GABRIEL'S HORN

First Congregational United Church of Christ

November 2026

Beloved Community,



This week I had the opportunity to gather online with faith leaders across the country who have been providing visitation and spiritual care to those living in detention camps. A formerly detained resident of Minneapolis described hearing his name called first thing in the morning to be told he had a visitor. He had no idea who the visitor might be, but soon he was sitting across from Father Lucas, a tall man in cowboy boots who had traveled hours just to visit with him and pray together. "In those difficult days, when someone cares about you it makes you feel like you are important to someone," he said. "I am going to try to do for others what was done for me."

On the cusp of a consequential election, no one outcome will heal what ails us as a nation. And yet the church is showing up in powerful ways—standing up for voting rights, caring for those targeted by policy violence, visiting the sick, defending the dignity of our neighbors. I believe we are excavating a profound theological truth—we belong to one another and must be, in the words of Willie James Jennings—"lovers of those outside of ourselves." We are discovering that we possess greater moral courage than we had imagined.

Our stewardship theme this season is "There Our Hearts Will Be." Rooted in Jesus' teaching from Matthew 6, our stewardship focus invites us into deeper spiritual alignment through an honest, hopeful exploration of how our practices, priorities and resources reveal what truly claims our hearts. This year we remember that stewardship is not a performance, but the quiet, courageous work of placing all that we have and all that we are in God's care.

This month we invite you into the work of the church. Join us for All Saints' Sunday as we honor departed loved ones, including those who have died in ICE detention this year, lighting candles and breaking bread together, both around the communion table and at a potluck meal to extend God's table. Join us for a nurture series following worship on November 15th and 22nd as we continue to explore the meaning of our nation's 250th

anniversary of independence in light of our faith commitments to truth-telling, liberation, and justice-seeking. Join us on Tuesday, November 24th for the Drop-In Center's Thanksgiving Feast for youth and young adults facing housing insecurity.

On November 22nd , we will mark Commitment Sunday—a recognition that this church community lives out our mission because of the gifts of time, talent, and treasure that are so freely given by our members and friends. As we each discern what we will give and share, I hope you will remember the power of the church to serve the world and preach the good news of God's abiding love for all people.

In Grace,
Rev. Amanda

Council Capsule

Council Capsule: October 2026

Council convened on October 13th. Key topics/votes included the following:

- Voted to approve the 2027 asking budget, which was presented to the congregation at the October 25th congregational meeting.
- Voted to approve Jim Riker, Susan Anderson, and Trevor Bakker as the 2026–27 Nominating Committee.
- Voted to approve moving the Youth Drop-In Center's Tuesday programming to the second-floor Community Hall, with use of the Chapel as needed. Details are being worked out with the Drop-In Center and the Building Manager.
- Discussion of the Sanctuary Committee's plans to apply for two UCC MIRA grants.
- Updates on the Director of Music Ministry search, the Messaging Project, and a proposal involving the MLK Library.
- Reflection on our faith and democracy season.
- Planning for the church-wide retreat at West River and the start of Stewardship season on October 25th.
- Updates on youth ministry, including monthly sandwich distribution with unhoused neighbors and an upcoming service trip to Richmond.

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 Michael Enseki-Frank, Assistant Moderator

Stewardship

Stewardship Testimony from Karen Pence

First Church has been in my life for more than 40 years. To be accompanied in life by First Church—its members, its staff, its vision of a more just and loving world—has been a great gift.



One story. In the summer of 2022, Brian, Natalie, and I were visiting Brian's parents in Montana. I was isolating, though, because I had Covid. My cell phone rang. It was Friendship Hospital for Animals. Our beloved dog Paige had died suddenly. Paige was Brian's and my first baby and Natalie's big sister (and also, for a time, a regular attendee of Church Council meetings with a special fondness for Dale Ostrander). This was devastating news. And I was stuck in isolation and unable to physically be with Natalie as she absorbed the news. The hospital just wanted to talk logistics. What should they do with the body? I was overwhelmed and punted—could they just put Paige in their freezer?

Which left some unresolved questions – how could we say goodbye in a meaningful way to a dog in a freezer? How could we help Natalie with her grief? What if Brian and I started crying? Would that be upsetting to Natalie? Only one answer, of course. I called Reverend Sam. Could he meet us at Friendship Hospital for Animals when we got back? Would he be willing to be with us as we said goodbye to our beloved dog?

You all know the answer to this question. Of course he showed up, with a thoughtful prayer, words of comfort for all three of us, and a steadfast presence and message of God's love. We were accompanied during a hard time. We were not alone.

What a gift to have such accompaniment. What a gift to be part of a church that tries to show that accompaniment and love to everyone, no matter the situation. A church that views everyone as worthy of this accompaniment. That's why I pledge.

Submitted by Karen Pence

Christian Education

Volunteer Opportunities at Tommy's Pantry

We have several wonderful opportunities to serve at Tommy's Pantry in November and December. Tommy's Pantry (tommyspantry.org) is a fabulous partner that serves our neighbors from Maryland and DC who are facing hunger and food insecurity. Many of the families that Tommy's Pantry serve are immigrants. Please sign up at the link below and email Rev. Sam if you have any questions at mcferran.sam@gmail.com. Also, please bring a friend. Service is a wonderful way to introduce friends and neighbors to the community and values of First Church.

Tommy's Pantry
Where human dignity is the guiding principle

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

- 11/21 from 6:00am-7:30am: Tommy's Pantry Distribution (Grades 5 +)
- 12/12 from 10:00am-12:00pm: Tommy's Pantry Shelf Stable Packing (Grades K +)
- 12/19 from 6:00am-7:30am: Tommy's Pantry Distribution (Grades 5 +)

Please sign up at Fall 2026 Tommy's Pantry Sign Up.

Christmas Pageant: December 6



First Church is excited for this year's Christmas Pageant! This wonderful tradition allows the children and youth to joyfully tell and embody the story of Christ's birth, the message of God's love and hope to all of us. This year the theme is "Home."

Schedule

1) First Reading: November 15th during Sunday School
2) Rehearsal: December 5th, 8:30am – 10:00am in Sanctuary
3) Performance: December 6th (Arrive by 9:30)

Please fill out this Christmas Pageant Form and email Rev. Sam if you have any questions! We so hope your child or youth can join us!

Movie and Game Night

Saturday, November 7th
5:30 PM – 8:30 PM



Please join the Children and Youth of First Church and People's Congregational for a fun night of movies, games, snacks and joy!

We will be meeting in the Community Hall and Chapel.

We hope you can make it! Email Rev. Sam at mcferran.sam@gmail.com if you have any questions!

(Please note that *The Sheep Detectives* is a placeholder; movie may be different.)



Adult Education Opportunities this Fall

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

November

- November 1: All Saints potluck meal
- November 8: Book Talk with Rev. Jason Carson Wilson on "Makeshift Messiahs"
- November 15: Marking the 250th: Slavery on G St. with Commemorative Artwork Team
- November 22: Marking the 250th: History as Public Witness with Dwan Reece
- November 29: Advent Nurture Series with Rev. Barbara Gerlach

December

- December 6: Christmas Cookie Showcase
- December 13: Advent Nurture Series with Rev. Barbara Gerlach
- December 20: Advent Nurture Series with Rev. Barbara Gerlach

Book Talk with Rev. Dr. Jason Carson Wilson: Nov. 8

Following worship on November 8th, join us in the Community Hall at noon for a talk with Jason Carson Wilson to discuss his book *Makeshift Messiahs: Why the American Right Keeps Creating Political Saviors*--a timely look at the pattern of casting strongmen as saviors, and what it will take to resist that pull. Jason's book is available for purchase in print or as an ebook. Several copies will be available to borrow from our church library for those interested.

November 15: America's 250th: Where is the "Forever Path" Leading?



Join artist Jessica Valoris, historian Dr. Antonio Austin, and the Commemorative Artwork Task Force for an engaging conversation about the "Forever in the Path" stained glass panels that hang over the fountain in our narthex, as a reminder of those who lived and labored in bondage on the land on which our church now sits. How do we view this artwork through the lens of America's 250th anniversary of independence? How has the excavation of our history and the process of creating this artwork transformed our understanding of the lives of those who worked this land as enslaved laborers? How do we honor the ancestors who fought for survival and freedom? Join us following worship on November 15th in the Community Hall or on Zoom.

November 22: America's 250th: History as Public Witness

Join Dwan Reece, Associate Director for the Humanities at the National Museum of African American History and Culture and longtime member of our church, for a discussion about the 250th anniversary of our nation's independence through the lens of history as public witness. Join us following worship on November 22nd in the Community Hall or on Zoom for the final nurture in this series to reflect upon America's 250th.



Care of Parish

Continued Support for the Kiss Family



Beloved Community, following Eric Kiss' diagnosis of metastatic cancer, Anna provides updates on a CaringBridge site to organize the ways we can sign up to support their family. You can sign up for the Meal Train here. Let us surround Eric, Anna, Riley, and Archer with our prayers as we also pitch in to care for them however we can in the weeks and months ahead. They are part of our First Church family, and they do not walk this path alone. We pray that the love of God will attend them, mind, body, and spirit. We truly appreciate your prayers and your care for them in this time.

Facilities

This Fall at Live at 10th and G

Washington Bach Consort presents **Bach's Polyphonic Heritage.** November 6 at 7:00 pm. A group of eight singers, joined by organ and violone, bring this broad-ranging repertoire to life.

Heritage Signature Chorale **27th Anniversary Concert,** November 14 at 6:00 pm. The evening will feature music by celebrated Black composers including Clarence Cameron White, Margaret Bonds, Adolphus Hailstork, Ulysses S. Kay, and more.

Capriccio Baroque presents a **Harpsichord Concert with Justin Taylor.** November 21 at 8:00 pm. Taylor plays a varied program of music written across centuries – revel in the elegance of the Baroque, the kinetic modernism of the 20th century, and the textural sounds of contemporary times.

Hanging of the Greens

Sunday, November 22nd (after the worship service) in the Sanctuary from 12:00 – 1:30pm

Please help us prepare for the Advent Season with our annual "Hanging of the Greens." This lovely tradition is the first step in helping us as we prepare for the birth of Christ, the arrival of God's love and hope for all of us. "Hanging in the Greens" includes decorating the balcony and chancel with greens, wreaths and a tree, and enjoying pizza with good friends. All are invited to participate, including children. Please email Rev. Sam to RSVP at Mcferran.sam@gmail.com.

Outreach & Membership

Messaging Focus Group: November 14th



With visibility and messaging at the heart of sharing the good news of First Church and nurturing our growth, our Messaging Focus Group will meet with (former member) Hannah Long-Higgins this month to distill an authentic, meaningful core message about our church. As an expert storyteller, we are contracting with Hannah to convene this focus group to engage in dynamic, generative conversations about who we are as a congregation and how we share the good news of this beloved community with those who have yet to walk through our doors. The group is already engaged in one-to-one conversations with Hannah via Zoom. Then on November 14th, they will participate in a daylong session at the church with Hannah present. Coming out of this work we expect to emerge three possible resonant messages (or taglines) that meaningfully describe First Church. The message we land upon will be infused into our website, printed on t-shirts, and used to increase our visibility as we share the good news of this beloved community.

Advent: A Very Invitational Time of Year

Rev. Amanda has been heard to say that the most effective way for our beloved church to grow is through the invitation of our current members. Here are two easy ways to share the wonder of the Advent season at First Church with those in your orbit.

#1: Identify any listserves in your neighborhood. (Example: "Moms on the Hill.") Look at the guidelines for the list serve. Could you post an item or two during the Advent season about our worship services? If yes, send a quick email to Mary Pence marypence58@gmail.com with the name of your list serve, and whether you want a post to appeal to families with young children or a general post for any age. Mary will then send you a couple of posts for you to use.

#2: Mentally flip through your network. Is there someone for whom the Blue Christmas Service of Lament & Healing might be particularly meaningful this year? Is there a family with children or a set of grandparents who would love our Christmas pageant? If yes, pick up one or more of our Advent Invitation Cards at the Usher's Table and use them to start a conversation and issue an invitation. The cards will be available on November 22nd and thereafter.

Submitted by Mary Pence, O&M Chair

Social Action & Awareness

November Second Sunday Special Offering: Food Justice DMV (FJDMV)

This November, our second Sunday special offering recipient will be Food Justice DMV. According to the Capital Area Food Bank 2026 Hunger Report, food insecurity in the he DMV has reached a 5 year high of 38%! Our immigrant neighbors are some of the most vulnerable. They are fearful of being detained by ICE when they leave their home to shop for food. Many have lost employment as Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is paused for some immigrant groups. FJDMV is unique in that they are able to directly deliver food and baby items to the home. FJDMV currently distributes approximately $8,000-$10,000 worth of baby items weekly. The need is great! Let us respond with generous hearts to Christ's call. "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35) This month, First Church has applied for the UCC MIRA Global Hope Partner Match Grant for up to $5,000. Any second Sunday offerings for FJDMV have the potential to be doubled. 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!

Election Eve 16th Street Candlelight Vigil: Nov. 2



On the evening before the final day of voting in our national election, please join a candlelight standing vigil with many houses of worship along 16th Street NW, from the White House to Silver Spring, to shine a light for democracy, peace and hope. The vigil will take place from 5:30 - 6:30 PM. Sixteenth Street is DC's "corridor of faith," a 6.5-mile thoroughfare lined by nearly 50 houses of worship. In these challenging days of economic insecurity, the hollowing out of our civil service, war, with ICE and the National Guard on our streets, First Church will join many other religious communities in bearing witness to the love that grounds us as people of faith and good will. The First Church contingency will gather in the Black Lives Matter Plaza in front of St. John's church. Rev. Amanda will supply vigil candles; please feel free to bring battery operated candles or flashlights if you prefer. We are also invited to bring signs expressing our prayers and hopes for our country. **This is a positive, non-partisan vigil, so please only bring respectful signs that do not promote or oppose any candidate or party.** We encourage you to use democracy, peace, and hope as themes. To RSVP, contact Rev. Amanda.

Volunteer with our Drop-In Center: Thanksgiving Feast



Every Tuesday from 6 to 8 pm, First Church opens its doors to clients of Sasha Bruce Youthwork and other homeless or precariously housed neighbors of ours for connection, food, and youth programming.

On November 24th, we will host a Thanksgiving Feast for Drop-In Center clients. We are expecting 50-60 guests. You are invited to sign up to help in two ways:

- Provide a side dish
- Volunteer to help set-up, serve, and/or clean-up.

Please sign up to indicate what dish you can bring, or to volunteer for a shift. Side dish contributions can be left in the church kitchen the Sunday before, or you can drop them off on that Tuesday. We ask that you use single-use dishes for easier clean-up and label each dish with the item name and any reheating/serving instructions. Contact Gail Sonnemann or Kim Darling with any questions.

Worship

Guest Preacher on November 8: Rev. Tom Baynham



The Rev. Tom Baynham serves as Community Engagement Coordinator at Richmond Hill Monastery. When Tom joined the residential staff in July 2024, he served as the Welcoming and Hospitality Pastor and Interim Associate Pastoral Director. A native of Richmond, Tom returns home after serving as the Senior Pastor of the Friedens United Church of Christ in St. Charles, Missouri from May 2019 to June 2024. Rev. Baynham has over forty years of congregational ministry experience, mostly in church music, having served congregations in the Southern Baptist Convention, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Diocese of Virginia, and the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Rev. Baynham is a graduate of Bluefield University; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond; Boston University School of Theology; and the Eden Theological Seminary. Tom, and his former wife Brenda are parents to son Daniel Baynham, Executive Vice-President with VOLO Sports in Washington, DC, and daughter, the Rev. Lindsey Baynham Freeman, District Superintendent of the Mission River District in the Virginia Annual Conference. The highlight and joy of Tom's current stage in life is being "Poppi" to their grandchildren; Teddy, age 7; Bronwyn, age 4; Maxwell, age 3; and Myles, age 2.

Advent Worship Theme: Until the Dawn



In the season of Advent, we spend four weeks preparing our hearts to receive the mystery of incarnation on Christmas. On November 29th, we will launch this year's Advent theme, "Until the Dawn: Actions for the Work of Advent. As we move through the night with hope for tomorrow, the way forward is not always clear. In the dark, our senses are heightened and fear may creep in. Yet darkness also brings gifts--rest, regeneration, dreams, and intimacy with God. In our sacred stories, angels often arrive in the night, calling for courageous action and singing good news. In the night, Mary's labor pains crescendo and Christ is born. In the night, shepherds and Magi follow the stars to get closer to God's gift of divine incarnation. As we move toward the horizon, we will cry out, start somewhere, speak up, and take courage. These actions will empower us to resist despair and put prayers in motion. Until the day when God's love reigns and all the earth echoes shalom, we will keep moving, singing, resisting, and rejoicing--trusting that God joins us in the work of Advent.

Daily Devotional: Toward the Dawn: Actions for the Work of Advent

Beginning November 22, pick up a daily devotional booklet provided by A Sanctified Art, beckoning you deeper into the theme for Advent: "Toward the Dawn: Actions for the Work of Advent." The devotional includes reflections, visual art, journal prompts, music, scripture readings and poetry; it is designed for adults and older youth. Enjoy this guide to the holy season as an invitation to deepen your spiritual practice of observing Advent. Devotional booklets will be available at the usher's station on Sunday mornings.

Sign-Up to Serve as a Scripture Reader this Advent - Epiphany

Sign up to serve as a scripture reader or liturgist in worship this holy season of Advent and Christmas through Epiphany. We welcome members and friends, local and far-flung, adults, youth, and children to participate. Your voice helps make us who we are, so please take a moment to sign up. Our worship is enriched by your participation.



This Month at First Church: November 2026

Sunday, November 1
9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service & Sunday School
12:00 pm Community Potluck

Monday, November 2
5:30 pm Election Eve Vigil

Tuesday, November 3
10:30 am Staff Meeting
6:00 pm Drop-In Center
7:00 pm Worship Commission

Wednesday, November 4
12:15 pm Break Away Meditation
7:00 pm Care of Parish Commission

Saturday, November 7
5:30 pm Movie and Game Night

Sunday, November 8
9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service & Sunday School
11:45 am Coffee Hour
12:00 pm Book Talk with Rev. Dr. Jason Carson Wilson

Monday, November 9
7:30 pm Finance Commission

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

Wednesday, November 11
12:15 pm Break Away Meditation
7:00 pm O&M Commission

Saturday, November 14
Messaging Focus Group Session

Sunday, November 15
9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service & Sunday School
11:45 am Coffee Hour
12:00 pm America 250 Nurture

Monday, November 16
7:30 pm CE Commission

Tuesday, November 17
10:30 am Staff Meeting
6:00 pm Drop-In Center

Wednesday, November 18
12:15 pm Break Away Meditation
7:00 pm Facilities Commission
7:00 pm SAAC Commission

Sunday, November 22
9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service & Sunday School
11:45 am Coffee Hour
12:00 pm Hanging of the Greens
12:00 pm America 250 Nurture

Tuesday, November 24
10:30 am Staff Meeting
6:00 pm Drop-In Center Thanksgiving

Wednesday, November 25
12:15 pm Break Away Meditation

Wednesday, November 25 – Friday, November 27
Church Office Closed for Thanksgiving Break

Sunday, November 29
9:30 am Bible Workbench
10:30 am Worship Service & Sunday School
11:45 am Coffee Hour

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

a just world for all ucc.org

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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