

GABRIEL'S HORN



First Congregational United Church of Christ

July 2026

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" –Isaiah 58:6

Beloved Community,

The "Forever in the Path" stained glass panels hanging in our narthex to commemorate the lives of those who lived and labored in bondage on our land reveal the contradiction at the core of our nation's founding—the vision of "liberty and justice for all" alongside the reality of slavery and white supremacy. As we mark the nation's 250th anniversary of our independence, amidst politicized celebrations and a contested telling of our nation's story, this core contradiction endures. To continue our experiment in democracy, to forge a more perfect union, to live out our faith as a people in covenant with a justice-seeking God, we must name what ails us. We must call upon the spirit of those ancestors who, in the words of Bishop William Barber II, "believed in the promise of liberty even when it was denied them." Because they knew hope in the most hopeless of places, because they called upon the God of the exodus even while in bondage, because they found faithful ways to resist in perilous times, we too can hope, cry out to God, and resist.



Our summer worship theme, "Unsung Heroes," invites us to call their names and tell their stories. In July, we will hear a variety of voices in the pulpit and through special music. Our youth will lead worship on July 12th to share testimonies about their service-learning trip to Detroit, focusing on Isaiah 58. Rev. Sam will preach on July 19th, and we will hear a sermon from Trevor Bakker on July 26th. Special music this month features the gifts of Jim Riker, Moira Jones, Marian Drake, and the Witness & Wonder Collective. Please lean in to the intimate setting and creative gifts that summer worship offers. On July 12th, following worship, we will host an ice-cream social and Inquirer's Gathering for newcomers interested in learning more about the church.

During this meaningful anniversary in our national life, I invite you to take the time for spiritual

reflection. Join us on the 4th of July at the Frederick Douglass House to experience the re-enactment of the iconic "What to the Slave is the 4th of July?" speech. Sit by the flowing fountain in our narthex to reflect on our stained-glass commemorative artwork, using the brochures there to explore symbols used by artist Jessica Valoris. Support our youth—pray for them as they travel to Detroit to serve; attend the youth-led service on July 12th. Dig into the all-church summer read, "Stamped from the Beginning," using prompts provided in the e-news. Sign-up for a Friday timeslot to reconnect with me.

Your presence with us this summer matters, as we look to the God who continually calls us back to covenantal love. This love is always rippling from God toward us, eliciting greater trust that, ultimately, love prevails. "Faith, hope, and love abide," the apostle Paul wrote in a letter to the church at Corinth, "and the greatest of these is love."

In Love,
Rev. Amanda

Council Capsule

Council Capsule: July 2026

Council convened on June 9th for the fifth meeting of the 2026 term. Key topics/votes included the following:

- The congregation mourned longtime member and usher Hugh Bushmiller, who passed away at 98. His memorial service was on June 28. The church also welcomed a new baby, Josephine Cheng Mekings.
- The Pride celebration will be Rev. LaTayna's last with the church before she moves on, and council also reviewed its response protocol after the Westboro Baptist visit.
- A music director search committee (co-chaired by Dwan and Andrew) has begun meeting biweekly and is arranging implicit bias training
- Fall retreat planning (Oct 16–18) is underway at a new, larger venue with flexible attendance options.
- Discussion of the launch of "Unsung Heroes" summer theme, which was inspired by America250 celebrations and a focus on marginalized voices.
- Council discussed moving from "educational" antiracism work toward deeper "transformation," including a multigenerational read of *Stamped from the Beginning* and the new smaller working groups.
- The income and expenses are tracking to plan, with a pending question about Lincoln Properties' costs and gas bill overages that Facilities Commission will follow up on.
- Facilities use is at capacity, with strong income from converting one-time renters into contracted, recurring users (e.g., from a one time concert to a concert series)
- Commissions were asked to review and update their charters

- A Frederick Douglass House delegation is planned for July 4th
- SAAC flagged declining turnout for "Moral Mondays" and may plan additional nonviolent resistance training.
- The contract renewal for the Washington Chorus passed Council.
- We are currently seeking a volunteer Signal coordinator, if interested please contact Michael Enseki-Frank.

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

Christian Education

Youth Service Trip to Detroit: Incorporating a City's Stories into Our Story



Design by Riley Kiss

On July 5th, Jonah, Riley, Laura, Simon, Brendan and Eli will head to Detroit for a week of service, relationship building, growth and fun.

During this week, they will embrace the Motown City by running a summer camp, visiting the Arab American National Museum, having meals with our Detroit neighbors, and rooting on the Tigers.

A theme of the trip will be the stories of Detroit. Detroit, like any city, has many stories, diverse and often in conflict with one another. The history of Detroit is one of the automobile and labor, Motown and northern migration of African Americans. It is also the story of river and lakes, home for a large indigenous population.

Today, the story of Detroit is a story of tension between a resurgent downtown and neighborhoods that have felt abandoned. We will study the historic, social and economic forces that impact Detroit. We will visit dynamic murals that reflect Detroit Pride. We will learn from community builders in the 9th Precinct. We will visit the beautiful shores of Belle Isle. Where is God in the midst of these stories? How do these experiences help us grow in love of our neighbor?



Design by Laura Darling-LaGamma

Ultimately, these stories, in ways small or big, become a part of our story. As the UCC tells us, God is still speaking through each of us! **Please join us on July 12th as the Youth will share their experience during the Worship Service.**

Also, a huge thank you to the parents, the congregation, the Potomac Association, and my co-leader, Erin Williams for making this trip possible. It is my belief that these trips are transformative for our youth.

– Rev. Sam

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

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 at the end of August. Below are links to the different versions to help you acquire your own copy.

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

Breakaway Meditation: Wednesdays at Noon



Nora Marsh shares: For the past few years, I have had a regular spiritual (non-religious) practice of participating in our Wednesday 12:15-12:45 PM meditation group. We met in person prior to the pandemic and then met on Zoom, where we continue to meet weekly. We do a mix of silent and guided meditations with time on either end for checking in with each other. Taking even ½-hour a week in a regular practice is incredibly grounding. We welcome newcomers and drop-ins, so

please give it a try. And it's free! You can contact me, Nora Marsh, at knoramarsh@icloud.com or Whitney McColley at churchoffice@firstuccdc.org to receive an invitation on Wednesday mornings.

Care of Parish

Care of Parish Updates and Save-the-Dates

Hope everyone's summer plan includes the ice cream social after church on July 12 hosted by the Darling-LaGamma family. Thank you Darling-LaGammas for stepping up again this year to host a fun "coffee hour."

Care of Parish has purchased a quiet new trolley to help bring coffee hour things downstairs without disrupting the service. Thanks to Susan and Doug Anderson for finding a quiet cart, assembling it and bringing it to church. We have also purchased two new green table cloths to lighten the look for summer.

Since people will be in and out this summer, please let Susan Anderson (ssba92@gmail.com) know if we run out of anything.

Happy Summer from Care of Parish!

Ice Cream Social: July 12

It's time for Ice Cream!



Plan to be at church on July 12 so you can enjoy the ice cream social after worship. Hosted by the Darling-LaGamma family, be ready to choose your favorite ice cream and all kinds of yummy toppings .

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

Music Director Search Update

We are pleased to report that the Search Committee for our congregation's new Director of Music Ministry is hard at work. We are still in the early stages of the search process. Over the last few weeks, we reviewed the feedback from our May Music Nurture and discussed how to incorporate this feedback into a new job announcement. We are currently editing the final draft of the job description. Once the Committee finalizes the job description and completes Implicit Bias Training, we will begin accepting applications.

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.

Outreach & Membership

Inquirers' Gathering: July 12th



Save the date of July 12th at noon to join Rev. Amanda, our Outreach & Membership leaders, and other newcomers for our summer Inquirer's Gathering. This will be a time of getting to know one another, sharing stories, exploring the history of First Church and the UCC, and answering any questions about membership. All newcomers are welcome to attend! This gathering will take place in the upstairs chapel; if you need a Zoom option, please let Rev. Amanda know. If you plan to attend, please email Rev. Amanda at ahendlervoss@gmail.com; however, you do not have to RSVP to attend.

Social Action & Awareness

July's Second Sunday Special Offering: Black Swan Academy

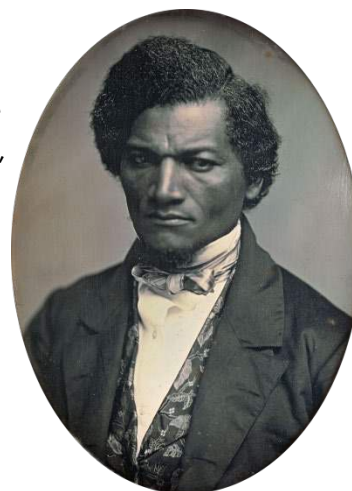
In July, we will take up a second Sunday special offering for [Black Swan Academy](#), a local organization that envisions a world where Black youth powered by their lived experiences are equipped with the tools and opportunities to be active decision makers and leaders who drive social change for the liberation of all people through civic leadership and engagement. BSA launches youth agenda areas such as affordable housing, mental health, environmental justice and more. Learn more [here](#) or speak to Casey Capsambelis, whose former students are active leaders in the organization. Please give generously to support Black Swan Academy.



Photo credit: Francis Abbey, Black Swan Academy

Frederick Douglass House: July 4th

Join First Church friends to mark the 250th anniversary of our nation's independence at the [Frederick Douglass National Historic Site](#) for the annual dramatic reading of one of Douglass' most famous speeches, "[What to the Slave is the 4th of July?](#)" The reading, performed by actor Nathan Richardson, will take place at 10:00am, followed by recitations by student winners of the Frederick Douglass Oratorical Contest. This year there will also be a public reading of the Declaration of Independence. The event is free and no registration is required. Join us to ground ourselves in a telling of our nation's history rooted in truth and a call to greater justice. We will meet at the Frederick Douglass House at 9:45. Questions? Contact Michael Enseki-Frank or Jaimie Orr.



Corner on Our Faith, Our Vote

In 1864, the state elections in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Indiana were considered harbingers of the presidential election that November (in which Lincoln would be re-elected). In Pennsylvania, the margin was so close that only the absentee soldier vote allowed the Republicans to claim a slight margin. Weeks later, Lincoln received the news that voters in MD had ratified a new constitution officially terminating slavery in their state. The margin, perilously close, was ultimately won by the absentee soldier vote.

Doris Kearns Goodwin notes, "It was clear to both parties that the absentee vote could prove critical in the presidential election." Only 13 states allowed for soldiers to cast absentee ballots, with four others allowing proxy votes. President Lincoln asked that soldiers without those options be given leave to go home and vote. New Yorkers on gun boats along the Mississippi were able to vote because a navy boat was sent to gather their absentee ballots and return the ballots to New York.



Absentee voting is a practice that ultimately made the difference in our nation's ability to overthrow slavery and a proud tradition that enfranchised soldiers fighting for the Union in the Civil War. As the midterm elections draw closer, we will continue to exercise the right to vote absentee as a tradition at the very heart of our democratic practices.

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:

- 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:

- 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)

First Church Marches in Capital Pride Parade



First Church celebrated PRIDE in fabulous fashion alongside several other Potomac Association congregations in the 2026 Capital Pride Parade. The Potomac Association, with the help of Association Moderator Rev. Dr. Jason Carson Wilson, made the event accessible with a van--driven by Rev. Dr. LaTayna Purnell. Anthony Leonard waved from the backseat. Hearing spectators affirmed that our presence blessed them. We shouted, "Happy PRIDE!" and "Love is louder!" as we made our way along the parade route. Peter Tracey and Conference Minister Rev. Freeman Palmer served as our hype-men, rallying the crowd. We carried our own banner, wore our T-shirts (fabulously embellished by Kristen Kerns Wheeler), and shared plenty of swag. Nan McConnell helped prepare for the festivities before a great First Church contingent marched.

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.



This Month at First Church: July 2026

Wednesday, July 1

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Friday, July 3

Church office closed for Independence Day (observed)

Saturday, July 4

9:45am Frederick Douglass House Visit

Sunday, July 5

9:30 am Bible Workbench

10:30 am Worship Service

11:45 am Coffee Hour

Tuesday, July 7

10:30 am Staff Meeting

6:00 pm Drop-In Center

7:00 pm Worship Commission

Wednesday, July 8

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

7:00 pm O&M Commission

Sunday, July 12

9:30 am Bible Workbench

10:30 am Worship Service
& Sunday School

12:00 pm Ice Cream Social

12:00 pm Inquirer's Gathering

Monday, July 11

7:00 pm Finance Commission

Tuesday, July 14

10:30 am Staff Meeting

6:00 pm Drop-In Center

6:00 pm Council Meeting

Wednesday, July 15

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

7:00 pm Facilities Commission

7:00 pm SAAC Commission

Sunday, July 19

9:30 am Bible Workbench

10:30 am Worship Service
& Sunday School

11:45 am Coffee Hour

Monday, July 20

7:30 pm CE Commission

Tuesday, July 21

10:30 am Staff Meeting

6:00 pm Drop-In Center

Wednesday, July 22

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Sunday, July 26

9:30 am Bible Workbench

10:30 am Worship Service

11:45 am Coffee Hour

Tuesday, July 28

10:30 am Staff Meeting

6:00 pm Drop-In Center

Wednesday, July 29

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

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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