

GABRIEL'S HORN



First Congregational United Church of Christ

May 2026

Beloved Community,

What do you believe about God? What does it mean to walk in the ways of Jesus? What does it mean to be human, and how do you make sense of suffering? Why is it important to live out faith in community? What does God promise to you? These are some of the questions our youth will reflect upon in their "This I Believe" statements on Confirmation Sunday (May 17). Their parents, mentors, and pastors will show up for them to listen attentively, to bless and affirm, and we hope you will too. Faith itself is a journey, and what we believe or believe changes over time as we learn from the experiences life provides.



I write this letter on the day that the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act, a week when King Charles III marked the 250th anniversary of our declaration of independence from England by affirming the limits of executive power and merits of democracy. The world we are bequeathing to our children is one of wildfires and warming oceans, of war over oil and unrivaled inequality. It's all too easy to drift into cynicism, to bemoan our powerlessness, but as Rev. Sam and I have gathered with our youth to explore confirmation, I have been reminded that the antidote to cynicism is purpose in community.

Every Sunday we offer another opportunity to gather as God's people in prayer and song, worship and community. We do this for ethical formation, to get grounded in the gospel of love in a world of hate, to be filled with the Spirit who makes a way where there seems to be no way. We will pray with you and walk with you. Sometimes we will disagree and miss the mark, but we will also repair, forgive, and share one another's burdens. This is the work of a living faith.

Throughout the month of May there will be many opportunities to sharpen your sense of purpose, to give hope a place to flourish. On May 3rd, we are blessed to welcome the Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers (a mentor who has impacted my ministry) into the pulpit. Following worship,

Dwan Reece and Andrew Hamilton will facilitate a congregational conversation on our music ministry. This will be a time to reflect on what we have learned over the last year and hear the congregation's insights and questions at this inflection point in our life together. On May 17th, we will mark Pentecost, celebrate a baptism and confirm our youth. Then we will move into our spring congregational meeting. On May 31st, the Rev. Dr. Ron Hopson will preach "In Defense of Shame," a powerful message in these shameless times. After worship we will host a participatory discussion on how we can respond to God's call to be an antiracist church.

Come and be filled with God's Spirit of grace, hope, and love. Come and be shaped and formed in community. Come to give and come to receive. Let's build a more just and peaceful world for all of us.

In Peace,
Rev. Amanda

Council Capsule

Council Capsule: April 2026

Council convened on April 14th for the third meeting of the 2026 term. Key topics/votes included the following:

- Holy Week was a major success with strong attendance, beautiful music, and many volunteers contributing.
- Music Minister Ulung will not return, a music search committee will be assembled soon.
- Antiracism work continues, with follow-up from the Lenten series and discussions planned for June; messaging taskforce report is forthcoming.
- Sunday security measures are being strengthened through trained de-escalation volunteers supporting Sunday Coordinators; parking issues have improved.
- Treasurer reported expenditures slightly below budget, noted lower cash levels, and flagged significant HVAC and future capital needs.
- Council approved up to \$34,378 to replace the failing narthex HVAC unit pending two additional bids, acknowledging the broader need for long-term capital planning.
- Commissions are asked to review charters; documentation group meets May 1; Fall Retreat planning is progressing.

If you have questions, please reach out to Peter Tracey, Moderator (peter.l.tracey@gmail.com) or Michael Enseki-Frank, Assistant Moderator (michaelensekifrank@gmail.com).

Submitted by Abigail Cipparone, Clerk

Spring Congregational Meeting: May 17

Please join us in-person or on Zoom on Sunday, May 17 at noon for the Spring Congregational Meeting. This is an excellent opportunity to learn more about the work of the Church Council, Commissions, and Committees in support of our efforts to be a Beloved Community. The meeting will include reports from the Senior Minister and Associate Minister, as well as the Moderator and Treasurer. We will also hear about significant projects currently being carried out by various Commissions and Committees. Please bring your enthusiasm and your questions. We'll look forward to seeing you on May 17.

Submitted by Peter L. Tracey, Moderator

SAVE THE DATE: All Church Fall Retreat: October 16-18

All are invited to join us at West River Retreat Center in West River, MD for an all church retreat, October 16-18, 2026. We will have sign up forms available starting in May, but in the meantime, we encourage you to block out this weekend on your calendar. If you are interested in helping plan any aspect of the retreat, please contact Kim Darling, kdarling@gmail.com, as many hands make for light work!

First Church Hosts Potomac Association (UCC) Spring Meeting: May 16



The Potomac Association of the United Church of Christ will gather for their spring meeting on Saturday, May 16th from 9:00am- noon, and First Church will host this hybrid meeting (both in person and online) in our building. To attend, [RSVP here](#). This is a free-of-charge meeting filled with spirit, good food (breakfast and lunch will be served), community, and worship. We thank the Care of Parish Commission for volunteering to set-up, provide/refresh coffee, water, and lemonade, and cleaning up as well. Questions? Reach out to Rev. Jason Carson Wilson, Moderator of the Potomac Association.

Christian Education

Volunteering at Tommy's Pantry

In May, we have our last opportunity this spring to serve with [Tommy's Pantry](#). We will distribute food and wellness supplies to those in need, many of whom are immigrants and refugees from around the world. Please sign up at the link below and email Rev. Sam if you have any questions at mcferran.sam@gmail.com.

Tommy's Pantry is located at the Church of the Ascension (633 Sligo Road, Silver Spring, MD, 20910).

* 5/2 6-8 AM Tommy's Pantry Distribution (Grades 5 +)

Tommy's Pantry Sign-Up Link - is [Spring 2026 Tommy's Pantry Sign Up](#)



A Great Visit to the Capital Jewish Museum!



On Saturday, April 18th, our youth had a wonderful visit to the Lillian and Albert Small Capital Jewish Museum. During this trip, we learned more about our Jewish friends, neighbors and faith siblings. It also served as the interfaith component of the Confirmation journey.

This incredible and highly interactive museum was founded in 2023 to tell the history and impact of the Washington Jewish community over the last 200 plus years. We visited the old sanctuary of the Washington Hebrew synagogue, built in 1869. Their amazing exhibit, "Connect, Reflect, Act," highlighted prominent Washingtonians (with identity cubes) both past present. We were very excited to see it included Jessica Valoris, the very artist of our stunning stained glass windows "Forever in the Path." The museum also highlighted the many ways the Jewish Community engaged in "tikkun olam" (repair the world) by addressing issues of poverty and injustice, fighting for voting rights during the Civil Rights Movement, and supporting the LGBT community.

We also enjoyed the temporary exhibit, Blacklisted, which told the scary history of the Red Scare where actors, producers, and other members of society faced persecution, defamation and loss of jobs because of the federal government's zealous campaign to incite fear and accuse people of being communist sympathizers.

Movie and Game Night on Saturday, June 20th

We are planning another fun movie and game night on June 20th! We will be joined by our friends at People's UCC. Please email Rev. Sam if you'd like to help plan the event.



First Church Goes to the Soccer Pitch!!!



**Our Washington Spirit vs Denver Summit FC
July 26th, 7 PM
Audi Field (DC)**

In honor of the World Cup and all of First Church's soccer players and fans, we are excited to cheer on our Washington Spirit on July 26th. It will be an awesome night and will also be Women's Empowerment Night! Tickets are \$25 per person. If you'd like to go, please email Rev. Sam at mcferran.sam@gmail.com



Adult Education Opportunities this Spring

Please join us following worship on Sundays for a variety of programming to nurture the soul and deepen relationships:

- May 3: Congregational Conversation on our Music Ministry
- May 10: extended Coffee & Community hour
- May 17: Spring Congregational Meeting
- May 24: extended Coffee & Community hour
- May 31: Nurture Dialogue on Antiracism

Congregational Conversation on our Music Ministry: May 3



Today following worship, please plan to join us in the Community Hall for a congregational conversation on our music ministry. We will reflect on what the last year of music in worship has taught us as we continue to ground ourselves in the vision of expanding our musical styles, genres, and expressions as we live into our antiracism goals. Your reflections, insights,

and questions will be generative for us at this inflection point in our congregational life together.

Responding to the Call to Antiracism: May 31

Following worship on May 31st, join the Rev. Dr. LaTayna Purnell and Kim Darling, members of our Antiracism Committee, for a participatory discussion on how we can respond to God's call to be an antiracist church in these times. Following on the Antiracism as My Spiritual Practice Lenten training, we will map out upcoming opportunities to continue the work through affinity groups, pilgrimage trips, a congregational read over the summer and intergenerational efforts. Your voice matters, and we want to hear from you. Please plan to join us in the Community Hall or on Zoom as we continue this conversation crucial to our mission at First Church.



Care of Parish

Care of Parish Updates and Save-the-Dates

After a busy Lent and Easter, Care of Parish is pivoting to our Spring Potluck before the spring congregational meeting on May 17. Future Care of Parish events include a potluck on June 7, an ice cream social on July 12, a break in August, and a fall potluck September 13.

A challenge for Care of Parish is filling coffee hour slots. We may have to go back to assigning people dates. We would prefer for members to choose dates that are convenient rather than be assigned a time that may be problematic. To sign up or ask questions, reach out to Nick McConnell (nicholasmcconnell@msn.com or 202-941-7972) or go to the [SignUpGenius page](#) to select your preferred date.

Facilities

This Month at Live at 10th & G



Friday Morning Music Club

[Friday Morning Music Club](#) Downtown DC Chamber Series. May 15 at noon. Featuring a variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles.

[Capriccio Baroque](#) presents **Bach – Köthen, The Happy Years**. May 2 at 8:00 pm. Selections of J.S. Bach's works written 1717-1723 when he lived in Köthen and enjoyed greater freedom to compose as he felt inclined.



[The Thomas Circle Singers](#) presents **Surface**. May 9 at 5:00 pm. Come celebrate the joy and bravery of community with a night of music that uplifts and inspires! You'll witness the joy of our two newest commissions, Arianne Abela and poet Ruthie Prillaman's *Surface* and Evelyn Simpson-Curenton's *Build Ye the Walls*.

[Vocal Arts DC](#) presents **Le Bu & Artyom Pak**. May 10 at 5:00 pm. 2024 Operalia First Prize winner, Chinese bass-baritone Le Bu, makes his highly anticipated Washington, DC recital debut as the Vocal Arts DC Gerald Perman Emerging Artist. His performance marks the grand finale of our 35th anniversary season and is dedicated to the memory of our founder and his wife, Gerald and Ann K. Perman. Le Bu's commanding voice and artistry have captivated audiences worldwide, and this recital offers a rare opportunity to experience his talent in an intimate setting.



[Heritage Signature Chorale](#) **Concert**, May 16 at 6:00 pm. The season finale, bringing together the Chorale, friends, and family for a powerful evening of music rooted in spirituals, sacred works, and contemporary choral traditions. With heartfelt performances and a program that uplifts, this concert reflects our enduring mission to preserve and celebrate the African American choral legacy.

10-Day Forecast, May 30 at 7:00 pm. A musical journey that explores the ever-changing nature of the weather through the art of handbells. We invite you to join us as we bring these seasonal sounds to life.



Social Action & Awareness

May Second Sunday Special Offering: Street Sense Media



Journalism can transform lives. [Street Sense Media](#) is documented evidence of that reality. May's Second Sunday special offering benefits the D.C.-based media outlet. Street Sense lives into its commitment to end homelessness in the District by raising awareness, spotlighting solutions, and empowering people in our neighborhoods through storytelling. The unique media organization challenges "perceptions of homelessness and those it affects while creating common ground upon which we can build a stronger community" via film, theater, photography, audio, illustration, and other projects—in addition to journalism. Please give generously this month to support this worthy organization.

Corner on Our Faith, Our Vote

Washington, DC:

- Primary date: June 16
- WIN Districtwide Candidate Forum: May 17, 3:00-5:00 PM
- [Ranked Choice Voting video](#) from our neighbors at MLK Library
- Easy Voter Registration at DC Public Libraries (no library card required)
- Questions? Contact Sandy Sorensen

Virginia:

- Youth Vote: Any Virginian who will be 18 by the November 3rd general election can vote in the primary and the general election this year. They can register now on the [Virginia Elections website](#). Please share this news widely.
- Same day registration is possible to cast a provisional ballot if the registration deadline is missed.
- Questions? Contact Rev. Amanda

Maryland:

- Primary date: June 23
- Youth Vote: Any Marylander who will be 18 by the November 3rd general election can vote in the primary and the general election this year. They can register now on the [Maryland Elections website](#).
- Questions? Contact Jim Riker



Helpful Resources:

- [UCC Webinar on Toxic Polarization & Partisan Divides](#) with Chandra DeNap Whetstine
- [Brennan Center for Justice on the SAVE Act](#)
- [Brennan Center for Justice on how the DOJ is being used to subvert the vote](#) (and what can be done)

Commemorative Art Panel at DC History Conference: May 2



Register now for the DC History Conference, May 1-2, at the MLK Library. On Saturday, May 2, 10:30 - 11:45 AM, First Church will present a panel titled ***Forever in the Path: Faith, History and Commemorative Art*** moderated by Dwan Reese with panelists Meg Maguire, historian Dr. Antonio Austin, and artist Jessica Valoris.

The DC History Conference's mission is to highlight outstanding recent scholarship and engagement with the history of Washington, DC and to share that knowledge with an interested community of scholars, neighbors, students, history enthusiasts, policy makers, activists, artists, and more.

Since 1973, trained scholars and community members have had the opportunity to present their work at this welcoming annual gathering. This interdisciplinary community conference prioritizes the local city but includes the federal city, as well as nearby Maryland and Virginia. The conference is free, but a contribution to defray expenses is also requested.

Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) Candidate Forum: May 17



On Sunday, May 17th from 3:00-5:00pm, Washington Interfaith Network will gather hundreds of people of faith to host a candidate forum at Union Baptist Temple Church (1225 W St. SE). Mayoral, at-large, and congressional candidates will respond to WIN's agenda, one built from listening to DC residents across all 8 Wards on issues spanning from public safety and housing to utility costs and homelessness. Elected officials respond to organized power. When we show up together, from congregations and communities across the city, the commitments candidates make in that room carry real weight. [Click](#)

[here](#) to register to attend. Learn more about WIN's 2026 Issue Agenda here: <https://www.windc.org/win-votes/>. If you are able to attend as a representative of First Church, let Rev. Amanda know.

Downtown Drop In Center Training for new Volunteers: May 6, 6-8 pm

Since 2015 Sasha Bruce Youthwork (SB) in collaboration with First Church has offered a pizza night for youth aged 14-24 every Tuesday 6-8 PM in the First Church Narthex. To become a volunteer at the Tuesday Night Drop in Center for youth, please complete two prerequisites:

- Attend Wednesday May 6 online training 6-8:30 PM to learn more. Link will be sent out shortly.
- Fill out a form for a background check, a process Sam McFerran leads (the same as checks for Sunday School teachers)

Background: The program offers a skill building program, low barrier access to food and community, and referrals to social workers. The program is part of a safety net for young people in need and/or at risk of homelessness. Our highly skilled First Church Drop In Center Program Coordinator Jarred Bowman, and SB Outreach coordinators Quinnae Gray and Anthony Dickey plan and lead programs each week.

Come to serve up pizza and a warm welcome, and as the spirit moves, join in card games and discussion, or offer a listening ear. Volunteers are invaluable to making this program work. Questions? Ask Gail Sonnemann (gsonnemann@gmail.com) or regular volunteers Erin Williams, Michael Ensek-Frank, Susan Anderson or Nan McConnell.

Sanctuary

The Horse of Jenin Movie Screening: June 4

First Church UCC will be presenting the screening of **The Horse of Jenin** on Thursday **June 4th at 7pm**. Prior to the screening, Alaa Shehada will be speaking to attendees by Zoom. \$15 suggested donation.

An Important Story

The Horse of Jenin is a solo show written and performed by Palestinian stand-up comedian and actor **Alaa Shehada** created The Freedom Theater of Jenin, co-founded the Palestine Comedy Club, and has performed in a TEDx London talk with Nish Kumar. *The Horse of Jenin* won the **Edinburgh Fringe First Award** in 2025.

Show Description

The Horse of Jenin was inspired by a public sculpture built from the debris of a major invasion in Occupied Palestine. It is constructed from the fragments of Alaa's own memories and stands as an ode to the power of imagination and the resilience it brings.

Tour Update

The Horse of Jenin booked a 9-city North American tour for Spring 2026, but when Alaa returned to the U.S. for a performance, he was denied entry as a result of the government's continued targeting of Palestinians. The U.S. has since issued a ban on entry for individuals traveling on Palestinian Authority documentation.

Refusing to let border restrictions, discrimination, and an attack on free speech silence Alaa's story, **we've turned the live tour into a virtual tour.**

Worship

Worship with us on Confirmation Sunday: May 17

Join us in the sanctuary or [click here](#) to join us by Zoom on May 17 at 10:30 AM as we mark Pentecost (the birth of the early church) by celebrating the confirmation journey undertaken by our youth. Riley Kiss will be baptized. Our children will sing "El Condor Pasa" and lead a Reader's Theater of the Pentecost story. Members of the confirmation class will share their faith statements, and some of them will be confirmed as we welcome them into the full life of the church as members in the presence of their mentors. Praise God! Michael Hopkins, one of our confirmation mentors, will accompany the service on percussion. Join us to celebrate our youth and mark this milestone in their faith journeys.



May 3rd Guest Preacher: Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers



The Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers is a retired Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ordained clergywoman.

Rev. Powers has served the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as Pastor of local congregations in D.C. and PA. and on the National level as Director of New Church Development and Interim Director of The Reconciliation Ministry in Indianapolis, IN.

Afterwards she was called to serve on the National staff of the United Church of Christ as Minister of Evangelism for Church Development and Renewal Local Church Ministries in Cleveland, Ohio. After serving on the National Staff, Rev. Powers was called and became Associate Conference Minister and Acting Conference Minister for the Southern Conference in Burlington, NC. God then called her to Chicago, IL where she became the Associate Conference Minister for the Chicago Metropolitan Association for the IL Conference where she ministered until her retirement in 2019.

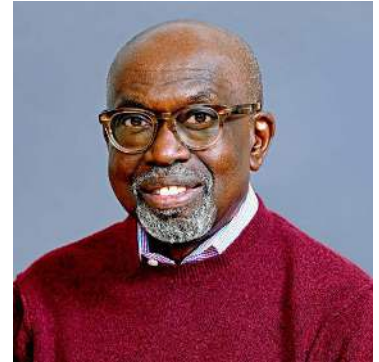
Since residing in Maryland, she has served as Pulpit Supply for two congregations in the Central Atlantic Conference. She now serves at the pleasure of the Conference Minister helping with Search and Call within the conference.

Powers graduated from Hood Theological Seminary, Salisbury, NC in 2016 with a Doctor of Ministry degree. She completed a Master of Divinity degree in 1992 from Duke University, Durham, NC, and a Bachelor of Science degree in 1989 at Trinity College, Washington, DC.

This North Carolina native was ordained in 1992 at Twelfth Street Christian Church in Washington, DC. She is the proud parent of Darien Sean McGriff, grandparent to six, and great grandparent to one.

May 31st Guest Preacher: Dr. Ron Hopson

On May 31, we welcome the Rev. Dr. Ron Hopson back 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 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 a beloved friend. He recently preached the Gospel Christmas Service at the Washington National Cathedral, where he worships. We warmly welcome home the Rev. Dr. Ron Hopson!



This Month at First Church: May 2026

Saturday, May 2

10:30 am Commemorative Art Panel at
MLK Library

Sunday, May 3

9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service
& Sunday School
11:45 am Coffee Hour
12:00 pm Congregational Conversation
on Music

Tuesday, May 5

10:30 am Staff Meeting
6:00 pm Drop-In Center
7:00 pm Worship Commission

Wednesday, May 6

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation
6:00 pm Drop-In-Center Volunteer
Training
7:00 pm Care of Parish Commission

Sunday, May 10

9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service
& Sunday School
11:45 am Coffee Hour

Monday, May 11

7:00 pm Finance Commission

Tuesday, May 12

10:30 am Staff Meeting
6:00 pm Drop-In Center
6:30 pm Council Meeting

Wednesday, May 13

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation
7:00 pm O&M Commission

Sunday, May 17

9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service
& Sunday School
12:00 pm Spring Congregational
Meeting & Potluck
3:00 pm WIN Candidate Forum at Union
Baptist Temple

Monday, May 18

7:30 pm CE Commission

Tuesday, May 19

10:30 am Staff Meeting
6:00 pm Drop-In Center

Wednesday, May 20

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation
7:00 pm Facilities Commission
7:00 pm SAAC Commission

Sunday, May 24

9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service
11:45 am Coffee Hour

Tuesday, May 26

10:30 am Staff Meeting
6:00 pm Drop-In Center

Wednesday, May 28

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation
7:00 pm Antiracism Committee

Sunday, May 31

9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service
& Sunday School
11:45 am Coffee Hour
12:00 pm Responding to the Call of
Antiracism

We are an Open & Affirming congregation, welcoming all LGBTQ+ individuals and families into the full life and leadership of our church.



**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Ministers – Friends & Members of the Church
Senior Minister – Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss
Associate Minister – Rev. Sam McFerran
Building Manager – Byron Adams
Interim Music Director – Dennis Turner
Administrative Assistant – Whitney McColley
Sexton – Ines Marquez
Member in Discernment – Lynaya Morris

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