

THE CORNERSTONE

First Church is an Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Please join us for worship this February!

- March 3rd** **Third Sunday in Lent**
10 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Also available via [Virtual Church](#)
Rev. George Harris, preaching

- March 10th** **Fourth Sunday in Lent**
10 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Also available via [Virtual Church](#)
Rev. George Harris, preaching

- March 17th** **Fifth Sunday in Lent**
10 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Also available via [Virtual Church](#)
Rev. George Harris, preaching

- March 24th** **Palm Sunday**
10 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Also available via [Virtual Church](#)
Rev. Kevin Weikel, preaching

- March 28th** **Maundy Thursday**
7:30 p.m. in the Sanctuary

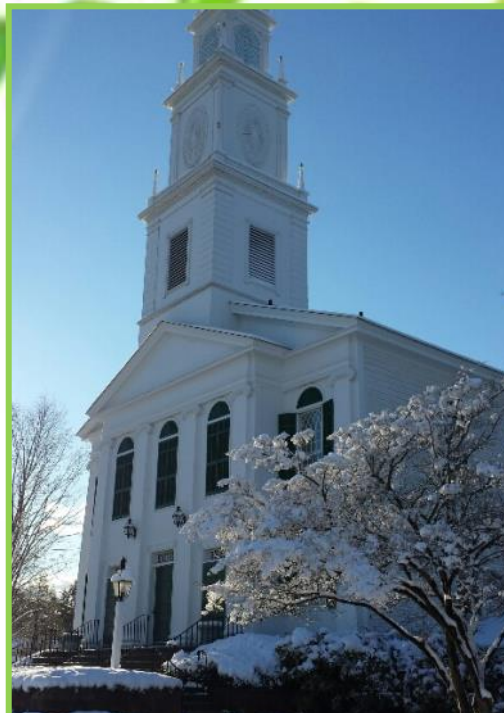
- March 29th** **Good Friday Silent Vigil & Candlelighting**
6:00-9:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary

- March 31st** **Easter Sunday**

Joint Sunrise Service w/ Simsbury UMC
6:30 a.m. Meet at SUMC, walk to Cemetery

Pancake Breakfast
8:00 a.m. Palmer Hall

Easter Worship
10 a.m. in the Sanctuary
Also available via [Virtual Church](#)
Rev. George Harris, preaching



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See additional information inside The Cornerstone about Holy Week worship and fellowship

Pastor Pondering

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. John 19:25



Rev. George Harris

Senior Minister

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Out of Office Tuesdays

Traumatized, grief-stricken, and utterly helpless, Jesus' mother and other women who loved him, gathered at the cross and bore witness to his excruciating death on a Roman cross that day.

Over the past months, we have been confronted daily with horrifying news from Israel and Gaza, beginning on October 7, with the Islamist militant group, Hamas' slaughter of Israeli civilians and the taking of 253 Jewish hostages, followed by Israel's invasion of Gaza leading to the slaughter of over 30,000 Palestinian civilians. I identify with the women at the cross, feeling overwhelmed and utterly helpless.

Other than offering sincere but general prayers for peace, I have not addressed these horrific events in church. I haven't offered a biblical perspective to suggest how we might process, cope or act in response. I feel like I should, say more. But frankly, I have felt stuck, unsure how to respond appropriately or adequately as your pastor.

I try not to succumb to bothsideism or whataboutism, the idea that one side's wrong justifies the other side's wrong. I have talked to both Muslim and Jewish colleagues and friends, none of whom has suggested easy answers, and all of whom are anguished about the violence that continues to unfold daily, as well as the implications for anti-Semitism and Islamophobia here. Though I can't possibly do justice to the long, complicated history of this conflict, here are a few biblical and historical markers.

Biblical History

- In an event that has come to be known as the Exodus, God led Moses to free Hebrew slaves from Egypt.
- Over forty years, Moses led the Jews to the "Promised Land" of Canaan. Upon occupying that land, Jews slaughtered the supposedly sinful Canaanites who had called it home for generations.
- Hundreds of years later, Jews were taken into exile by Assyrian and Babylonian empires and held in captivity for generations before being freed and allowed to return to Jerusalem.
- Jesus was born into Roman occupied Israel. This occupation included the complicity of Jewish vassal kings and religious leaders, and was enforced by the Roman army and the use of terror, including the public torture and execution of Jewish opponents on Roman crosses.
- There were some in Israel, likely including some followers of Jesus, who advocated for armed resistance to Roman occupation.
- Jesus was murdered on a Roman cross because he was seen as a threat to Roman and Jewish power.

Biblically speaking, Israel has a long history of being both occupier and occupied, oppressor and oppressed.

Modern History

- The nation of Israel was established by a UN mandate in 1947, as a homeland for Jews around the world. Establishing the boundaries of Israel, involved the forced expulsion of some 700,000 Palestinians from the land they had called home for thousands of years, into UN designated Palestinian territories.

(continued on p. 3)

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- Saying it was necessary for their national security, Israel occupied Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank in 1967, severely restricting the movement of some five million Palestinians within the territories. As a result, Palestinian territories have been impoverished, leading deplorable living conditions and gross human rights violations.
- Over the past forty or fifty years, there have been a series of wars, armed Palestinian uprisings, and terrorist attacks including suicide bombings targeting Israel.
- Hamas assumed leadership of Gaza in 2006. Hamas' founding documents commit to the complete destruction of Israel.



Even sharing these little bits, I am leaving out much, much more. Some would no doubt challenge my choices of which bits to share and leave out, but just this much communicates the depth and intransigence of these conflicts and the way they are being played out in today's bloody crisis.

At the greatest personal cost, Jesus consistently modeled a strong, but peaceful response to Roman occupation. It follows that calling for a cease fire seems like a good first step, consistent with our faith. But should there be a cost for you and me? What would it mean to take up our cross and follow Jesus?

As Good Friday approaches, we are invited to join the women at the cross, to bear witness, to take their grief and Christ's suffering upon ourselves and pray the ancient prayer:

Kyrie eleison	Lord have mercy
Christie eleison	Christ have mercy
Kyrie eleison	Lord have mercy

Our sanctuary will be open from 6-9 pm on March 29, Good Friday. I invite you to come for a time, light a candle, sit quietly at the cross and pray.

Peace,
Pastor George



A Message from Rev. Kevin Weikel

"Practice Resurrection"

We find ourselves traveling through Lent, with Easter around the corner, which makes me wonder, what do you believe about the resurrection? Was it an actual, literal, physical event? Was it symbolic? Or was it something in between?

When responding to this for myself, I have become comfortable with simply saying, "I don't know." I have come to understand that there is something peaceful about handing one of our biggest theological questions over to the mystery of God. I have come to find that too much worrying over whether the specific events of that first Easter, as relayed to us by the Gospel writers, can get in the way of encountering resurrection in our lives.

Here is the truth: No matter the specifics of Easter morning, we know the women and disciples who were present had a miraculous encounter with the Divine, as did those who met Jesus in the Bible stories after Easter, and we know that when we look for the Living God amid our lives, we can experience resurrection, too.

In his poem, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer's Liberation Front," Wendell Berry closes with this two-word sentence: "Practice Resurrection." I find this meaningful because I'm not sure it is as important to believe in any particular detail about the resurrection as it is to practice resurrection. Practicing resurrection means intentionally letting the divine into our hearts and minds. It is then that we begin to see new life spring up around us.

We practice resurrection when we...

...allow the part of ourselves that wants to hold on to stereotypes and fears to die off so that we might rise to open-mindedness, curiosity, and grace instead...and experience resurrection.

...allow the part of ourselves that wants to hold on to grudges and hard-heartedness to die off so that we might rise to empathy and compassion... and experience resurrection.

...allow the parts of ourselves that want to hold on to complex past events to die off so that we might rise to opportunities that the present moment has for us...and experience resurrection.

And so I ask you friends, where in your life must you, as author Marcus Borg has written, "Die to an old way of being and begin to live into a new way of being?" Where must old life be cut out to allow new life to grow...so that resurrection can happen?

This Easter, may we debate less about whether or not there was a physical or bodily resurrection and intentionally reflect more upon God's luring us, prompting us, and encouraging us to see new and wondrous things. May we practice and experience resurrection this Easter and always!

Happy Easter!

Kevin



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Out of Office Tuesdays



Mark Mercier

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Out of Office Tuesdays

Musical Notes

Holy Week is upon us... and it seems like not that long ago that I was putting Christmas decorations back in the attic. Matter of fact, it was just three weeks ago – admittedly I move rather slowly on things like that. There is something in me that finds it difficult to undo many weeks of Christmas preparation in a few short days – particularly since Christmas itself didn't seem to be long enough, and the passage of time is picking up speed as the years roll by... kind of like a toboggan careening downhill. Don't blink – you might miss something.

The perception of the passage of time is interesting. In some reading that I have done, I see it reported that the time is perceived as being faster when one is having a positive experience. So the adage “time flies when you're having fun” has some documentation. Conversely, when you're in a moment of panic, such as forgetting a line in a play in front of an audience, that moment definitely seems to move at a snail's pace.

Then there are those moments outside of time – when we are experiencing eternalism – a universal present, where past, present and future exist in a block together and time ceases to matter. It's a moment of transcendence, where the only thing that exists is a great big “now”. These are the “thin moments”, the indescribable places where creativity abounds, where “flow” exists, where we can come closer to feeling the presence of God, and the physical world is neither important or unimportant – it is just a means to an end. We have all been there...hopefully.

We as musicians know all about the bending of time. Time stops during creative moments – there have been some concerts and presentations that seem to have lasted forever – and the absolute trancelike beauty of the moment was far more important than the passage of time. This is the state that makes all the work put in to arrive at that point worthwhile. We rehearse, practicing the mechanics to get to the point where all we have to think about is the beauty of the music. We are inviting God to dinner, and we are setting the table, heating the oven, peeling the vegetables, lighting the candles, and making things ready for God's knock at the door.

Holy Week is what it's all about for us Christians. We are shown that there is life at the end of our physical journey. This stuff is important enough to warrant our musicians working hard to make sure that we are helping to create these thin moments for those with us. The exuberance of Palm Sunday. The despair of Maundy Thursday. The astonishment of Easter Sunday. We have planned; we have practiced and rehearsed; we have worked to prepare so that we can live in an experience in the eternal now. Christ is riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey; standing before Pilate; carrying his cross, crying out on agony, and rising from the dead...all during this Holy Week – all of it real; all of it now.

As we move toward Easter, may you have chances to see the beauty of life, hear the eternal in the music you listen to; feel the warmth of the light of which we are all a part, and know the love of God on your journey...



Children's Ministry News

Grow your heart at First Church



Church School is a warm, welcoming space for children to hear the stories of our faith tradition and learn the vastness of God's loving embrace. Children are invited to gather for worship with their families in the Sanctuary at 10 am. Children are shepherded to Church School following the Children's Sermon (or Baptism if a Baptism Sunday). Younger children return to worship during the Offering Time, and participate in Holy Communion on the First Sunday of the month.

Nursery Care

The Nursery is open during worship for newborns through 3-year-olds. Parents are welcome to stay in the Nursery with their children.

Volunteers Needed!

Each Sunday, we need two lead teachers and two shepherds (assistant teachers) for Church School. Are you interested in helping out?

[Please click this link](#) for the Signup Genius!

Thank you, and God bless you,

Rev. Kev and the Board of Christian Education



2024 VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

AT FIRST CHURCH SIMSBURY
WITH SIMSBURY UNITED METHODIST



Camp Firelight

A SUMMER CAMP

Psalm 56:3

ADVENTURE WITH GOD

JUNE 17-21 | 9 AM - 4 PM

FIVE FULL DAYS!

\$229 (EARLY BIRD) \$249 (AFTER MARCH 31)

REGISTRATION ENDS 6/1

**CAMPERS WILL LEARN TO
FACE THEIR FEARS, TRUST
GOD, AND MAKE FRIENDS**



Join us for Vacation Bible School 2024! For more information and to register, [click here!](#)

First Church Youth and Young Adults

No matter where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here!

Visit the [Youth and Young Adult Pages](#) on our Website for Current, Up-to-Date Information!

Confirmation at First Church is an intentional time of exploring what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The goal is for each student to grow in the knowledge that he or she is a magnificent creation of the Divine and deeply loved by God, and for each student to understand that God's love extends to all creation and all people.

- **March 5, 2:30pm** | Confirmation Class Meeting Soup Kitchen Prep and Serve, First Church Kitchen and South Park Inn, Hartford
- **March 11, 5:00 pm** | Confirmation Class Pizza with the Pastors, Conference Room
- **March 18, 5:15 p.m.** | Confirmation Class, Conference Room (*library*)
- **March 25, 5:15 p.m.** | Confirmation Class, Conference Room (*library*)
- **April 1, 5:15 p.m.** | Confirmation Class, Conference Room (*library*)



See the next page for more opportunities to grow and serve!

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



We will meet at 9:15 am in the youth room at First Church, Simsbury. We will assemble hydroponic farm systems for those who depend on food pantries in Hartford. We will arrive back at 1:30 pm after having lunch together.

March 23

- ✓ Snacks
- ✓ Music
- ✓ Volunteering



For more information and to volunteer, [click here!](#)

JOIN US!



Sign up to cook, flip pancakes, and help serve here!

Easter Morning **Pancake Breakfast**

8-10 am in Palmer Hall



Free Will Offering

For more information and to volunteer,
[click here!](#)

**VOLUNTEER FOR
REBUILDING
TOGETHER!**
A DAY-LONG SERVICE
PROJECT IN HARTFORD!

SATURDAY APRIL 27TH FROM 8 AM - 4 PM!

Rebuilding Together is a nationwide organization focused on helping homeowners with minor repairs and upgrades to make their homes safer. First Church has committed to bringing a team to help with repairs.



Text Rev. Kev at 860-324-5630
with any questions

**FIRST CHURCH,
SIMSBURY**
2024
YOUTH SUMMER
MISSION TRIP!!

650 WSM GRAND CLE OPRY OPRY.COM #OPRY



mission trip

NASHVILLE

FOR MORE INFO &
TO REGISTER >>>



AUG 4-10, 2024

For more information and to register,
[click here!](#)

Women's Ministries Group Walk

Please join us for a lovely walk and a chance to be together. We meet every Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. in the parking lot behind Fitzgerald's along Iron Horse Boulevard. No sign-ups or RSVP needed. Just come and bring a friend!



Notice of CARE BAG Change of Command

You are invited to a think tank conversation as to how best continue First Church's Care Bag program's 20+ year commitment to the CT Department of Children and Families. The purpose of Care Bags is to provide immediate support to children entering into DCF under emergency circumstances. Which means for children arriving abused, dirty and with no possessions. We provide filled, decorated tote bags including clothing, toiletries, food, blanket, book, stuffed animal and small toys. Bags are provided for ages newborn through teen with an average of 25 bags per month.

Our three leaders, Becky Goss (20 years overall coordinator and boy bags), Nancy Wadhams (10+ years girl bags), and Terri Carlson (10+ years infant bags) will be leaving their posts later this year. It's currently a well-oiled machine but new blood and improvements are in the wind!

Nancy Wadhams has offered to host a think tank meeting in May to create a framework for going forward. A tutorial on what we do and how we accomplish it will be provided as well as physical examples.

We have heard many wonderful creative ways to accomplish this task and hope you will join in the mission. There is such satisfaction in knowing you are providing a desperately needed service to both damaged children and harried social workers.

Stay tuned, the date will be announced soon.

Becky Goss

Usher Schedule

Team	Team Captain
A	Debi Ackels
B	Erin Naspo Jen Petron
C	Anthony Weber
D	Andie Fabian

3/3/24	B
3/10/24	C
3/17/24	D
3/24/24	A
3/28/24	Andie Fabian leading
3/31/24	B

Sunday Morning Flowers

Sunday flowers give the chancel a complete and celebratory look. They often are placed in honor or memory of a loved one or special day.

If you think you might like to have an arrangement placed in memory or honor of someone or something near or dear to you please sign up below! Sara Batchelder will contact you to confirm the date and arrange for any details you may want to provide, including wording to be placed in the bulletin on that particular Sunday.

Flower arrangements generally cost approximately \$75.00 and Sara Batchelder can take care of the ordering for you.

Sara can be reached at (860) 655-4810.



Acolytes Wanted

Children and youth are invited to sign up to participate in the 10 a.m. worship service as an acolyte.

An acolyte, or "one who helps," lights the candles on the alter before the service and takes the light out into the world at the conclusion of worship.

[Click here to sign up!](#)



GHIAA Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance News

Sisters and Brothers at First Church,

GHIAA House Meetings for 2024 are about to begin. We are excited to announce our [preliminary lineup of 2024 house meetings!](#)

This house meeting campaign is a little different from previous ones in that our house meetings are being co-hosted by teams of congregations and held on-site at various GHIAA institutions. You are encouraged to [register via our online form](#) for any date. Whichever house meeting(s) you attend will be an opportunity to connect with leaders from across our network. **FCCS is hosting with** our neighbors at Farmington Valley Jewish Community and Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, both in Simsbury.

We will have people from the FCCS Core Team outside the Chapel the next few Sundays to answer questions and give you info to sign up if you need help.

At each House Meeting, participants will divide into small groups to share stories of the struggles you are facing, to hear about the forces your loved ones are contending with, the wrongs in your community and greater Hartford that need to be made right. ***This is a critically important step in our organizing process, as the stories shared in these house meetings will shape GHIAA's next slate of issues for action in the coming Months and Year.***

We need to hear from you!

Simsbury Opportunities All on Sunday afternoon:

March 3 2pm First Church Simsbury

March 17 1pm Farmington Valley Jewish Community

April 7 2pm Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church

We look forward to hearing your stories as we deepen our relationships and move forward in our shared work of justice. Thank you for all you do.

Joining you to work for Peace & Justice,

Bill White, Mario Chiappetti Co-Chairs

and the entire FCCS GHIAA Core Team

A photograph of two men wearing cowboy hats and plaid shirts, sitting outdoors in a rustic setting. The man on the left is holding a blue bowl of eggs, and the man on the right is holding a bunch of green bananas. They are both smiling.

**IT'S TIME TO
SHARE THE
LIGHT**

One Great Hour of Sharing® (OGHS) is one of four special mission offerings of the United Church of Christ. This Lenten Offering supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ within Wider Church Ministries. This offering will be taken on March 10 during our Sunday worship service, or you may donate directly to UCC OGHS at:

<https://support.ucc.org/ways-to-give/our-churchs-wider-mission/one-great-hour-of-sharing/one-great-hour-of-sharing-donation>

FREE Community DINNER

FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2024

5-6:30 PM

PALMER HALL

FoodShare Truck Help Needed

Every other Monday throughout the year, the FoodShare truck provides perishable food items to those from our community in need in our church parking lot.

[Click Here](#) to Sign Up



Lay Readers Wanted

At First Church, we value the participation of our members and friends in our worship services. Therefore, the Board of Worship is asking one layperson to read each week in worship.

What is a lay reader? A lay reader is a layperson (a non-clergy member or friend of the church). in the church who volunteers to worship by reading liturgy (i.e., call to worship, confession, scripture, and/or offertory).

[Click here to sign up!](#)

During the Lenten season and into Easter, please remember First Church's Easter Fund. All funds donated are shared equally between the Ministries of First Church and an outside organization to be determined later in the year.

[Click here to donate!](#)

Celebrate Holy Week and Easter with First Church of Christ, Simsbury!

Holy Week is a time to reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Remembering Jesus' experiences, reflecting on his messages, celebrating his life and recommitting to living as his disciples in the world today.

We hope you will join us as we observe these important days, as individuals, as members of this church family, and with our neighbors and friends in the Simsbury community. May you have a blessed Holy Week and Easter!

Palm Sunday, 21 March 2024

10:00am Worship

Maundy Thursday, 28 March 2024

7:30pm Worship in the Sanctuary

Good Friday, 29 March, 2024

6:00 - Silent Vigil and Candle
9:00pm Lighting in the Sanctuary



Easter Sunday, 9 April, 2023

6:30am Sunrise Service
Meet at Simsbury UMC
and process to the
cemetery for shared
worship

8:00- Pancake Breakfast in
10:00am Palmer Hall

10:00am Easter Worship in the
Sanctuary

11:00am Fellowship and Easter Egg
Hunt

EGG HUNT



**EASTER PLANTS FOR EASTER SUNDAY
MARCH 31, 2024**



The beautiful display of flowers for Easter Sunday is provided by your donations and memorial gifts.

To reserve or donate a beautiful plant for the Sanctuary on Easter Sunday, March 31, please complete the form below and send to the church office by March 25.

Please indicate whether you wish to pick up the plants AFTER the 10:00 am worship service and/or donate to one of our homebound members.

**Cost per plant is \$12.00.
Please make checks payable to:
FIRST CHURCH FLOWER FUND**

I would like to order a plant to be used in the Sanctuary on Easter Sunday.

My Name.....

In Loving Memory of.....

OR

In Honor of.....

Please Deliverplant (s) to a shut in.

Will pick..... plant (s) up after the 10:00 am service.

Check enclosed..... Telephone #.....

First Church of Christ

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*Please note new office
hours of Monday;
Wednesday-Friday from
10:00 am—3:00 pm

From the Office

Calendar of Events

Please click [HERE](#) for a full list of all upcoming events!

An Update on The Donkey

What glorious uproar that was last week!
Who knew they'd be throwing all those lovely
comestibles right at my feet?
Tender green shoots of palm—and even
flowers and fruits.
It was a feast like I've never seen before.
Not just dry grass shoved in the manger, or scrubby weeds torn from
the dry patch out back of the stable.
Sweet, moist, juicy fresh groceries, all in the street for the snatching.
I'd gladly do that duty again!

And that fellow what sat on my back—
why, how they adored him!
He didn't whip or strike me
or seem to be in a rush at all.
He was content to be just there, in that crowd
as long as it took and
I could just take my sweet time, and snatch up the good stuff
raining down all around us.

I wonder?
Might he return to ask me to bear him along
again?

- Tammy Forner, 2023