

GABRIEL'S HORN

First Congregational United Church of Christ

April 2021



Beloved Community,

As rain gently falls on my roof, softening the earth below for the green blades rising, we stand on the cusp of Holy Week. It is a week when we set our faces toward Jerusalem, walking with Jesus through suffering and death into the dawn of new life. We will confess our brokenness, we will grieve, we will shout our praise to the One who is always calling resurrection forth from the jaws of death. Last year at this time, we anticipated that soon we would be regathered in the sanctuary and, when we were able to safely do so, we would celebrate "Resurrection Sunday." After enduring months of bewildering isolation and loss, we are still not able to regather. Yet we have survived. Watching the "Jerusalema" dance processional on Palm Sunday, I take heart that we have survived with gratitude for life, and even joy.

In the weeks ahead, we will celebrate resurrection, that victory o'er the grave. Slowly, in the coming months, we will begin the process of regathering as we are safely able to do so. I am eager to simply sit and talk with some of you as we schedule small group cluster gatherings outdoors (wearing masks and observing distancing). We anticipate moving into what our Regathering Task Force calls "Phase 2," when liturgists, scripture readers, and some guest instrumentalists will be invited to lead worship from the sanctuary along with staff, even as we remain worshipping virtually through the end of May. Over the summer, if the metrics allow, we hope to enter "Phase 3," a time of experimentation as we welcome small groups such as Council or Commissions to worship with us, practice our pandemic protocols, and work out any kinks before we enter "Phase 4," when you will be able to sign up to attend worship in the sanctuary, up to 50 at a time. I ask for your patience and understanding as we roll out a fluid regathering plan rooted in the metrics of active cases and vaccination rates. Our goal, as set forth by the 2020 Council even before my arrival, is to prioritize safety and equity for the most vulnerable. I celebrate with all of you who have been able to be vaccinated; I pray for patience for all who continue to wait. Your commitment to public health in this time truly saves lives.

This month we also close out the first quarter of our Racial Justice Audit process. The first quarter has been dedicated to inquiry, as we explore the audit tool and worksheet (or profile) and discern the processes various commissions will undertake to ensure that the second quarter, beginning in May, will comprise the work of the audit itself. During May through July, commissions will complete the worksheet (or profile) with the help of surveys, interviews, wider conversations, deep listening, and holy imagination. Thank you to all serving on our commissions for the extra time and commitment required for this labor of love. Let us remember, above all else, that God's Spirit attends us on this journey. We will not always

(continued on page 2)

get it right, but we are creating new practices of inquiry, deep listening, and new learning. I invite you to join us on May 2 following worship for a congregational conversation in which we will break out into ministry areas to further discuss how we might become a transformational church deeply committed to anti-racism, shared power, and multi-cultural expression.

We know that we do this work in challenging times. Again and again, we have lamented violence and so much death; again and again God meets us with the divine love that cannot be quenched or toppled. May we show up fully present to moments of grief and struggle as well as those of beauty and rebirth. As we celebrate the life-giving love of our God and welcome with joy the season of burgeoning blossoms, greening trees, and new life breaking forth outside our doors, I pray that the saving grace of resurrection meets you once more.

In Grace, Amanda



Guest Preacher on April 25: Rev. Aubra Love

Rev. Aubra Love is an ordained minister, ethicist, and compassionate organizer. Grounded in the liberating Word, she has served in many settings of the United Church of Christ, from the Southern Conference to the Southeast Conference to the Pacific Northwest Conference, over the past 25 years.

A graduate of Cornell University and Morehouse School of Religion at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Rev. Love began in parish ministry, founded a national educational ministry, and is now a sought-after preacher who beckons the emergent church with love and vibrancy.

Holding ministerial standing in the Potomac Association of the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ, Rev. Love currently worships and serves at Christ Congregational Church in Silver Spring. She hails from Atlanta, Georgia.

Congregational Conversation on Racial Justice Audit: May 2

Save the date of May 2 for an after-worship congregational conversation on our Racial Justice Audit process. In this conversation, we will explore the audit tool and worksheet, then break out into groups to discuss ministry areas through the lens of racial justice. This is an opportunity for those not currently serving on a commission to join in conversation connected to an area of ministry that you care about, alongside those currently serving on commissions.

Care of Parish Commission



Meet Reverend Amanda IN PERSON!

At the request of the Regathering Task Force, Care of Parish is organizing small in-person gatherings for people to meet Rev. Amanda during the spring and early summer. Additional information will be coming soon on dates, times, locations, hosts, and sign-up details. Meetings will take place outdoors to allow for appropriate COVID precautions.

COUNCIL CAPSULE

March 2, 2021

Council convened on March 2, 2021 and conducted the following business.:

We accepted the recommendation of the Regathering Task Force to continue worshipping and gathering virtually through the end of May 2021. We hope by then to have a plan for the gradual return to in-person services. In the meantime, we will explore the possibility of inviting members to participate from the sanctuary as liturgists, musicians, and worship leaders during our weekly on-line service to the extent we can safely do so.

On recommendation of the Social Action and Awareness Commission, we voted to join fellow churches in the Potomac Association in endorsing the "Housing Justice Priorities for the DC Comprehensive Plan" prepared by the DC Grassroots Planning Coalition. The priorities statement advocates for changes to the Comprehensive Plan to address racial and economic inequities in housing, and to confront problems of housing affordability, homelessness, and residential displacement due to gentrification. The priorities statement is available on the Coalition's website: <http://www.dgrassrootsplanning.org/priorities/>

We joyfully agreed to accept LaTayna Purnell as a member in discernment for possible ordination. LaTayna joined us as a member this past year and is a student at the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, Minnesota. We look forward to supporting LaTayna on this journey.

As we continue to undergo the yearlong Racial Justice Audit process, all Commissions are encouraged to read through the Audit Tool, highlighting portions that relate to your area of ministry, and all members are invited to attend the ongoing three-part Sankofa nurture series from March 7- 21, co-led by Rev. Sam and the Rev. Dr. Ron Hopson.

Finally, on March 17, 2021, we will celebrate Rev. Amanda's one-year anniversary with us as our designated senior minister. Amanda had the misfortune of arriving just as the pandemic struck and forced us into this extended period of remote gathering. But we had the great good fortune that she arrived when she did. We do not know how we would have sustained the life of the church through the pandemic and the past year's political turmoil without her compassionate and wise leadership. We look forward to the coming opportunity under our covenant with Amanda to extend a call to her for permanent ministry. Council anticipates scheduling a vote on a permanent call in the fall, after providing Amanda the opportunity to meet more of us in person over the spring and summer.

The next Council meeting is set for Tuesday April 6, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.

Questions for Council? Please contact Moderator John Smeltzer (johnsmeltzer@gmail.com) or AssistantModerator Susan Anderson (ssba92@gmail.com).

Outreach and Membership Commission



Inquirers' Gathering: April 18 Following Worship

Save the date of April 18, following worship, to join Rev. Amanda, Moderator John Smeltzer, members of our Outreach & Membership Commission, and newcomers for our spring Inquirer's 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! This virtual gathering will happen by Zoom following worship at 11:40; those who plan to attend can remain on the worship Zoom call. If you plan to attend, please email Rev. Amanda at ahendlervoss@gmail.com; however, you do *not* have to RSVP to attend.



A Note from Mary Alice Ball

I moved to Chestertown two years ago, delighted by a one-mile commute to my new job and the beauty of the Eastern Shore. What I hadn't counted on was the difficulty I would have in finding a faith community that would compare with First Church. I followed a routine that has worked for me in the past and church shopped locally, before branching out to try churches that were further away. After deciding that the UCC church in Annapolis was just too far, I settled for a local church from my childhood denomination. I saw familiar faces in the congregation and was warmly welcomed, but I could not shake the feeling that this old and out lesbian just didn't fit in. It was too white and too complacent.

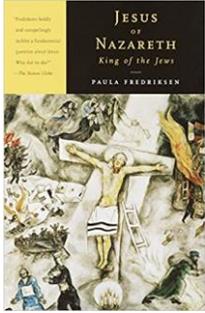
What a relief Zooming with First Church has been! What makes it so special to me? Its fierce and passionate commitment to social justice, not just in words but in deeds; its diversity; the beloved community; the fabulous music; but more than anything, the wise and caring ministry of Reverends Sam and Amanda. I don't know what will happen post-pandemic, but for now I treasure being able to worship with all of you again via Zoom.

Mary Alice

New Church Directory

As many of you know, we have moved to an online church directory. A PDF version of the directory is available and may be emailed to you if you wish. Please contact Cindy in the church office at churchoffice@firstuccdc.org if you would like the PDF version. Printed copies will be available after Easter. If you would like a printed copy, please let Cindy know and one will be mailed to you in early April. You may also access the church directory online by going to [First Church Directory](#).

Christian Education Commission



Theology Book Group: Tuesday, April 13

The Theology Book Group will meet next on Tuesday, April 13, at 6 pm to discuss Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*. The book examines historical sources to address the question of why Jesus was executed, which involves examination of the religious and political context of his time. The Zoom link is <https://georgetown.zoom.us/j/97841224122>. All are welcome.

Worship Commission

Worship Table Design

As we live stream from the sanctuary, we value the way visual arts can draw us more deeply into sacred space and the experience of worship. If you are gifted in design or visual arts, we invite you to share your gift by designing a beautiful altar for one or more Sundays. Please [Click here](#) at least one week in advance, and we will reach out to you that week prior to check in and provide any support needed for your design. You may contact Laura Johnson at: johnson.laurad@gmail.com with any questions.

Reflection on Joint Worship Service

What a gift it is to be in relationship with our sister church Peoples Congregational United Church of Christ. I am so grateful to the leadership of First Church and Peoples Congregational for the time, energy, and holy work that went into creating the February 28 joint worship service. The service theme centered on the message of God's ever-present Spirit, even and especially, during wilderness times, when God can feel so absent. The Rev. Brandon Harris' sermon deeply touched me as I reflected the wrestling I have done with God while caring for patients devastated by the pandemic. I have witnessed much suffering and "this should not be" moments, and I hold on to the faith that in some way, God is showing up. Rev. Harris spoke of the spirituality of Africana people, who, even in the midst of suffering and oppression, have affirmed God's presence and work again and again. This affirmation neither fixes nor denies the suffering taking place, but is a faithful declaration that God is still moving and working within the world.

This service was one new way of doing worship, and as we embark on the Racial Justice Audit, we are called to deeply reflect on how we can worship in new ways. Rev. Sam and Rev. Hopson started us off on this reflection process and work of the heart during our Sankofa series. If any of your reflections have led to an interest in being a part of the audit focused on worship, please don't hesitate to contact me at johnson.laurad@gmail.com

Blessings, Laura Johnson

Social Action & Awareness Commission

Making Community with Our Neighbors: Nurture/Training April 25 at 11:40 AM

Pam Lieber will provide an orientation to the drop-in/drop-by Center that we co-host on Monday evenings in partnership with Sasha Bruce Youthworks at First Church. This session is a great way to learn about DC's homeless and precariously housed youth, the work of Sasha Bruce, and the unique offering of First Church.

Attendance also will qualify you to volunteer at any time in the future, and we need volunteers! During the COVID winter, a lean, stalwart crew of (unvaccinated) sheros showed up on Monday evenings to stand OUTSIDE the church to pass out supplies to homeless neighbors, and simply to affirm our presence in downtown DC. As we continue the drop-by offering into 2021 and look ahead to one day reopening for full evenings of pizza and community, we need reinforcements.

This is a light commitment way to be part of a deeply meaningful aspect of First Church and work side by side with others. Even one Monday evening every month or two will be a great help. Even if you're not ready to participate yet, we all are participants in one way or another, so come join the conversation.

If you have any questions, please contact Janneke Ratcliffe at Janneke1018@gmail.com.



April Second Sunday Offering on April 11:

Anacostia Watershed Society

Since 1989, the Anacostia Watershed Society has been uniting the watershed communities in the shared goal of protecting and restoring the Anacostia River. You can find us out in the wetlands, in classrooms, and on the river itself as we work to restore natural systems, stop new pollution, and inspire people's passion for a cleaner river.

The Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS) is the leading member-supported organization dedicated to restoring the Anacostia River and its watershed communities. We rely on gifts from friends like you. With your gift to AWS, you are supporting a very special natural area in the heart of the city. As you help bring the river back to health, it becomes a place for people and wildlife to thrive together. You can be part of one of the region's best success stories and put your mark on the river which grows closer to swimmable and fishable each moment.

Your gift supports the beauty of the Anacostia River now and the vibrant life in its future. And your generosity will flow downstream as cleaner, clear water from the Anacostia and its tributaries flows ultimately into the Chesapeake Bay.

Please give generously. COVID-19 has reduced the number of volunteers, but the work must go on.



Sanctuary Task Force

WHAT'S HAPPENING with IMMIGRATION? WHAT'S NOT!!

WE ARE IN A GOOD PLACE

We are experiencing a surge of children and families at the Southern border, which demands our care and compassion. Thankfully, however, the era of Trump's oppressive and xenophobic policies appear to be over. The costly and pointless border wall construction has stopped and ICE raids on immigrant homes and workspaces have halted. People in sanctuary across the country, including Rosa Gutierrez at Cedar Lane in Bethesda, have made the decision to leave sanctuary, reunite with family, and fight their asylum cases from home. Now we have a new administration with a far more open-hearted humane outlook for those immigrants seeking refuge and asylum.



OUR WORK LOOKS DIFFERENT

Yes, the outlook is brighter. We have shifted from physically protecting our immigrant neighbors in DC from ICE and police to advocacy on their behalf in the DC City Council and the halls of Congress.

DC ADVOCACY

Last year the city passed an amended Sanctuary Values Act that not only prohibited city police from collaborating with ICE on detention of undocumented people but prohibited the Department of Corrections from releasing any information on people whom they were holding at the DC Jail, other than the few who are charged with a federal offense temporarily housed at the jail. This year we are again working with the Council Judiciary Committee to ensure that the "non-collaboration with ICE" policy appears in writing in MPD policy manuals and is not solely taught as part of standard training.

CONGRESSIONAL ADVOCACY

We have joined Faith in Action and CAN to push for a path to citizenship for all Dreamers, TPS holders and families. The battle will surely play out in the Senate. Our pastor, Amanda, has signed a national clergy letter supporting these demands. We will also be calling on you to call your Senators as well as Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes-Norton.

IMMIGRANT FOOD is DC's first cause-casual restaurant that is a place for advocacy, change, and community. Award-winning Chef Enrique Limardo's creative menu reflects how we see America at its core: diverse, nourishing, and welcoming.

Don't forget to check our weekly email from IMMIGRANT FOOD featuring a roundup of immigrant centered events and the promise of delicious food inspired by the immigrants in our neighborhoods.

WHERE DO IMMIGRANTS FIT INTO OUR RACIAL JUSTICE AUDIT?

How easily we forget that our great land welcomed almost all of us as immigrants. True, back then most immigrants were White Europeans. Today most immigrants are coming from Central and South America, Africa and Asia, each one a different color, sporting different features and speaking different languages. How easy it is to just look at these new arrivals and see them as "other." Before we judge, it behooves us to look inward and question our own reactions.

2021 Church Council, Commission Members, and Council Reps

Church Council

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Commission Chairs & Members

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Nora Marsh, council rep
Carol Malone
Mark Jensen
Carolyn Marsh

Christian Education:

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LaTayna Purnell, council rep
Alisa Tanaka-Dodge
Anna Kiss
Andrew Hamilton
Rev. Sam McFerran, staff

Facilities Commission:

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Marian Drake, council rep
Peter Tracey
Kim Darling
Anisa Heming, volunteer
Byron Adams, staff

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John Marsh, council rep
Chris Barr
Allison Truhlar

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Ellen Bushmiller, council rep
Priscilla Waters
Patrick Darling-LaGamma
Meg Maguire
Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss, staff

Social Action & Awareness Commission:

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Rev. Jason Carson Wilson, co-chair, revjasoncarsonwillsonmdiv@gmail.com
Jamey Moore
JD Okorie-Dunn
Michael Hopkins
Janneke Ratcliffe

Worship Commission:

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Abigail Cipparone, council rep
Lucille Dickinson
Mary Hayes
Chris Byrne
Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss, staff
Rev. Sam McFerran, staff
John Horman, staff

Personnel Committee:

Ellen Bushmiller
Kim Darling
Lucille Dickinson
Priscilla Waters

April Calendar

Thursday, April 1

6:45 pm Monthly Mentor Mtg.
7:00 pm Maundy Thursday Worship

Friday, April 2

2:00 pm Hand Chime Rehearsal

Sunday, April 4

9:30 am Sunday School
10:30 am Easter Worship
11:40 am Coffee Hour

Monday, April 5

6:30 pm Sanctuary Group
7:30 pm Care of Parish Commission
7:30 pm Christian Ed. Commission
7:30 pm Finance Commission
8:00 pm Young Adult Group

Tuesday, April 6

Church Staff Easter Break
6:30 pm Church Council

Wednesday, April 7

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Sunday, April 11

9:30 am Sunday School
10:30 am Worship
11:40 am Coffee Hour
7:00 pm Confirmation Journey

Monday, April 12

8:00 pm Young Adult Group

Tuesday, April 13

6:00 pm Theology Book Group
6:00 pm Worship Commission

Wednesday, April 14

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation
7:00 pm Wednesday Monthly Small Group

Thursday, April 15

10:30 am Re-Gathering Task Force

Sunday, April 18

9:30 am Sunday School
10:30 am Worship
11:40 am Inquirers' Gathering
7:00 pm Confirmation Journey

Monday, April 19

8:00 pm Young Adult Group

Tuesday, April 20

7:00 pm Outreach & Membership
7:30 pm Facilities Commission

Wednesday, April 21

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Thursday, April 22

7:30 pm Choir Zoom meeting

Friday, April 23

9:00 AM GABRIEL'S HORN DEADLINE
2:00 pm Hand Chime rehearsal

Sunday, April 25

9:30 am Sunday School
10:30 am Worship – Palm Sunday
11:40 am Nurture/Training Drop-In Center
7:00 pm Confirmation Journey

Monday, April 26

6:00 pm Monthly Small Group
8:00 pm Young Adult Group

Wednesday, April 28

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Thursday, April 29

7:30 pm Choir Zoom meeting

Friday, April 30

2:00 pm Hand Chime Rehearsal



**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, LaTayna Purnell

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