

GABRIEL'S HORN



First Congregational United Church of Christ

August 2026

Beloved Community,

August portends a season of change as we enjoy the final weeks of summer and look toward the fall. Our children and youth will return to school before the month's end, and we look forward to blessing backpacks and collecting hygiene items for students served by the Ward 8 Hub. I hope you will take the time in these final weeks of summer to practice sabbath rest. Whether you are traveling, visiting family and friends, harvesting the fruits of your garden, or cooling off in a pool, river, ocean or lake, remember that our humanity requires play, rest, and time set apart from the daily grind. We do this not just to sustain the struggle for justice so central to our time, but simply because rest is how we love ourselves. And collective rest can shift our consciousness, in the words of Tricia Hersey, founder of the Nap Ministry.



Rev. Amanda with Jarred Bowman, our Drop-In Center Coordinator

Worship is the time when we gather for spiritual restoration as we encounter the inexhaustible source of life and breath—God, our Creator. This month we will continue to enjoy special music offerings and personal testimonies reflecting upon the theme, “Unsung Heroes.” We will also enjoy sermons from the Rev. Diana Gomez de Molina on August 9th and Sandy Sorenson on August 30th. In a time overwhelmed by breaking news and toxic “othering,” in worship we root ourselves in the good news of God's love at work in and through beloved community. Show up when you can; Zoom in when you're joining from afar, but make it a holy habit to avail yourself of this vital lifeline offered every Sunday.

This month also marks the 10th anniversary of the Drop-In Center, a vital ministry in partnership with Sasha Bruce Youthwork and Table Church which serves young people who may be unhoused or housing insecure. A joyful celebration is being planned for Tuesday, August 25th from 6-8pm, and we invite all who have ever volunteered to join us. We especially give thanks for Jarred Bowman, our Drop-In Center Coordinator who rebuilt this program after its COVID-19 closure. Every Tuesday he can be found engaging young folks,

guiding volunteers, and collaboratively planning programs to enrich and support whoever shows up. We give God thanks and praise for Jarred, for our volunteer coordinator Gail Sonnemann, and for the opportunity to host this vital, life- giving ministry for DC's youth with the support of all of you.

In Gratitude,
Rev. Amanda

Council Capsule

Council Capsule July 2026

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

- The church held an antiracism "field trip" with 20 members/guests featuring student readings of Frederick Douglass's speech and a call-and-response reading of the Declaration of Independence. Another intergenerational field trip is being considered for winter.
- Mid-year staff reviews are being scheduled.
- The church was approached about a space use rental for a community listening session for mayoral candidate Janeese Lewis George (open to the public, paid at the standard rental rate). A concern was raised about tax-exempt status implications, which Amanda will continue to look into.
- Summer Sunday school is doing a project by the AIDS Memorial Quilt and Sam is recruiting teacher cohorts for the fall (~6 people rotating). The church volunteered at Tommy's Pantry, and the youth trip to Detroit showed strong growth and engagement. Mohagony Thomas from Bread for the City will preach on Labor Day Sunday.
- Erin and Michael have begun cataloguing church archives; Erin will also co-moderate the church's Signal groups.
- A ~\$5,500 budget variance (mainly from Lincoln Property overages in gas and trash collection lines) is expected to be offset by strong building income; pledges are under 50% collected but are not a concern given typical payment timing.
- Q2 investment performance was strong, exceeding the inflation-adjusted target, with stock holdings above target range (to be reviewed by the Investment Commission). A Square terminal is available for groups needing to process credit card sales (e.g., t-shirts).
- Consultant Hannah Long-Higgins has proposed a 1-2 week engagement to help develop the church's core messaging, which would include a full day reflection exercise in the church in November or in 2027. She would charge \$5,000 plus airfare, which would likely be funded through O&M funds and Trinity Grant money. This cost could be possibly split across two calendar years, and she wouldn't start work until after November.
- SAAC is planning a nurture series on toxic polarization, voter turnout, and election protection; the drop-in center welcomed new volunteers. The Eighth Ward hub is also in need of a toiletry drive.

- The search for a new Director of Music Ministry is in early stages, and the search committee now has a revised job description. A market pay analysis (via job postings and BLS data) found the current salary range (\$28,000–\$37,500 for 18 hrs/week) was below market; the committee recommended a new range of \$32,500–\$41,275. Council approved the new salary range.

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

Submitted by Abigail Cipparone, Clerk

Christian Education

Back to School Toiletry Drive

This summer, we will be supporting A Wider Circle's 8th Ward Hub by participating in a toiletry drive. The 8th Ward Hub is a vibrant community center dedicated to serving the residents of the Washington Highlands, a beautiful but very isolated part of the city. Washington Highlands includes many community members who face food and housing insecurity. According to their mission statement, "The 8th Ward Hub provides wraparound programming. Its twin goals are to improve the quality of life of our neighbors through high quality programming, and to facilitate place-based community building and organizing to realize an inclusive future for the neighborhood."



Throughout the month of August, we will be participating in a toiletry drive. The items for the toiletry drive are listed below. You can also purchase them through this [Amazon Wish List](#).

You can either bring them to church or have them mailed to the A Wider Circle with 8th Ward Hub in the note - 9159 Brookville Rd, Silver Spring, MD 20910

- | | |
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| 1. Socks | 6. Tide Pods |
| 2. Underwear – Children to Young Adult Sizes | 7. Men's Deodorant |
| 3. Undershirts – Children to Young Adult Sizes | 8. Women's Deodorant |
| 4. Dove Soap | 9. Lotion |
| 5. Dove Body Wash | 10. Sanitary Napkins (multiple sizes including plus) |
| | 11. Lip Balm |

Please email Rev. Sam if you have any questions at mcferran.sam@gmail.com.

Blessing of the Backpacks: August 30



We invite all children and youth for a special Children's Moment on August 30th for the Blessing of the Backpacks. We will bless all our students, faculty and staff for a safe and wonderful year of learning, growth, and joy! The Blessing of the Backpacks is both an opportunity for the church to support our students, but also to share how God's spirit accompanies them each and every day.

Whether your student is in daycare, elementary school, or high school, we hope they can join us. We would love for them to bring their backpack, as well as wear their school colors! We especially pray for our children and youth who are starting at a new school.

Please reach out to Rev. Sam if you would like to help with this special Children's Moment.

All-Church Summer Read!

Join us on our All-Church Summer Read. We have selected Dr. Ibram X. Kendi's book *Stamped From the Beginning*. This book is available in a variety of versions designed for most levels of readers making it a great option for a read aloud or read along for your entire family. It's available in print, electronic, and audible versions. The public libraries in our area carry copies, and there are a couple copies in our Antiracism library in the church living room. We will have a discussion of the book and its relevance to our community following worship on Sunday, August 30. Below are links to the different versions to help you acquire your own copy.

- [Original Version](#)
- [Graphic Novel](#)
- [Young Adult Version](#)
- [Kid's Version](#)

Care of Parish

Care of Parish Updates & Homecoming Save-the-Date

Hope everyone is having a good summer. As we move into August, Care of Parish is thinking about Homecoming at First Church. Please put September 13 on your calendar for Homecoming with our fall kick off pot luck. We are not having a potluck in August so bring your special dishes in September to welcome friends back and bring new friends to introduce them to First Church hospitality.

Connect with Rev. Amanda this Summer

Connect with Rev. Amanda this summer by signing up for one of her Friday coffee and conversation slots. This will be a time to enjoy conversation, deepen connection, or to receive pastoral care. You can pick a date and time and please note where you wish to meet (her office or a nearby coffee shop). Please note there are some Fridays when she is away on vacation. Sign up [here](#).

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!

Music

Making a joyful noise!

Hello members and friends. In anticipation of Homecoming Sunday, and the choir's return to enriching our services, I'm extending an invitation to those who would like to join the choir. We welcome all voices, with enthusiasm! The choir sings the 2nd and 4th Sundays each month, and rehearses on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays, at 10:00 am. There will likely be at least one rehearsal in August, to be determined. Please introduce yourself to Dennis (Interim Music Director) before or after Sunday service. Here's to wonderful music making.

-Dennis Turner, Interim Music Director

Music Director Search Update

The Search Committee for our congregation's new Director of Music Ministry continues to be hard at work. We have significantly updated the job description and have conducted an Implicit Bias Training for the search committee. We are about to engage an external consultant who advised the prior search committee and who can both help refine the job posting and also promote the position once we're ready to post.

As we said in our last update, one goal we have is to get the position announcement posted as widely as possible. To that end, we intend to make the final position announcement available to the full congregation so that members/friends can circulate it within their own networks.

Please reach out to search committee co-chairs Dwan Reece and Andrew Hamilton if you have questions during the search process.

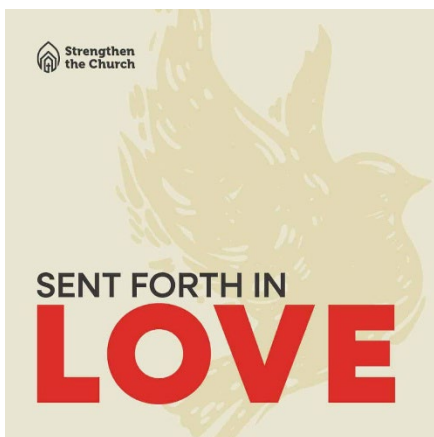
–Andrew Hamilton, co-chair, Director of Music Ministry Search

–Dwan Reece, co-chair, Director of Music Ministry Search

Committee Members: Rev. Amanda Hendler Voss (Senior Pastor), Lucile Dickinson, Michael Hopkins, Patrick Darling-LaGamma, Jim Riker, Reshmina William.

Social Action & Awareness

August Second Sunday Offering: Strengthen the Church



In August, our second Sunday offering will go to one of the special offerings of the United Church of Christ, [Strengthen the Church](#). The Strengthen the Church offering supports congregations and initiatives that help us live into the United Church of Christ "big tent" mission. Your support of this offering will help the UCC fulfill its commitment to creating a just world for all by investing in new ministries and practices that meet the emerging needs of local communities. As God calls our congregations to be the church in new ways, your generosity will plant new churches, awaken new ideas in existing churches and develop the spiritual life in our youth and young adults. Please give generously! To learn more, watch the [Strengthen](#)

[the Church](#) video. While we will take up the offering on August 9th, please know you can give to this special offering throughout the month either by writing "Second Sunday Offering" in the memo portion of your check or by indicating your online donation is for the second Sunday offering. Thank you!

Report from Frederick Douglass House

At 10 in the morning on the 4th of July, a hardy group of 20 First Church members and friends, ages 5 - 80+, braved the heat and humidity to celebrate our nation's 250th birthday at the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site (FDNHS), atop Cedar Hill in Anacostia, southeast DC. In addition to breathtaking views, free water and shade, the event offered audience participation and two enthusiastic, fashion-forward ASL interpreters.

National Park Service staff gave welcoming remarks. Then, two winners of the site's Annual Oratorical Contest (one from Maryland, one from Canada) spoke. Both students delivered

the famous “What to the American Slave Is the 4th of July?” speech from memory - very impressive, especially for middle schoolers!

Next an adult Frederick Douglass interpreter showed two kids from the audience, including our own Wallace Mills, how he taught himself to read. Then, since we'd already heard “What to a Slave Is the 4th of July” twice, “Frederick Douglass” delivered his famous [1862 speech](#) about the 1st Amendment completely from memory.

Finally, adults in the audience (including 3 from First Church) took turns at the podium, each reading a section of the Declaration of Independence. After that, we dispersed to explore the house and/or museum.

We highly recommend this as an annual event, especially on 4ths of July that aren't almost 100 degrees outside! A Vanity Fair Documentaries crew was filming, so look for footage somewhere on-line in the coming months. Also, the next [Oratorical Contest](#) (open to students in 1st-12th grade age 6-18) is in November. ABC News [interviewed the staff and one student](#) at FDNHS in late June. This event was part of our antiracism efforts to travel beyond the walls of the sanctuary together to encounter experiences that transform our hearts and strengthen our resolve on the lifelong journey toward racial justice.



Celebrate 10 Years of Community at the Downtown Youth Drop-In Center on Tuesday August 25

All Drop-In Center Volunteers throughout the years are invited! See the invitation [here](#).

- Date: Tuesday, August 25, 2026
- Time: 6-8pm
- Location: 945 G Street NW DC 20008

Please [RSVP](#) by August 11 if possible. We can't wait to celebrate with you!

For the past decade, the Downtown Youth Drop-In Center has been a place of belonging, support, opportunity, and hope for young people throughout the District. Now, we're excited to celebrate this incredible milestone with the people who have made it possible. Whether you've been a client, a family member, a partner, a volunteer, a supporter, or you're interested in learning more about our services, we would love for you to join us as we celebrate 10 years of impact.

This special anniversary celebration will bring together current and former participants, recently aged-out alumni, community partners, and long-time staff and volunteers to reflect on our journey, reconnect, and look ahead to the future. Enjoy food, music, activities, and opportunities to hear stories from those whose lives have been touched by the Drop-In Center.

Together, we'll celebrate a decade of building community—and the many years still to come. Celebrate with us!

First Congregational Church & Sasha Bruce Youthwork

Corner on Our Faith, Our Vote

As we turn toward fall, our Faith & Democracy campaign will soon be launched, including a September 20 Faith & Democracy Sunday worship service, after-worship nurture programs listed below and a non-partisan postcarding campaign with Center for Common Ground targeting under-represented voters.

September 20: Difficult Conversations & Countering Disinformation with Chandra DeNap Whetstine

September 27: Get out the Vote facilitated by Sandy Sorensen with panelists Andrew Hamilton, Meg Maguire, Gail Sonnemann and Karen Tramontano

October 11: Election Protection and Bystander Intervention with Thaddaeus Elliott

Washington, DC:

- Mail Ballot Drop-Boxes Open: October 9 - November 3
- [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:

- Early Voting: September 18-October 31
- Registration Deadline: October 23
- 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:

- Early Voting: October 22-29
- Same day registration is offered with documentation: driver's license, utility bill, bank statement or other government document with your name and new address
- 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)

Worship

Summer Theme: Unsung Heroes

This summer in worship, as our nation marks the 250th anniversary of our independence, we will uplift the legacy of ancestors who stood for justice and worked for liberation whose names and stories we may not know, both in American history and in the Bible. What does it mean to train our eyes on the margins, seeing history or the gospel from this perspective? Which unlikely figures, the poor and dispossessed, has God used to build the beloved community? How can we relearn our history and theology from their stories? How does Jesus' solidarity with the "crucified peoples of the world" transform our faith? Join us this summer for intimate worship settings as we deepen our understanding of liberation and delve into a variety of special music offerings.

Lean into Summer Worship

This summer, when you hear the singing bowl invite us into holy time, the musical prelude marks the shift between the noise of the world and the sanctuary of God's house. We invite you to consider the prelude as a spiritual practice; a cue to breathe deeply and quiet the heart, to return to the life-giving love of God. Throughout the summer, you will notice our sanctuary is set for a more intimate gathering. Please join us in the chairs on the floor of the sanctuary as we sit in the round, so we can see one another and worship side-by-side. Special music will minister to us weekly, and we will enjoy a deep bench of preachers from the pews: Abigail Cipparone, Trevor Bakker, Diana Gomez de Molina, and Sandy Sorensen, along with Rev. Amanda and Rev. Sam. On July 12th, our youth will deliver the message following their service learning trip to Detroit. Lean in this summer as together we invite the gospel message of liberation and love to wash over us here in the nation's capital.



Crafting a Labyrinth for First Church



Calling all crafters! First Church is looking for volunteers willing to help design and implement a portable cloth labyrinth for use as a physical meditation practice following worship. Labyrinths are a great way to get folks "out of their heads" and moving into a space of quiet contemplation that engages mind, spirit, and body. However, full-scale structural labyrinths are expensive and bulky (and pre-made fabric labyrinths can also cost a pretty penny!). We're looking for a team of crafty people willing to dedicate their time and talent to helping create First Church's own, portable cloth labyrinth. In particular, we're looking for volunteers who are willing to assist with procuring materials, designing, or sewing and painting. With enough volunteers, this should only take a few hours: many hands make light work! If interested in learning more, please reach out to Reshmina William at reshmina.william@gmail.com.

This Month at First Church: August 2026

Sunday, August 2

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

Tuesday, August 4

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

Wednesday, August 5

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation
7:00 pm Care of Parish Commission

Sunday, August 9

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

Monday, August 10

7:30 pm Finance Commission

Tuesday, August 11

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

Wednesday, August 12

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

Sunday, August 16

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

Tuesday, August 18

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

Wednesday, August 19

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

Sunday, August 23

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

Tuesday, August 25

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

Wednesday, August 26

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Sunday, August 30

9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service
& Sunday School
11:45 am Coffee Hour
12:00 pm All-Church Summer Read
Discussion

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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