Peace,  
Rev. Amanda

## Welcome New Members!



Lois and Kurt Fischbeck: We first came to First Congregational UCC after returning from a sabbatical in California in January 2020. Over the years we have attended a variety of Catholic and Protestant churches in the DC area and elsewhere. We live in Bethesda, where Kurt works at the NIH. Our two sons and grandchildren are in western Massachusetts and Philadelphia. We have much enjoyed participating in First Congregational worship services and other activities both physically and virtually. It is our new spiritual home!



Kaeley McEvoy grew up in Connecticut and first encountered First Congregational Church in 2013 when she lived in DC during a summer internship. She is currently serving as Associate Pastor at Westmoreland Congregational UCC in Bethesda, MD, and living in Mt. Pleasant. Kaeley enjoys reading four books at once, finding pick-up soccer games, and writing poetry on her front porch. Previously, Kaeley lived in NYC and worked at Judson Memorial Church. She attended seminary at Union Theological Seminary and studied Writing and Peace and Justice Studies at Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, PA. She is looking forward to reconnecting with First Church and deepening her spiritual roots in DC.



LaTayna Purnell: I currently live in Houston, Texas. I joined the UCC while in Boston and found a church home. My family, wife Cindy and two sons, Myles, 15, and Jonah 9, moved from Massachusetts to Texas five years ago. We have been searching for a church home that is centered on social justice but especially anti-racism. Because of the pandemic, I have been able to attend First UCC services because of my friendship with pastor Amanda. I jokingly made a Facebook statement after watching from Houston, "I wish I could join your church." And Pastor Amanda replied, "You can!" So with that, I am joining with the hope of moving to the area at some point, but virtually being a part of a community that lives my values. While I am not naive to believe that First UCC is perfect, I do believe it continues to strive toward the goal and truly beloved community. My wife and I both lost our jobs due to COVID-19 which provided me with the opportunity to begin seminary for my Master of Divinity. I have been accepted into and will start attending United Theological Seminary this fall. I am looking forward to discerning my path forward. Thank you for welcoming me into your community!

## Pastoral Care

By Rev. Amanda

To live in the world today is often to know the ache of loneliness, a low-level anxiety, and the overwhelm of an unraveling world. From the hard questions of spirituality to a rollercoaster of emotions (or distracted numbing out) to persistent worries about ourselves and our beloved ones, the care we receive in community is essential. Pastoral care especially can be a healing balm in these uncertain times.

At its best, pastoral care offers deep listening, asks poignant questions, and draws us more deeply into the grace and beauty of God. In pastoral care, you might receive accountability for a new commitment or a trusted referral for therapeutic care. Contemplative practices, moments of silence, or prayer might be explored. Sometimes what is most needed is simply a pastor's non-anxious presence. According to Kenneth Blue, "Intensive listening is indistinguishable from love, and love heals." Pastoral care extends beyond personal sessions when we create environments that invite people to also share with one another within the wider congregation.

Pastoral care intentionally seeks to create a healing space. In my years of pastoring, people have entrusted me with stories they have never shared before. Those giving voice to unspoken stories are ordinary folks. Most of them live a middle-class lifestyle, earned a college education, and work professional jobs. Many are engaged, married, or parents of young children. They look like individuals who lead successful, fulfilled lives. As a pastor, however, I have learned that no human being truly "has it all together." Instead, most of us have endured a traumatic encounter with violence, a shameful secret, or a gnawing wound that continues to dog our lives. Many of us have not fully healed from the most troubled chapters of our lives, but we do our best to get out of bed each morning, take our vitamins and medicine, and move through our days.

Mostly, pastoral care does not begin with childhood trauma or confessions of long-held secrets, although it can. It begins with whatever is ailing one's soul in this moment, whether that is discernment about a major life transition, persistent spiritual questions, relationship struggles, agonizing grief, or doubt about one's identity or vocation. Pastoral care begins with whatever someone brings to discuss, and it honors the act of vulnerability, or exposing one's true self. It then invites the deeper wisdom of the heart to show up.

Pastoral care does not present a silver-bullet solution or offer a diatribe of "should haves." Suffering and struggle can, after all, be inexplicable. Instead, pastoral care calls forth the presence of God—the divine power that is greater than our individual selves. Together, we trust that the power of God's love is already at work, and so we seek where resilience, mercy, compassion, and wisdom reside within.

### Pastoral Care FAQs

*Is pastoral care like a therapy? If not, how are they different?*

While pastors come from a variety of backgrounds and training, we are not therapists. Instead, a pastor will notice when issues arise that could benefit from therapy and encourage you to seek it out with trusted referrals. A pastor will create a safe space for contemplative listening, reflecting back the wisdom arising in your own heart, and consider how faith can be part of our healing journey.

*Is pastoral care tied to doctrine and dogma?*

No. While pastors ideally embrace a healthy theology, pastoral care is provided to listen to whatever struggles you are experiencing and accompany you on the journey of exploring where God is showing up in your life.

*How often does pastoral care take place?*

You can seek out pastoral care with a simple call, email, or text to Rev. Sam or myself when you are wrestling with something, experiencing loss, or in need of an extra layer of support. Pastoral care does not happen with the same regularity as therapy, for example, but can refer you to a therapist should you need consistent and sustained support in that way.

*Can pastoral care happen remotely?*

Yes. Pastoral care can take place in person, through video conference, or by phone.

*What happens in pastoral care?*

Many sessions begin with a welcome and time of listening to whatever is on your heart. We may ask thoughtful and clarifying questions, listen contemplatively to your responses, share affirmations and insights, and close with a time of prayer or gratitude. Pastoral care can happen in a brief conversation or a longer session. If you reach out, we can schedule to meet with you that allows us to be free of any other commitments during our time together.

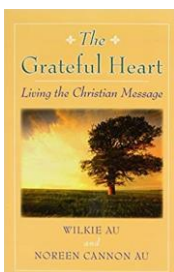
### Connect with Rev. Amanda This Fall

[Click here](#) to sign up to connect with Rev. Amanda this fall by phone, Zoom, or (on Friday mornings only) at the church (please note that physical distancing will be observed and masks will be worn by all). If none of these dates work for you but you would still like to connect, there is a space at the bottom of the sign-up sheet to indicate that and Rev. Amanda will be in touch with you to find a time that works. These one-hour meetings may include pastoral care, a time to better get to know each other, and an opportunity to catch up and share from the heart.

### Help Us Lead Worship This Fall

As we move to streaming from the sanctuary beginning September 13, there are three ways you can serve as a liturgist or scripture reader this fall: submit a pre-recorded video of yourself, participate by Zoom from home, or join the small crew streaming live from the sanctuary while following our guidelines for safety. [Click here](#) to sign up to serve as a liturgist or scripture reader this fall. We are so grateful for your voice!

## 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](#)



## Building Community One Smile at a Time A Story of Hope and Positive Change at the Cheyenne River Reservation

Labor in the Pulpit  
September 6, 2020

(A nurture to follow 5 minutes after the service)

First Church is excited to participate again in Interfaith Worker Justice's Labor in the Pulpit. As the Sunday before Labor Day, this service allows our church to join mosques, synagogues and churches across the country to focus on how we can bring our voice, our resources, and our power toward issues of social and economic justice, as they relate to workers and working families.

This year, our focus will be on the Cheyenne River Reservation, a Lakota Reservation in central South Dakota. Since 2003, the Cheyenne River Reservation has partnered with Simply Smiles, a non-profit dedicated toward helping advance indigenous people's social, economic and health outcomes.

For their 2019 summer service trip, First Church youth went to the Cheyenne River Reservation to fall in love with the beautiful sky country, to learn about the history and the culture of the Lakota, and to serve as enthusiastic camp counselors for the youth. Unfortunately, we could not return this summer because of the pandemic.

Since that trip, the Lakota people have filled a part of our heart. Just like Ruth said to Naomi, "Your people are my people," the Lakota are our people. Since our trip, First Church has hosted a screening of the documentary, "Warrior Women," about Lakota civil rights activist Maddona Thunderhawk and her daughter, Marcella Gilbert, both an activist and the manager of the garden and healthy living initiatives on the reservation.

Our Sunday service will include a conversation between Madonna and Marcella about the current situation on the Reservation, a community where unemployment is high and economic opportunity is scarce. Jasmine Martier, the volunteer coordinator for Simply Smiles, will provide us with the message about Simply Smile's existing efforts, and how they can serve as an inspiration and a model for us to create change in our own communities.

First Church Youth are also hosting a fundraising effort to support funds for the Children's Village at the Reservation. To learn about the Children's Village: <https://www.simplysmiles.org/crst-childrens-village>  
To support Simply Smiles: please visit [simplysmiles.org](https://www.simplysmiles.org)

We hope you can be a part of this exciting Sunday at First Church. If you have any questions, please reach out to Rev Sam at [mcferran.sam@gmail.com](mailto:mcferran.sam@gmail.com) or 202-294-5437

## Social Action & Awareness Commission



### Second Sunday offering on September 13: Faith UCC's Mobile Food Market

In the midst of the COVID pandemic that is causing (and increasing) food insecurity, the Social Action and Awareness Commission has decided to designate the Second Sunday offering in September to a food ministry in Northeast DC. Faith UCC, located at 4900 Tenth Street NE, offers a free Mobile Food Market monthly, each third

Thursday of the month. Folks can drive up, open their trunks, and have food placed into the trunk. They can walk up to get a "grab and go" bag, and food is also dropped off both at senior buildings as well as the Mary Elizabeth House, an apartment building for young women who have aged out of the Foster Care System (currently housing 12 women each with a child).

In July they served 113 households -- 38 were new households, 75 were returning households. There were 335 people in the households with 101 children, 114 seniors and 13 veterans. Most of the persons receiving food were from DC. Our financial donations will greatly help the program provide consistent services.

Look for future announcements from SAAC about other ways we can support this Mobile Food Market – e.g., volunteering to transport food to senior buildings (the bigger the vehicle, the better), volunteering onsite to help with food distribution (outside at Faith UCC), and donating non-perishable food items.

Here is their website: <https://faithuniteddc.com/our-ministries/> Please give generously on September 13.

## Church Council

### Council Capsule for August

The First Church Council met on August 4, 2020. Amanda Hendler-Voss, Designated Senior Minister, thanked the Council for leadership, for the decision to continue worshipping online through the year, and for communicating these decisions to the congregation effectively. We are fortunate that things are going well. In the fall we will build on what we have learned, be more creative, and improvise more, even though we will not be worshipping in person. Monthly small group meetings on Sunday night will begin in August. Amanda shared opportunities for fall:

- Live streaming of service with John Horman and Amanda in the sanctuary.
- Sacred conversations to combat racism. Kris Watson will hold a conversation with congregation.
- Encourage all to make a plan to vote and help others to do so too.
- Hold a stewardship campaign
- Refresh the website homepage



The Personnel Committee, responding to Moderator Kim Darling's request for guidance, developed and documented staff leave policies to ensure fairness during the era of the Covid-19 pandemic. Council thanked the committee for following city mandates and spelling out how leave policy for staff is implemented during this period.

Associate Minister Sam McFerran reported that meetings with young adults and youth continue. He is looking forward to using Mr. Rogers "Won't you be my neighbor?" curriculum and videos. Jasmine Martie of Simply Smiles will preach on September 6, Labor Day Sunday

Kim Darling, Moderator, requested and Council approved the formation of a Church Governance task group to be chaired by Nan McConnell. The group will examine best governance practices today among churches, and will report findings, ideas, and recommendations.

Kim Darling is forming the Nominating Committee for 2021. She asked Commissions to examine their membership and let her know the number of vacancies to be filled for 2021. Contact Kim if you have questions about the nominating process or wish to serve on the Nominating Committee.

Nora Marsh reported that the Care of the Parish Commission needs volunteers to send cards or make phone calls to church community members. Contact Mike Zawada if you can help. The commission is sponsoring a Mystery Night on Saturday evening August 22.

Ann Bushmiller reported for the Outreach and Membership Commission that four newcomers attended an Inquirer's meeting.

Looking forward to preparing budget for 2021 and the fall Stewardship Campaign, Council approved the formation of a Budget Committee to be led by Assistant Moderator Garnell Yarbrough and comprised of members of the congregation. The group will receive and process budget requests, find ways to better tie our budget to our mission, and consider issues of long-term sustainability. The deadline for 2021 budget requests is September 18, and additional guidelines will be sent to commission chairs and council representatives from commissions.

The Taskforce on Building Use in Covid era has decided to ensure 24 hours between users to allow for cleaning and dissipation of airborne threats. This taskforce will continue to review all requests for building use until the city is in phase three of reopening.

Action taken after the meeting: Moderator Kim Darling shared by email and Council approved by email a motion from the Outreach and Membership Commission to invite LaTayna Purnell, Cindy Bohrer, Lois Fishbeck and Kurt Fishbeck to join the church on Sunday August 30. At the same service Kaely McEvoy will be welcomed to full membership, transferring from associate membership. LaTayna Purnell and Cindy Bohrer will be our first all-virtual members. Lois and Kurt began attending in person and continuing in virtual times.

The next First Church Council meeting is Tuesday, September 1, 2020  
Prepared by Gail Sonnemann, Clerk



## Calvin Coolidge Papers Project

The Library of Congress' Manuscripts Division has just put online a trove of Calvin Coolidge materials from his presidency. President Coolidge attended First Church during his presidency.

The Manuscript Division has released the Calvin Coolidge Papers Project (<https://www.loc.gov/collections/calvin-coolidge-papers/about-this-collection/>). Digitized from 190 reels of previously reproduced microfilm, these papers constitute the largest collection of original Coolidge documents in the world. The collection dates primarily from the five and a half years of his presidency, 1923-1929, and contains incoming correspondence with attachments, notes, carbon copies of outgoing letters from Coolidge or one of his secretaries, telegraph messages, appointment books, and names and addresses of White House guests. Filed in Executive Office numerical case files, the correspondence chronicles the concerns and debates of the 1920s,

including agriculture and rural life, business and manufacturing, commerce, immigration, international relations, labor, prohibition, race relations, sanitation and public health, transportation, veterans affairs, and women's rights.



**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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