

GABRIEL'S HORN

First Congregational United Church of Christ

October 2021



Beloved Community,

Theologian Dr. Willie James Jennings says, “the heart of discipleship is to cultivate belonging—to God and to one another.” What if we imagined our faith as a journey into belonging? Not a belonging defined by exclusivity, but one that broadens step by step until we know deep in our bones that there is nothing and no one to whom we don’t belong, and who doesn’t belong to us? Imagine if that was the ultimate goal of every spiritual longing, the north star of every step toward spiritual growth—to live into the wideness of God’s love which claims us all.

In the midst of this pandemic, too often we have felt severed from the communities that grant us a sense of belonging. We hesitate to show up, because we live with unvaccinated children or may be immune compromised ourselves. We may lift our voices in song privately, but we have not done so collectively in more than a year and a half. Feasting together in large numbers is not yet safe. Even the small hugs and lingering conversations, the bumping into someone we haven’t seen in a few weeks, the sounds of our children worshiping with us—all of these signals of belonging have gone silent. How do we remember that we belong to one another and to God?

This month we invite you to join us in whatever ways feel safe and good to you as we begin to crack our doors a little wider. The month’s worship services are book-ended with World Communion Sunday and All Saints Sunday, times when we remember that we belong to the wider body of Christ and the great cloud of witnesses. These special services will include opportunities for communion and remembering loved ones we have lost. Join us in person by [clicking here](#) to sign up or be sure to tune in by Zoom. On October 10th, we will launch a new stewardship season, talking honestly about money and how we steward our collective resources to ensure this community can serve as a place of belonging for the generations to follow. We will be blessed by personal sharing that testifies to the life-giving, foundational importance First Church imparts to our lives—how it may be that place where you first knew or came to feel more deeply just how truly you belong to God.

Delve into a healthy theology of belonging by joining our book group on Tuesday, October 5th to discuss *Borders and Belonging: The Book of Ruth and Story for*

Our Times by Irish poet Pádraig Ó Tuama. Help cultivate a sense of belonging with those with a lived experience of exclusion by serving at our Tuesday night Drop-In Center (contact Janneke Ratcliffe for more details). Come out for a screening of “In the Heights” on Saturday, October 16th to enjoy connecting with our community. Gather with the children and families who have been missing from our sanctuary on Sunday, October 17th when Rev. Sam leads the next outdoor worship experience in Anacostia Park. Then on Sunday, October 24th, please be sure to join us for a congregational meeting that will shape our future together as I humbly seek to enter into a call and covenant with you as your settled senior minister. The truth is there is no other community to whom I would rather belong right now than here among all of you.

Through it all, I ask that you make a commitment to prayer this month—lifting up those on the front lines of this pandemic, praying for the teams hard at work selecting our next Director of Music Ministry and Administrative Assistant, holding close those within our own congregation who are grieving or ill, praying for us as we shape our shared future together. In prayer, may you know that I also pray for you, and may you sense the deep and wide belonging—in God and in community—that is yours, right here at First Church.

In Gratitude,
Amanda

Sign Up for In-Person Worship

“I was surprised how meaningful it felt to be in person.”

“I got chills hearing Amanda speak in person. Incredible!”

“Loved being in the space and hearing the music live.”

“Seeing people was so meaningful.”

These are just a few of the comments we've collected from folks who have joined us for worship in the sanctuary. We hope that all who feel comfortable would find an opportunity to sign up and see how the experience works for them.

In-person worship is limited to 25 people per Sunday given our area's current case rates, and we continue to require masking and physical distancing.

[Click here](#) to sign up to worship in-person in the sanctuary any of the next four Sundays. This link will always take you to the sign-up sheet and will always contain the next four Sundays. If you have trouble signing up with this link, please contact Kim Darling directly: kdarling@gmail.com

Sign Up to Serve as Liturgist or Reader this Fall

As we move into autumn, we welcome fresh faces and voices in worship to serve as liturgists or scripture readers. [Click here](#) to sign up to serve. Liturgists provide either a Call to Worship or lead the Prayer of Confession and Words of Assurance. Both liturgists and scripture readers can lead from the sanctuary or from home by Zoom; please specify when you sign up. Our worship theme will be “Journey with Us.” Questions? Contact Rev. Amanda.



Guest Preacher: Dr. Ron Hopson

Join us for worship on October 17 as we welcome the Rev. Dr. Ron Hopson into our pulpit. Dr. Hopson is Associate Professor of Psychology and Divinity at Howard University. Dr. Hopson received his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Michigan State University. He attended Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary at Northwestern University and is ordained in the United Church of Christ. His most current work is in the area of Sexuality and the Black Church, for which he was recently honored with a Prophetic Ministry Award by Ministers for Racial, Social, and Economic Justice at the 2021 General Synod of the United Church of Christ. Dr. Hopson previously served this congregation and continues to be an Associate Member and beloved friend. He recently led implicit bias training for our Director of Music Ministry Search Committee. We warmly welcome home the Rev. Dr. Ron Hopson!

Church Council

Council Capsule for October 2021

Update On Staff Transitions

1. Call to Permanent Ministry

As previously announced, this fall we are engaging in a process for calling the Reverend Amanda Hendler-Voss to be our permanent senior minister. Since March 2020, Amanda has served as our designated senior minister, a position that is limited by covenant to a term of three years. In the past year and a half—a time of extraordinary challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic—we have witnessed and greatly benefited from Amanda's leadership. We have seen her immense talent and passion for social justice, and we have shared a deep and growing friendship. We are prepared now for a sacred conversation in anticipation of a call to permanent ministry.

The conversation is taking place in three parts. *First*, on September 29, 2021, the Designated Minister Relations Team (DMRT) met with Amanda to evaluate her ministry in light of the goals established in the Designated Ministry Covenant: (1) to continue walking on the path to become a multiracial and multicultural church; (2) to strengthen our church community; and (3) to develop consensus about the social justice issues to prioritize within the mission of the church. We also discussed the many challenges that disrupted Amanda's ministry from the start. Through an announcement to the church's email listserv, we invited the congregation to share any relevant thoughts with DMRT in advance of this evaluation. If you have any additional thoughts you would like to share, please contact any member of DMRT before **October 4, 2021**. The DMRT members are Kim Darling, Katherine Antos, Hannah Higgins-Long, David Greer, Priscilla Waters, Susan Anderson and John Smeltzer.

Second, Council will meet on October 5, 2021 to receive a report from DMRT. Council will then invite Amanda into conversation about her hopes and goals for permanent ministry and what she and we perceive to be the mission and role of First Church into the future. On **October 17, 2021**, we will convene a nurture after worship to continue this conversation about First Church today and First Church reimagined. The nurture will provide an opportunity for all members and friends of the congregation to share their hopes and dreams for the future of the church and to engage in conversation with Amanda about a shared vision for worship and mission in the coming years.

Third, we will convene for our Fall Congregational Meeting on **October 24, 2021**. We will then hold a discussion and vote on a nomination to call the Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss to be our Senior Minister. Please mark these dates on your calendar and plan to join us in these vital conversations about the ministry of the church.

2. Search for Director of Music Ministry

Our search for a new Director of Music Ministry (to replace John Horman, who retired in July) is also well under way. The search committee has finalized the job description and is busy sharing it widely in the DMV music and ministry circles, as well as on some national sites, including the American Guild of Organists. The posting for the Director of Music Ministry is available on the church website [here](#). The committee encourages church members and friends to share this with any potential applicants. Should you wish to share the posting via email, consider using the following introduction:

First Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC) in Washington, D.C., seeks a skilled, creative, and collaborative Director of Music Ministry to organize, develop, coordinate, and direct the music program of the church. This is a part-time position, currently budgeted for approximately 18 hours per week. The salary range is \$30-40 per hour, commensurate with experience, plus benefits, including 5% retirement, health stipend, annual and sick leave. We are an Open and Affirming and Anti-Racist congregation; LGBTQ+ individuals and people of color

encouraged to apply. Interested candidates should submit a resume to: firstchurchdchiring@gmail.com by **October 10, 2021**. No phone calls, please.

Our goal is to select a new director of music ministry by Thanksgiving. But Council has asked the search committee to be deliberate, to maximize our chances of attracting high-quality candidates and securing the best person for the position. In accordance with our bylaws, the committee will select and bring a candidate to the congregation for the congregation's approval. If we do not have a candidate by the fall congregational meeting (and it seems unlikely that we will), Council may hire a candidate on a temporary basis to fill the vacancy, subject to ratification at our next congregational meeting (which would be our annual meeting in January). Until a new director of music is hired, we will continue to call on a talented pool of substitute musicians.

The search committee members are Marian Drake (chair), Kristy Goodfellow Mills, Andrew Hamilton, Michael Hopkins, Emily Laing, Priscilla Waters, and Jason Carson Wilson. If you have questions for the committee, please feel free to contact Marian at marindrake@yahoo.com. We are very grateful to the committee for taking on this important task.

3. Administrative Assistant

Finally, we regret to note that we remain in search of an administrative assistant to replace Cindy Dobbs, who retired from the position at the end of August. We were excited to welcome a new hire to the position. But she faced some unexpected challenges and determined that that the job was not the right fit for her and tendered an apologetic resignation. Council has approved the hiring of a temporary administrative assistant while we look for a new long-term replacement. Please have patience with us as we work to maintain continuity of office coverage.

Update On Racial Justice Audit

This summer, the church embarked on a self-audit to review all aspects of church operations in relation to our desire to promote racial and cultural diversity and anti-racism. We utilized an anti-racism audit tool (survey) developed by the Racial Justice Network Leadership Team of the Central Atlantic Conference (CAC). After soliciting input from the congregation, including a congregation-wide survey, Council and all commissions helped formally complete the CAC audit in September. During October, Council and commissions will be reflecting on the audit process results to ascertain what we are doing well as a church, where we need work, and how efforts to combat structural and institutional racism connect to our faith and whom we proclaim God to be. We will consider recommendations for specific goals to achieve over the next 1-5 years and benchmarks for evaluating progress toward those goals. Commissions will report back to Council by the end of October. We hope to have a comprehensive report on the audit and recommendations for our annual meeting in January. We also

hope to provide information to Conference to help the CAC improve the survey for use by other congregations. We were the first church in the conference to complete the CAC audit.

Regathering

With the onset and spread of the COVID-19 delta variant, we have found ourselves caught in limbo in Phase 3 of our regathering plan. We will continue to monitor the metrics and CDC and other official guidance to determine whether we can safely proceed with more in-person gathering under our plan or under any appropriate changes to the plan. We would very much like to be able to have more in-person worship for the Advent season, consistent with our commitment to prioritize the health and safety of all members and friends. In the meantime, please remember that weekly worship services are presently open to in-person attendance by up to 25 congregants in addition to worship leaders, on a first-come advance signup basis. Please take advantage of that opportunity by clicking [here](#) to sign up for the worship service of your choice.

And please let us know if you have any questions on staff transitions, the racial justice audit, regathering, or any other issues!

John Smeltzer, Moderator - johnsmeltzer@gmail.com

Susan Anderson, Assistant Moderator - ssba92@gmail.com

Christian Education Commission

First Church Outdoor Children's Service Was A Fun Success!



On September 19th, First Church held its first outdoor Children's Service at Fort Reno Park. This monthly initiative provides an opportunity for community building, fun, and learning, especially for children for whom Zoom Sunday School isn't really working.

Under a beautiful blue sky, over twenty children enjoyed an engaging Sunday School Service where they explored the spiritual practice of Hospitality and reenacted the story of the two disciples' journey on Emmaus

Road. We were thrilled to welcome children from First Church, People's UCC, and friends of the congregation for this wonderful event.

Our next outdoor service will be at Anacostia Park on October 17th at 10:00 AM. We will meet near the Pavilion at 1900 Anacostia Drive, Washington, D.C. 20020. We hope you can make it! If you have any questions or ideas, please don't hesitate to reach out to Rev. Sam at 202-294-5437.

Upcoming Outdoor Services



October 17 at Anacostia Park (by pavilion)

1900 Anacostia Drive, Washington, D.C.

Theme – What Does God Require of Me

Donations – Non-perishable food for Martha's Table

November 21 at A Wider Circle (at neighbor school)

9159 Brookville Rd # C, Silver Spring, Md.

Theme – Learning from our mistakes

Donations – Toys that we no longer need

(We are welcome to volunteer at AWC after the service)

Services will begin at 10. Please gather by 9:45.

Each service includes a Gathering, Dramatic Reading of the Story, Sharing the Message, Offering, Prayers, and Sending. We hope to have 2 or 3 children volunteer each Sunday both to tell the story and to help share the message. Rev. Sam will work with them to make sure they succeed and have fun!

There will be no chairs, so we will either be standing or sitting on the ground. We have identified locations that are geographically varied and have a natural place to lead worship from. Please reach out to Rev. Sam if your children or family would like to help lead service, at mcferran.sam@gmail.com or 202-294-5437.



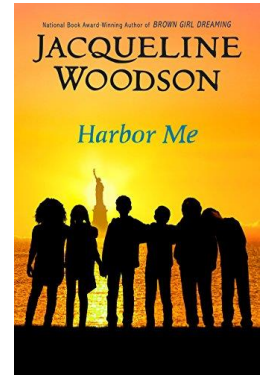
FALL FAITH FORMATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Sunday School – Follow Me in the Learning and Living of Spiritual Practices

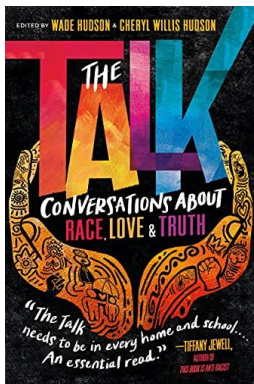
This Fall, the Pre-K to 4 Sunday School will begin with a new curriculum, **Follow Me**. Follow Me teaches spiritual practices that help us lead our lives today. We will be exploring the practices of “Welcome,” “Confess,” and “Hope.” We will learn where these practices can be found in the Bible, where we have seen them in the world, and how God wants us to practice them. We will also incorporate teachings about racial justice and helping us become anti-racist. Sunday School will be at 9:30 via Zoom or as a part of the outdoor worship services.

Middle School – “What does it mean to be a harbor for one another?”

For our Middle Schoolers (grades 5-8), we plan to read Harbor Me by Jacqueline Woodson, and to explore what it means to truly “love thy neighbor.” What is required of us to best understand the challenges facing our friends and neighbors? How do we create safe spaces where we can speak our truths? Each youth will be provided with a copy of this book. A review of the book can be found [here](#). The class will meet periodically on Sunday evenings in September, October, and November. In November, the youth will share what they learned in a Sunday Service and go on a two-night trip with the High School youth to learn about racial justice in Richmond, VA (if safety permits).



High School – “Speaking our Truths”



Our High School youth will work on identifying what truths they need to know and speak in order to navigate their lives. With The Talk: Conversations About Race, Love and Truth by Wade and Cheryl Willis Hudson as their guides, they will learn about ‘realities’ facing our neighbors, as well what truths they need to claim as High School youth in 2021. A link and review of the book can be found [here](#). The class will meet periodically on Sunday evenings in November, December, and January. They will share their truths in a service in January. Along with the Middle School youth, they will go to Richmond, VA (safety permitting) for a two-night service trip to learn more about social justice and community building.

Social Action & Awareness Commission

Second Sunday Offering — Neighbors in Need

This October, we are gathering donations for Neighbors in Need (NIN), a special mission offering of the United Church of Christ. In 2021, the NIN “Unfailing Love” offering supports organizations and projects that serve homeless and immigrant neighbors or communities. One-third of NIN funds support the [Council for American Indian Ministry](#) (CAIM). The other two-thirds will fund grants to UCC churches and organizations to lead justice initiatives, advocacy efforts, and direct service projects in their communities.

Two projects that received NIN funding:

➤ **Hope Station Nogales to provide reverse sanctuary to deportees in Mexico**

A United Church of Christ sanctuary church offering immigrants refuge in the Arizona borderlands will soon offer a place of hospitality, support and hope on the Mexican side of the border for people who find themselves deported from the United States. The Shadow Rock UCC Sanctuary Action Team and the Rev. Ken Heintzelman, in an extension of the spirit and intent of their ministry of sanctuary in Phoenix, are in the process of establishing Hope Station Nogales, in Sonora, Mexico.

Hope Station, funded in part by a \$10,000 grant from Neighbors in Need, will be a place of transition, a place where people who are deported but have family in the U.S. can find a meal, safe lodging and assistance.

➤ **Houston teens learn wage activism from working adults like them**

This summer, with a Neighbors in Need grant, 24 high school students from an economically challenged Houston neighborhood learned about activism and carried out a local campaign for a \$15 minimum-wage law.

The idea came from the basic insight that many Houston residents find it hard to make ends meet, especially workers in fast-food and other service industries. The Rev. Darnell Fennell serves some of those people in both his callings. He is pastor of [Just Love Church](#), affiliated with the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He also teaches high school social studies.

With a background in community organizing, Fennell knows people don't have to sit still for economic injustice. He knows the wider UCC feels the same, as seen in statements such as a 2017 General Synod [resolution](#), “A More Just Economy: \$15

Minimum Wage, Living Wages and Job Creation." So he sought the NIN grant to introduce young people to local activists in the national [Fight for \\$15](#) wage campaign and involve them in learning by doing.

Outreach & Membership Commission



As we incrementally return to in-person worship, we'd like to make sure everyone knows each other by name. So we're going to bring the nametags out of the closet and encourage you to start wearing them again. As part of our hospitality, we also want to ensure that everyone is referred to by the pronouns they prefer. Common pronoun combinations include she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, and he/him/his. We also welcome adding a little color to your nametags; in the near future,

we'll bring colored pencils or markers (feel free to bring a sticker too) so you can personalize your nametag if you like. We look forward to seeing you!

Wanted: Ushers!

Perks:

- Access, access, access—to the "brick-and-mortar" version of church
- Seeing fellow members and friends in person
- The fun of directing crowds (sizes may vary)
- Checklists - who doesn't love a good checklist?!
- Some semblance of what was and what will be
- Not Zoom



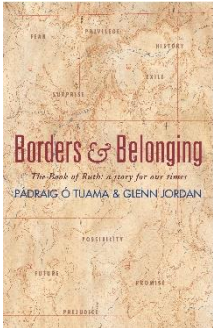
Downside:

- Pajamas discouraged (slippers optional)

If interested, please sign up using this link:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0A4FAAA72AA1FF2-first1>

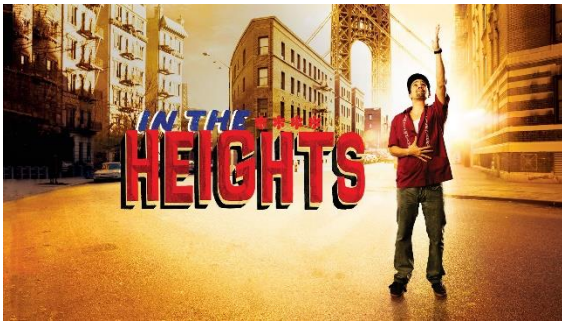
Upcoming Events



Theology Book Group: October 5

The Theology Book Group meets next on October 5, at 7 p.m., to discuss *Borders and Belonging*, a study of contemporary migration issues in light of the Book of Ruth. One co-author, Pádraig Ó Tuama, is a well-known Irish poet who has recited on the NPR program *On Being*.

All are welcome. The Zoom link is <https://georgetown.zoom.us/j/95345721768>



Fall Movie Night: October 16

Join Care of Parish on Saturday, October 16 for a viewing of "In the Heights." The movie will start at 7 p.m. and is 143 minutes long. The movie will be shown in the church sanctuary, where it should be easy to social distance. COP will provide a seasonal snack during a 15-minute intermission (served outside). Please bring

whatever you need to make yourselves comfortable for a movie—a camping chair, a blanket and pillow, etc.—and a mask. RSVP to Kristy Goodfellow Mills at Kristy.a.goodfellow@gmail.com or call or text (563) 580-5558. The number of participants will be limited to 35. The parking garage will be available starting at 6:30 p.m.

"In the Heights" centers on a variety of characters living in the neighborhood of Washington Heights, on the northern tip of Manhattan. At the center of the show is Usnavi, a bodega owner who looks after the aging Cuban lady next door, pines for the gorgeous girl working in the neighboring beauty salon and dreams of winning the lottery and escaping to the shores of his native Dominican Republic. Meanwhile, Nina, a childhood friend of Usnavi's, has returned to the neighborhood from her first year at college with surprising news for her parents, who have spent their life savings on building a better life for their daughter. Ultimately, Usnavi and the residents of the close-knit neighborhood get a dose of what it means to be home. *The movie is rated PG-13 for some language and suggestive references.*

October Calendar

Sunday, October 3

World Communion Sunday
10:30 am Worship
11:40 am Coffee Hour

Tuesday, October 5

6:00 pm Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth
7:00 pm Theology Book Group

Sunday, October 10

Second Sunday Offering
10:30 am Worship
11:40 am Coffee Hour
Stewardship campaign begins

Tuesday, October 12

6:00 pm Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth

Thursday, October 14

6:30 pm Washington Interfaith Network (WIN)
District-Wide Action

Saturday, October 16

7:00 pm Fall Movie Night,
"In the Heights"

Sunday, October 17

10:00 am Outdoor Family Worship
10:30 am Worship
11:40 am Coffee Hour
Congregational conversation with Rev. Amanda (following worship)

Tuesday, October 19

6:00 pm Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth

Sunday, October 24

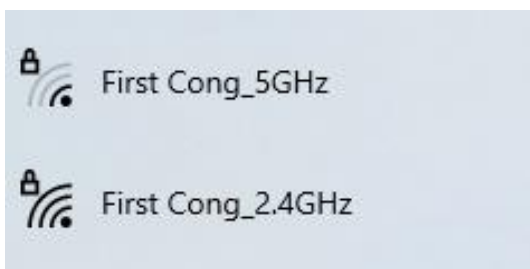
10:30 am Worship
11:40 am Coffee Hour
Fall Congregational Meeting (following worship)

Tuesday, October 26

6:00 pm Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth

Sunday, October 31

All Saints Sunday
10:30 am Worship
11:40 am Coffee Hour



First Church wifi password:

first1865

To avoid echo/feedback, please mute your device when taking part in group discussions.



Memorial Service for Don Bassler
November 6 at 2:00 PM

Join us in the sanctuary or by Zoom on Saturday, November 6 at 2:00 PM for a Memorial Service to mourn the loss and celebrate the life and friendship of Don Bassler. Rev. Amanda and Rev. Sam will lead the service, with Dennis Turner serving as the guest musician. A reception hosted by Care of Parish will follow in the Community Room.

To read Don's obituary highlighting his kindhearted life and legacy, [click here](#).

Let us continue to hold Grace and all who loved Don in our hearts and prayers.



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Ministers – Friends & Members of the Church
Designated Senior Minister – Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss
Associate Minister – Rev. Sam McFerran
Building Manager – Mr. Byron Adams
Sexton – Ms. Ines Marquez
Members in Discernment – Lynaya Morris, LaTayna Purnell

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