

GABRIEL'S HORN

First Congregational United Church of Christ

June 2021



Dear Beloved Community,

As spring swells into summer with growing gardens and cicada song in the air, we turn from Pentecost—the birth of the early church—to a new season of worship. Our summer worship theme will be “Wade in the Water,” as we explore biblical stories that feature the waters of creation, liberation, new life, baptism, chaos, and healing. As our summer adventures carry us to lakes and rivers, or perhaps to the ocean, we will reflect on the ways that God “troubles the water” to disrupt the placid status quo and lead us into newness. I hope you will join us.

June 13 will mark our transition into Phase 3 of our re-opening. Hybrid worship will be led from the sanctuary with small groups of up to 25 worshipers as we invite Council and then our Commissions (one at a time) to join us in the sanctuary to experience in-person worship once more. The summer will serve as a time for our leaders to practice the protocols that will guide us in Phase 4 this fall. It will also provide a season to meet the technological challenges of hybrid worship. We will continue to invite worshipers to join us by Zoom in every phase of our regathering and beyond.

Vital work on our Racial Justice Audit will also take place over the summer on our journey as an anti-racist congregation. Thank you for voting unanimously to claim our anti-racist identity at last month’s congregational meeting. This was an historic vote in our life together! Our congregation-wide survey ([click here](#) to complete it) was recently released. If there is one thing you do over the summer as part of our audit process, let this be it. We need to hear from you, and this extensive survey will take some time so plan accordingly (we recommend setting aside 30 minutes). I want to thank Abigail Cipparone who has designed the survey, receiving thoughtful questions from nearly every Commission, and who will be responsible for ensuring each Commission receives the results from their section of the survey. Your input will help Commissions complete the audit questions by the end of July. In the fall, we will focus on compiling reports based on the congregational survey, personal interviews, as well as outreach to other congregations and partner organizations engaged in the work of racial justice. Our final report will shape our Comprehensive Plan to Dismantle Racism as we vision and plan for the coming years.

It is with full hearts that we prepare to bless the retirement of our beloved Music Director, John Horman. John’s humor, creative genius, tireless work, and love of directing us to make music together have served this congregation brilliantly for seven years. And who can doubt John’s faithful commitment to our church after the last year of his tenure, as he devoted himself to making music with us in ways

(continued on page 2)

unimaginable before this pandemic? From talented musical guests and exquisite collaborations to a high-tech process to create each and every hymn, John has kept us singing. Under his leadership, the choir has served as a creative community of love, support, and joy. I hope you will join us for worship this month, especially on John's last Sunday, June 27, as he offers a musical farewell and we share our gratitude and bless this new season of his life. As Priscilla Waters recently observed, "We will never replace John, but he has opened our eyes to many musical possibilities," and we will build on his legacy.

In this season of tremendous promise, we cannot help but look to the future with joyful anticipation as God regathers us under the divine wing. From the sweet spirit we share together in the sanctuary to once more serving our city with the summer re-opening of the Drop-In Center, to outdoor gatherings with youth and families, I pray your heart will be buoyed by God's love with us.

In Gratitude, Rev. Amanda



Racial Justice Audit: Fill out the Congregational Survey Now!

[Click here](#) to complete the First Church Racial Justice Audit Survey as part of our year-long audit process. The survey includes questions from the following ministry areas: Council, Worship, Social Action & Awareness, Outreach & Membership, Care of Parish, Finance, and Facilities. Please know that your responses in each ministry section will only be shared with those Commission

members; for example, your answers in the Worship section will only be viewed by members of the Worship Commission. While trends in responses will be shared with staff, staff members will not view your responses. Because the survey is comprehensive, please plan to respond when you can take the time needed to answer this in-depth survey in its entirety, as your answers will not be saved if you exit the survey and return. Of all that you do this year to contribute to our Racial Justice Audit process, this may be the most important. Thank you for taking the time to lift your voice!

Church Council

Report from the Spring Meeting

The Congregation gathered (virtually) for our Spring Congregational Meeting after worship service on May 23, 2021. The highlights from the meeting:

Announcement of the Ruth Shinn Memorial Anti-Racism Fund

We were pleased to announce the establishment of the Ruth Shinn Memorial Anti-Racism Fund. The fund is a gift from Ruth's estate of just over \$100,000 to help fund the anti-racism ministry of the church. The initial priority for the fund is to help rekindle and continue our relationship with Howard University. Leaders from the church and the Anti-Racism Task Force hope to partner with Howard University faculty and students to develop an educational, justice, history, or worship program that spotlights anti-racism work. The fund is mission first. We will invest the principal to increase its impact but will draw down on

the fund for mission purposes at a rate of up to five percent annually, regardless of return. Ruth was a pioneer for civil rights. She helped integrate YWCA facilities, advocated for the rights of women and girls as a member of the National Board of the YWCA, and helped to develop affirmative action requirements for federal contracting while working with the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor. At First Church, Ruth was the first woman to serve as moderator. She led us to opening our doors and sharing worship space with the Metropolitan Community Church, which was instrumental to our becoming Open and Affirming to the LGBTQ community.

Ruth passed away last year at age 97. In the spirit of "Sankofa," we reach back to Ruth's legacy and wisdom to carry her gift forward to the civil rights challenges of today. We thank Sandy Shinn, Ruth's niece and representative of her estate, and Meg Maguire, for developing the plan for the fund in accordance with Ruth's wishes, and Lucille Dickinson for assisting with financial arrangements.

Vote to Adopt the Statement on Becoming an Anti-Racist Church

The congregation voted unanimously to adopt the Statement on Becoming an Anti-Racist Church authored by the Anti-Racism Task Force. Through this statement, we continue the congregation's longstanding efforts to embrace diversity and work for racial justice. We specifically acknowledged that "the legacy of white supremacy and racism remains entrenched in the economic and social fabric of our nation and in our governing institutions," and we "committed to identifying the presence of such racism in ourselves, in our congregation, and in the wider world, and to uprooting it with our whole hearts and minds."

In accordance with our Policy on Social Action Advocacy (2020), we also voted to empower an Anti-Racism Task Force as a committee of the Social Action and Awareness Commission and under the guidance of Rev. Amanda, to work in partnership with fellow churches and others to "advocate for federal, state, and local laws and regulations to confront and remedy systemic racism." The statement was prepared and submitted by the members of the Anti-Racism Task Force (2021): Rev. Jason Carson Wilson, Diane Brenneman, Rev. Karen Byrne, Kim Darling, Lucille Dickinson, Rev. Laura Johnson, Jessica Prentice, LaTayna Purnell, Janneke Ratcliffe, Gail Sonnemann, and Priscilla Waters. [Click here](#) to view the full statement on our website.

Plans for Regathering for In-Person Worship

Kim Darling, chair of the Regathering Task Force, presented the current details of our plan for regathering for in-person worship and other events in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We plan to begin Phase 3 of regathering on June 13, 2021. In Phase 3, we will invite select groups (of up to 25 persons) to attend worship services to test distancing and other protocols and to gather feedback for Phase 4.

In Phase 4, all members of the congregation interested in attending services (with COVID-19 protocols) will be invited to attend worship services, up to 50 persons per week, on a rotating basis. We anticipate that Phase 4 will begin in September 2021. Our regathering plan is deliberately more cautious than reopening plans for other institutions. We are committed to reopening in a manner that is respectful of the needs of the most vulnerable members of our community and of those who may find us anew for in-person worship each week.

We are also committed to continuing to worship on a hybrid basis—offering the option for remote participation via zoom to all of our members and friends who are unable to gather in person at 10th and G—even after the risks of the pandemic dissipate. We anticipate needing some additional time, as we transition to more in-person attendees, to acquire and to learn to use the equipment that will enable us to make the worship experience excellent for all attendees (in person and remote). We will continue to track the latest expert recommendations, as well as key metrics, and will adjust the schedule if we are able to accommodate a more rapid return to in-person worship. [Click here](#) to view the regathering plan and [click here](#) for a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the church's website. The members of the Regathering Task Force are Kim Darling, John Smeltzer, Susan Anderson, Nick McConnell, David Greer, Carol Malone, and Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss.

Some History on the Statement on Becoming an Anti-Racist Church

By Lucille Dickinson

The unanimous vote at the congregational meeting on May 23 to approve the Statement on Becoming an Anti-Racist Church follows a long history of the church working for racial justice and inclusion. The Statement is the culmination of many years of efforts in this area and a renewed sense of urgency over the past year following the murder of George Floyd.

For newer members of First Church, I'd like to highlight some of these efforts over the last 35 years. This is by no means a definitive history, as other long-time members of the church probably would highlight or emphasize other milestones from their vantage points. I especially refer you to the 150th anniversary collection of essays, which contains 12 pages devoted to this history. There have been stumbles along the way. But the vote on May 23 was an important step on a long journey of both First Church and the national and regional UCC.

Long-time ministers Rev. John Mack and Rev. Barbara Gerlach (who arrived in 1984 and retired in 2007) focused on increasing First Church's engagement with four African American churches in the Potomac Association, and the church participated in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. In 1992, the youth reflected on their experience of their own racial heritage and identity in a special worship service celebrating *500 Years of Cultural Encounter: Conquest, Resistance and Perseverance*. The church was intentional during this time in hiring assistant ministers of African descent.

In 1993, the 19th UCC synod adopted a Pronouncement and Proposal for Action on Becoming a Multiracial and Multicultural Church (MRMC). This proposal combined some anti-racism work but had a more sustained focus on working to be diverse and inclusive. The anti-racism piece is its call to (1) acknowledge and confess our sins of racism, (2) repent and refrain from acts of discrimination and bigotry, (3) confront indifference, ignorance, and neglect, (4) engage in deliberate study and action to stem the resurgent tide of racism.

First Church responded to this call. By 2000, a MRMC Task Force was formed (later renamed Beloved Community Task Force). In 2001, Rev. Ron McLean facilitated a three-session discernment process on (1)

whether becoming Multiracial and Multicultural should be a priority for First Church, (2) hopes for First Church as a Multiracial and Multicultural community, (3) current strengths and needed resources. In January 2003, the church adopted the Multiracial and Multicultural Vision, “committing ourselves to a path of discernment and action that will lead us to the fulfillment of Christ’s prayer that we may all be one.” And “we pledged that the fruit of the Multiracial and Multicultural church will be manifest in our staffing, our music and worship, our programs, our relationships, and our outreach.” In 2004, we studied pastoral staffing models at other churches and how they impact the racial and ethnic welcome and inclusion. In the mid-2000’s the church received grants for focusing on music, which opens doors and is a great tool for communicating across boundaries and embracing and living into becoming a MRMC community. In 2006, we started our relationship with Dr. Ron Hopson, who has served in various adjunct capacities since.

In 2003, as First Church embarked explicitly on its Multiracial and Multicultural vision, the 24th UCC synod adopted an addendum to its 1993 proposal—in 2003 it called the UCC to be “an anti-racist church.” Its premise explicitly refers to white privilege and white supremacy and institutional racism, as well as increased racial unrest following 9/11. So the UCC resolved to be an anti-racist church; to adopt anti-racism mandates, including policy that encourages anti-racism programs; and to work to dismantle racism in church and in society. (Sadly, First Church didn’t immediately act on this national UCC statement. One factor was the large site redevelopment project from 2006 to 2012—tearing down an old building, surviving the Great Recession, and building and settling in a new building—that consumed the energies of church staff and leadership.)

In 2016-2017 an ad hoc anti-racism task force emerged in First Church and developed a statement on anti-racism at First Church, with the help of Rev. James Ross, the Minister for Justice Formation. The church council endorsed it in the fall of 2017, and it became the basis for anti-racism work as well as recommended actions to address three levels of concern: in our individual lives, in First Church, and beyond First Church. This work plan, for example, led to the several sessions of discussions of white privilege, using the UCC’s curriculum, starting in summer 2017.

In 2019, the church’s search for a designated minister named its first goal as helping the church continue on the path to becoming a multiracial and multicultural church, and specifically evaluate and improve our practices, policies, and structures in what we’ve identified as our clear calling to be an anti-racist church. The covenant with Rev. Amanda reflects this priority: *The primary goal for this designated ministry is to continue walking on the path to becoming a multiracial and multicultural church where all people feel welcomed, included, and nurtured. Because of our history and long work for inclusion and justice, we have made many efforts over many years towards becoming a beloved multiracial and multicultural community. But we have fumbled and fallen short so far. We hear clearly the calling to function in a multiracial and multicultural paradigm because it seems both obvious and inevitable that this is what our world needs, and it reflects our foundational values. We need a leader dedicated to this vision who will help guide us toward this identity on three levels: interior (our sense of self, our spirituality and understanding of God, and our personal relationships with others), internal (the practices, policies, and structures of First Church), and external, so that we can be more authentic and effective in our engagement in our city, nation, and world.*

In 2020, the response to George Floyd's murder ignited a worldwide movement. But First Church's process didn't sufficiently empower church leadership to immediately respond publicly in the name of the church. So some infrastructure improvements were deemed necessary. In November of 2020, the church approved the Policy on Social-Action Advocacy to help commissions and committees act nimbly. The Statement on Being an Anti-Racist Church comes out of both this long history and the renewed urgency of the past year. It is a step in the work of dismantling racism—an important step—but a step, not the end by any means.

Worship Commission

Absent, but Still Present

By John Horman, Director of Music

As time passes and we grow closer to what our world resembled prior to the pandemic, we begin to examine what we've lost and gained from the experience. I'm sure that magazine articles, doctoral dissertations, and even books will be written about the 2020-2021 time period and what it has left in its wake.

As a Director of Music at First Church, I was presented a year ago with the dilemma of providing a steady stream "ready for worship" music each week, garnering instrumentalists for solo performances, keeping my organ and keyboard skills intact, and bringing a choir together to sing both hymns and anthems remotely.

Not only did the First Church Choir gain a few new members willing to take on the daunting job of learning and recording on a virtual platform, but also some singers who live in other parts of the world who joined the musical fellowship through the magic of virtual Zoom choir rehearsals. Here are four wonderful individuals who braved the technical juggernaut of learning and recording music online to participate over the past year.

From Mary Hayes:

I have been in Costa Rica for the last 30 plus years and have always sung with the choir whenever I was in town. It was a wonderful, shared activity with my mom, and I enjoyed getting to know all the people who were so special to her and are now special to me.

Hymn singing is a very important part of worship for me—it seems like singing together is a big part of walking together—and it's been a privilege to be a part of that in virtual services. As a worshipper and as a choir member, the anthem provides a spiritual focus that complements the spoken word. And the Doxology was always my favorite part of the service as a child.

Being a part of the choir has made me feel more connected to the church through this difficult time. Thank you for making it work and including us out-of-towners.

From Thom Fritz:

I have known about and, on a few occasions, even visited First Church through my long-time (decades) friendship with church and choir member Nora Marsh. Nora, who has greater appreciation for my singing than do I, invited me to "check out" the choir recently now that practices are virtual. Since I live overseas, Thursday evening trips into DC are not an option. I am new to the choir practices and so have yet to find my place. As to singing in general, however, it brings me joy and fulfills in me a long-held wish that I had a better voice and could bring pleasure to others through song. Over the years—okay, again the decades—I appear to be able to sing best in a church and have even, on a handful of occasions, had people sitting near me compliment my singing and express pleasure at having heard it. Those are the gifts that lift my spirit, fill my heart, and make me smile—for a moment I did bring pleasure to another with my singing. Oh, as to why coming into DC for choir practices currently is not an option, I am living in Bogota, Colombia, where I am deployed as an employee of the U.S. Department of State. I am on a two-year tour in the U.S. Embassy here as a member of the Foreign Service.

From Welling Hall:

I think that my background information was published in the Horn within the past year. I am getting ready to move away from Indiana (thank God) and spend the summer at Chautauqua before I move to Boston. I'm looking forward to singing in the chapel choir at BU School of Theology when I get there.

We all understood that my singing was temporary, but it is coming to an end even sooner than I imagined! I have a board meeting on Thursday this week and the following week is during my major moving sale. I will try to pop in to say hello and good-bye soon! Thank you so much for everything! It has been a real joy.

From Randy Jones:

I have had connections to our choir for eons. Before I ever joined First Church, I met many choir and Church members through my partner, John Shepherd (Music Director from 1976-93). I have also known John Horman since the dawn of time, as he and John Shepherd were best friends. Just two months after John Shepherd's death, I was dragged into the choir by Judith Gray and Celeste Feather. I was warmly welcomed and have felt at home there ever since. As a choir member, I have felt an integral part of our worship services, and that is deeply meaningful to me. For me, music helps me express my faith better than words. Of course, the camaraderie and the joy of learning and performing wonderful music are also wonderful plusses of choir membership. In July of 2019 I retired and moved to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. I am still adjusting to many things. I have yet to pick up much Spanish, but I fully intend to. Love the climate, the culture, and the people here. Trying to do finances remotely when I am technologically challenged has not been so easy, but I am improving. Having Zoom choir rehearsals and services has helped impose at least a little organization to my days. In fact, those have been the silver lining of the pandemic for me. I've really missed First Church and singing with the choir, so this contact has been fantastic for me. Yay!

For these individuals and many others, we at First Church should give thanks to God and in the words of Randy Jones, shout a loud and joyous, "YAY"!

Facilities Commission

Facilities Commission continues to be engaged with supporting Byron's work on outreach to potential tenants and other opportunities for renting the flex-space and the sanctuary, and is encouraged by recent progress on this since COVID restrictions are easing and potential renters are thinking of returning downtown. Facilities also began undertaking the work of the racial justice audit during its April and May meetings. We are primarily focusing on building use, business relationships, and community relationships, and how the use of our space can maximize these aims in support of racial justice.

Christian Education Commission



Micro-aggressions and Their Impact on Our Ability to Build an Anti-racist World: Sunday, June 6, 11:35 (via Zoom)

A Nurture Led by Lynaya Morris, MDiv, and Rev. Sam McFerran
We hope you can join us for this important conversation about what it means to be an anti-racist community. Using the topic of micro-aggressions as a starting point, we will explore the hard issues that sometimes get in the way from us fully committing to being an anti-racist body of Christ.

During this conversation, we will be breaking into small groups and reflect upon the following questions:

- 1) When have there been instances when positive intentions sometimes have a negative impact on being a welcoming and anti-racist community? Why is it important to reevaluate our good intentions in the light of their broader impact on the community?
- 2) Where do you have power to make a difference in creating an anti-racist society?
- 3) When welcoming a person of color into our community, whose comfort am I valuing? Whose discomfort am I tolerating? How do these dynamics play out in the common life of the church?
- 4) What are tangible ways we can be a disruptive anti-racist force?

Social Action & Awareness Commission



Second Sunday Offering on June 14: Shaw Community Center

This month's Second Sunday Offering is Shaw Community Center or SCC. Dale Ostrander and Meg Maguire are the First Church caring ambassadors to Shaw. They both volunteer as after-school tutors and help with the Christmas gift drive. Dale is also on the Board of Trustees. They were kind enough to share this information. I was pleased to see that SCC has services available to all age groups and has been a positive impact for 30 years.

Recognizing the critical need in the Shaw neighborhood for educational and social services to benefit low-income residents, leaders of Lincoln Temple and Westmoreland UCC churches founded Shaw Community Ministry in 1991 with support from the Potomac Association.

The Center is located in the national landmark Lincoln Temple at 11th and R St, NW. Shaw Community Center serves the neighborhood in many ways, such as:

- Helps parents and their elementary and school-aged children in after-school programs of education, arts and recreation;
- Provides job training and employment counseling to young adults;
- Awards modest college scholarships to selected Shaw high school graduates;
- Sponsors a dynamic summer camp;
- Brings the community together for parties and performances; and
- Educates children of all ages about Shaw's rich cultural heritage and both the positive and negative changes taking place there.

Each year, the staff help the children write and perform a play about their community, its history, challenges, and, most importantly, actions that students can take to assert their belonging in this community and city. This is civic education at its best!

While First Church supports Shaw through our June Second Sunday Offering, and while the organization has been successful in receiving grants, the Center needs many additional gifts and talents:

- Donors to help expand day-to-day operations and address the serious structural problems with the building the Center must now manage;
- Donors to the scholarship fund; and
- Volunteers who can help students with their homework during the school year or activities during the summer.

Your contribution will directly enrich the lives of children in our city who live on the margins. Please give generously.

Update on Our Help to Palestinians in Gaza

Once again fighting broke out between Israel and its Palestinian neighbors in Gaza. A cease fire has been declared. That's good. But the cost to human life has not ended. Through our purchase over the years of Palestinian olive oil we have been supporting the people of Palestine. Usually we support farmers through Tent of Nations and Anera. But right now, we are supporting Anera as they collaborate with World Central Kitchen to distribute medicine and food in Gaza. First Church approved Olive Oil Ministry sending \$5,000 from its reserve fund to ANERA to cover the cost of emergency medical aid shipments. Please know that your support of the Palestinian Oil Ministry continues to work in life-saving humanitarian ways. We pray for the people of Gaza as we pray for a permanent peace between Israelis and Palestinians. If you wish to make a personal donation to Anera, here is the link:<https://support.anera.org/a/donate-palestine>. All new donations will be DOUBLED up to \$20,000 thanks to a generous donor from Texas. For updates on the situation in Gaza go to <https://www.anera.org/blog/update-on-the-crisis-in-palestine/>

June Calendar

Tuesday, June 1

6:30 pm Church Council

Wednesday, June 2

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Thursday, June 3

7:30 pm Choir Zoom meeting

Sunday, June 6

9:30 am Sunday School

10:30 am Worship

11:40 am Adult Nurture

Monday, June 7

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, June 8

6:00 pm Worship Commission

Wednesday, June 9

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

7:00 pm Wednesday Monthly Small Group

Thursday, June 10

7:30 pm Choir Zoom meeting

Sunday, June 13

9:30 am Sunday School

10:30 am Worship

Monday, June 14

8:00 pm Young Adult Group

Tuesday, June 15

7:00 pm Outreach & Membership

7:30 pm Facilities Commission

Wednesday, June 16

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

7:30 pm SAAC Meeting

Thursday, June 17

7:30 pm Choir Zoom meeting

Sunday, June 20

9:30 am Sunday School

10:30 am Worship

Monday, June 21

8:00 pm Young Adult Group

Wednesday, June 23

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Thursday, June 24

7:30 pm Choir Zoom meeting

Friday, June 25

Gabriel's Horn Deadline

Sunday, June 27

9:30 am Sunday School

10:30 am Worship

Monday, June 28

6:00 pm Monthly Small Group

8:00 pm Young Adult Group

Wednesday, June 30

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation



**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 –Lynaya Morris, LaTayna Purnell

945 G Street NW, Washington DC 20001
Phone: 202.628.4317 • Fax: 202.347.4911
www.firstuccdc.org