

# GABRIEL'S HORN

First Congregational United Church of Christ

May 2021



---

Beloved Community,

The season of Eastertide invites us to see the eternal Christ everywhere—in the garden, in wounds, in the presence of our fear, in rooms behind “locked doors,” in the companions with whom we break bread, in the wrestling to repair harms we have caused, in abundance and beauty. We are reminded that the present moment glows with a kind of phosphorescence, and we must slow down and return to our natural senses to breathe it in. Divine love, written all over the face of the earth, in the curl of green tendrils, in the extravagance of velvet petals paving the walkway, in the birdsong that greets us each morning. Life is a gift, and we feel this more deeply living through the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and racism.

I write just days after a guilty verdict was announced, on all three counts, in the trial of Derek Chauvin for the lynching of George Floyd. We know the verdict could have been otherwise, sending our nation into a spiral of protests. We also know this verdict does not tend to the root of police violence against Black lives, and so some of us are weary or numb. For some, our trauma has been triggered by the heavy emotions of this trial, in which a verdict was handed down, as yet another Black life was stolen in Columbus, this time a 16-year-old girl named Ma’Khia Bryant. How do we live our daily lives amidst this unrelenting brutality? How do we grieve while deepening our spiritual resilience? How do we organize for social change? As a justice-seeking community, we do not shy away from these difficult questions, but choose instead to live them together. In community, you see, there is a power greater than the sum of us, and it is the mystical power of the body of Christ. We are grounded in a source of love and renewal that never runs dry.

This month, we anticipate a congregational vote on a statement prepared by the Anti-Racism Task Force of the Social Action and Awareness Commission (SAAC) on “Becoming an Anti-Racist Church.” We move into the second quarter of our Racial Justice Audit process in which commissions begin seeking input (through congregational conversations, surveys, and interviews), setting aside time for robust discussions focused on evaluating ministry areas through the lens of racial justice. During May – July, commissions will complete the audit worksheet (or profile) which asks specific questions about raising awareness, building capacity, and taking action. I want to thank each person participating, especially commission leaders, as we learn together on this journey.

While we will continue to worship virtually in May, the numbers of COVID-19 infections are declining as more people become vaccinated and the weather invites us outdoors. If the trend continues, we will move into what our Regathering Task Force calls “Phase 2,” in which liturgists, scripture readers, and some guest musicians will be able to join staff in leading worship from the sanctuary. Please join us for

our spring congregational meeting on May 23 for more updates on what Phases 3 and 4 will look like. I celebrate this congregation's commitment to public health and the tangible improvement we are beginning to see in the wider community. I continue to ask for your patience as we finalize our plans for safe protocols and practices to guide our regathering.

On May 23 we will celebrate Pentecost Sunday (marking the birth of the early church) by confirming an outstanding group of youth who wish to enter into the joys and responsibilities of full membership at First Church. We have spent most Sunday evenings of 2021 together by Zoom; they have connected with their mentors, attended field trips, learned church history with the youth of Peoples' Congregational UCC, and will serve together with Sikh youth later this month. It has been a journey filled with blessing, thoughtfulness, and laughter. What a joy it will be to receive them into the fellowship of the church knowing that it is our companionship on the journey that invites us to see the eternal Christ everywhere. It is our covenant with one another that roots us in the true vine of God's great love. And so, we continue to grow. What a thing to behold! Thanks be to God.

In Gratitude, Amanda

### 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.



### Guest Preacher for May 30: Rev. Lawrence Tanner Richardson

Rev. Richardson is a pastor, prophet, evangelist, author, and Lead Minister at Linden Hills UCC in Minneapolis. He is a graduate of St. Catherine University and Liberty Seminary. Rev. Richardson also has completed certifications for Anti-Racism Facilitator Training, Our Whole Lives Sexuality Training, Church Planting, Digital Media Strategy and Executive Leadership Coaching. He is on staff as a media trainer at Auburn Seminary and as an executive clergy coach for the Center for Progressive

Renewal. Rev. Richardson also has active partnerships with the Evangelical Church of Germany, collaborating on digital ministry projects.

The author of [I Know What Heaven Looks Like](#), Rev. Richardson writes about and advocates for LGBTQ people, people of color, and the flourishing of all. His works have appeared in Huffington Post Religion, The Root, Believe Out Loud, The Salt Collective, Rachel Murr's Unnatural: Spiritual Resiliency in Queer Christian Women, Austen Hartke's Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians, and numerous other national and international publications. He has received awards and commendations for his service from Black Transmen, Inc., and the Stellar Awards for his work in global communication.

When he is not ministering, researching or writing, Pastor Lawrence loves reading, trying different cuisines, traveling, spending time with his family, and empowering people to live life from a place of joy, abundance, faith, and gratitude.

## Church Council



### Save the Date! Spring Congregational Meeting May 23, 2021

Please join us for our Spring Congregational Meeting on Sunday, May 23, 2021. We will convene virtually after worship service around 11:40 AM. We will receive updates on (1) plans to regather for in-person worship (as the COVID-19 pandemic eases); (2) progress on our racial justice audit; and (3) church finances. We also anticipate a congregational vote on a statement prepared by the Anti-Racism Task Force of the Social Action and Awareness Commission on "Becoming an Anti-Racism Church." Please contact Moderator John Smeltzer or Assistant Moderator Susan Anderson if you have questions or other agenda items.

### COUNCIL CAPSULE April 6, 2021

Council convened on April 6, 2021, and conducted the following business:

We discussed plans for returning to in-person worship services as the COVID-19 pandemic eases. The church is following a phased approach based on community metrics (average new case counts per 100,000 and vaccination rates). We hope to be able to move to "phase 3" (limited in person attendance with specified protocols) in June. The Regathering Task Force meets on April 15, 2021, to consider refinements to the plan.

We discussed efforts to lease the flex space (formerly leased by Fresh Farms). The current absence of a tenant constitutes a substantial hit to our budget, but the market for downtown office rental and prospects for leasing the space remain very poor. The Facilities and Finance Commissions continue to work with Byron Adams (our building manager) to explore all options. We welcome any assistance on spreading the word about the space availability.

The Social Action and Awareness Commission presented a draft congregational statement on anti-racism. The statement would affirm the Church's commitment (in conjunction with the ongoing racial justice audit) to identifying and uprooting subconscious bias in our personal relations and institutions, and would empower the church, in accordance with our Advocacy Policy (2020), to join with partner churches and organizations to call for reforms to combat systemic racism in policing, housing, education, and other areas. We anticipate presenting an anti-racism statement at the May 23, 2021, congregational meeting.

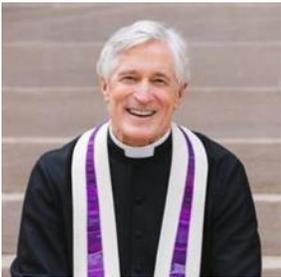
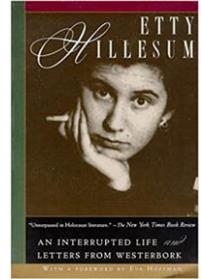
The next Council meeting is set for Tuesday May 4, 2021 at 6:30 p.m.

Questions for Council? Please contact Moderator John Smeltzer [johnsmeltzer@gmail.com](mailto:johnsmeltzer@gmail.com) or Assistant Moderator Susan Anderson [ssba92@gmail.com](mailto:ssba92@gmail.com).

## Christian Education Commission

### Theology Book Group: Tuesday, May 25

The Theology Book Group will meet next on Tuesday, May 25, at 6:00 PM, to discuss Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life*. This is the diary of a brilliant woman who grew in spiritual insight and intensity during the Nazi occupation of Holland during World War II. All are welcome. The Zoom link is <https://georgetown.zoom.us/j/2023655260>.



### Dangerous Memory: An Anti-Racist Political Theology of the Cross, Rev. Dr. Roger Gench

Sunday, May 16 immediately following worship via Zoom

“Where do we go from here, Lord?” In the aftermath of the trial of the George Floyd murder, what is our role, as Christians, to bring forth healing, justice, and hope?

Please join us for this timely nurture led by Rev. Dr. Roger Gench. Roger J. Gench served as the Senior Pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC from 2002–2019. He also was a leader in the Washington Interfaith Network. He is currently Theologian in Residence at Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia, and an adjunct faculty member at Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, Virginia). He is the author of *Theology from the Trenches: Reflections on Urban Ministry* (2014) and *The Cross Examen: A Spirituality for Activists*.

We are living in a kairos moment of racial reckoning in this country, a moment that finds us grappling with the meaning and consequences of a painful history of racism and slavery. For Christians, a kairos moment is an “opportune” moment when the future God has in mind for us struggles toward realization now, demanding decisive action on our parts. The white church cannot be silent at such a moment. It cannot emerge on the other side of it unchanged. It must engage the reality of racism with eyes wide open to painful memories that must be fully exposed. Dangerous memories must be awakened, for kairos moments reveal things that have been hidden.

The dangerous memory of the crucified and risen Jesus confronts the “lie” of racism, past and present. The cross and resurrection disrupt our forgetfulness about the lie and awaken memory of our complicity in the reality of racism and its ongoing diminishment of the lives of racially-minoritized people. Indeed, the dangerous memory embodied in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus creates tension that evokes a relational and agitational community of resistance to racist ideas and policies.



## Confirmation Journey: Living Out Our Faith and Building Interfaith Bridges

Confirmation Sunday is May 23

As part of the Confirmation journey, the youth are often asked: what does it mean to live out our faith? To answer that question, we brought them to Adams Morgan to visit with amazing community leaders who run faith-inspired non-profits to serve the poor and working poor.

On March 21, they met with Terry Flood of Jubilee Jobs and Jim Knight and Marty Mellett of Jubilee Housing. The leaders each shared their faith story, why faith has compelled them into the work they are doing. In three different groups, they took the confirmands and their mentors on a tour of the Adams Morgan neighborhood where their non-profits serve the poor and working poor residents in this highly gentrified neighborhood.



The youth saw the beautiful and dignified apartment buildings owned by Jubilee Housing. They peeked in on the dance studio at the Sitar Community Arts center. They learned about the ministry to provide a welcome and strong foundation for people returning home from prison. They learned from a resident at the Kairos House about the healing he received from Christ House. To paraphrase Matthew 25, to honor God is to serve those who most need our help. These leaders truly embody this message.

On Sunday, May 9, the confirmands will build bridges with our interfaith siblings at the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, a Sikh faith community in Rockville, MD. There they will volunteer at their pandemic drive-thru food pantry which serves more than 2000 people each Sunday. They will attend a prayer service and attend an education session to learn more about the Sikh religion. We are grateful for the warm welcome we have received from Guru Gobind. We also stand with them in opposition to the violence and racism they have endured in America, most recently evidenced in the shootings in Indianapolis.



Confirmation Sunday is May 23. We hope you can join us. Each of these confirmands has brought their whole self into learning about God, the Bible, and what it means to live out our Christian faith in a world that is in such great need for healing and justice. We are thankful to the mentors for guiding them these last three months, for Rev. Amanda for shepherding their journey, and for Rev. Sam for planning these two meaningful experiences.

## Worship Commission

### Thank you to Matthew LaGamma

Please join Worship Commission in thanking Matthew LaGamma for the beautiful photo of the Worship Table that is used during the Livestream services. Matthew took the photos for both Lent and Easter, and helped the Worship Commission set up for Easter. Thank you, Matthew, for sharing your time and gifts with us!

### Racial Justice Audit: Online Survey in May

The Worship Commission will be sending out a survey in early May as a part of the Racial Justice Audit. We encourage all members and friends of the church to take the time to reflect on the questions and respond with experiences, thoughts, and ideas. We want to hear every voice. This survey will be crucial for how we will proceed with the audit and make recommendations for future changes. Following, we will be conducting interviews during June and July to engage in further dialogue. Be on the lookout in your email and the worship folders for the survey link.

## Social Action & Awareness Commission

### Affordable Housing Update:

### Upcoming DC Council Vote on Comprehensive Plan Amendment

### Please Contact Your Council Member!

DC Council Chairman Mendelson introduced a markup on April 19 with an initial council vote expected on May 4. Our partner, Empower DC, believes that this proposal claims to fight for equity but won't actually stop displacement, create truly affordable housing, and promote community-led development. The DC Council's new Office of Racial Equity recently published a Racial Equity Impact Assessment of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment and came to the same conclusion: as written, the bill will exacerbate racial inequities in DC.

It is more important than ever to contact your DC Council Representative and urge them to adopt the revisions promoted by the DC Grassroots Planning Coalition and the DC Council's Office of Racial Equity.



## Second Sunday Offering on May 9: Food Justice DMV

On Mother's Day think about the sustenance and security that every parent wants to provide for their family. My mother, of blessed memory, could always provide my nutritional needs. For our immigrant siblings, food justice and security are difficult challenges. That's why you are being asked to generously support Food Justice DMV for this month's Second Sunday Offering.

With extraordinary bravery and tenacity, immigrants risked it all to get here. Then the pandemic hit, further revealing deep inequities about who gets to eat. Food Justice DMV is a local volunteer colectiva delivering food and standing in solidarity with thousands of our immigrant siblings. They deliver justicia in a grocery bag. 100% of their funds go to our Black and Brown siblings pushed off the economic cliff with no safety net. Your generous donation can be the safety net.

Together we can do incredible things to reduce food insecurity. Food Sanctuary DMV receives thousands of requests area wide, from parents who just want to feed their children, have diapers, and give milk to their babies. In one year they delivered food justice to over 130,000 people. The need only escalates.

To see how they reduce food insecurity one familia at a time and to learn about their dynamic volunteer opportunities go to [www.foodjusticedmv.org](http://www.foodjusticedmv.org) Thank you for your generous giving.

## May Calendar

### Sunday, May 2

9:30 am Sunday School  
10:30 am Worship  
11:40 am Racial Justice Audit Nurture  
7:00 pm Confirmation

### Monday, May 3

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, May 4

6:30 pm Church Council

### Wednesday, May 5

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

### Thursday, May 6

6:45 pm Monthly Mentor Meeting  
7:30 pm Choir Zoom meeting

### Friday, May 7

2:00 pm Hand Chime Rehearsal

### Sunday, May 9

9:30 am Sunday School  
10:30 am Worship – Led by Young Adults  
11:40 am Coffee Hour  
7:00 pm Confirmation

### Monday, May 10

8:00 pm Young Adult Group

### Tuesday, May 11

6:00 pm Worship Commission

### Wednesday, May 12

12:00 pm Joint Prayer Service  
7:00 pm Wednesday Monthly Small Group

### Thursday, May 13

7:30 pm Choir Zoom meeting

### Friday, May 7

2:00 pm Hand Chime Rehearsal

### Sunday, May 16

9:30 am Sunday School  
10:30 am Worship  
11:40 am Adult Nurture  
7:00 pm Confirmation

### Monday, May 17

8:00 pm Young Adult Group

### Tuesday, May 18

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

### Wednesday, May 19

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation  
7:30 pm SAAC Meeting

### Thursday, May 20

7:30 pm Choir Zoom meeting

### Friday, May 21

2:00 pm Hand Chime rehearsal

### Sunday, May 23

9:30 am Sunday School  
10:30 am Worship – Pentecost

### Monday, May 24

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

### Tuesday, May 25

GABRIEL'S HORN DEADLINE

### Wednesday, May 26

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

### Thursday, May 27

7:30 pm Choir Zoom meeting

### Friday, April 30

Staff Holiday (Memorial Day)

### Sunday, May 30

9:30 am Sunday School  
10:30 am Worship



**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

945 G Street NW, Washington DC 20001  
Phone: 202.628.4317 • Fax: 202.347.4911  
[www.firstuccdc.org](http://www.firstuccdc.org)