



Sunday Notes



First Church Happenings for the week of December 15, 2024

Sunday Worship

There are grammar sticklers and grammar nerds. There's a difference, of course. Sticklers are oppressive about other people's syntax and sentence structure and so forth. Nerds are obsessed with words and their morphology and meaning. I'm a grammar nerd.

For example, while reading this week's featured verse (Philippians 4:4-7): "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice*", Paul's use of the word '**always**' grabbed my attention. It occurred to me that he could just as easily have written '**all ways**'. There's a difference, of course.

Always means every single time. It's an adverb that means continually or perpetually. It's one of the 1,000 most frequently used words, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. **All ways** means in every single way, by every available method.

The simple word and the short phrase are often misused; but in this instance both work equally well. I'll say more when I see you. The sermon for the third Sunday of Advent is an ode to joy entitled: **Always and All Ways**.

Be blessed. Be a blessing.
Rev. Fredd

Altar Flowers

Our altar flowers are donated this week by Al, Chris, and Lindsay in loving memory of Joanne Elise Day - A caring, kind, smart, and funny wife, mom, grandma, and friend.

Light the Steeple

Our steeple is lit this week by Lisa Carl in loving memory of her parents, Maryett and Howard Carl.



Upcoming Events and Announcements

AED Training

We will be offering a training session for anyone interested in learning how to use the AED's you now see throughout the Church. The class will be held on Tuesday, December 17 at 5 p.m. in the Fellowship Room and will be taught by members of the West Hartford Community Emergency Response Team - there is no cost to you. We need at least 8 people to hold the class. Thank you! Click [HERE](#) to register.



Advent Services and Events

- Saturday, December 14 at 4 p.m. – City Singers Concert in the Meeting House
- December 15 – Third Sunday of Advent, Joy – 10 a.m. worship service
- Saturday, December 21 at 4 p.m. – Celtic Lessons and Carols in the Chapel
- December 22 – Fourth Sunday of Advent, Love – 10 a.m. worship service
- December 22 at 4 p.m. – Arts in the Center Concert, Chorus Angelicus in the Meeting House. [Order tickets Here.](#)
- December 24 – Christmas Eve Services: 4:30 p.m. – Family Service & 9 p.m. – Contemplative, candle-light service.
- December 25 – Merry Christmas!
- December 29 – Colossal Puppets & Trombone Choir return during the 10 a.m. worship service.



Parent Open House

This Sunday, December 15 following worship in the Fellowship Room

Please join us this Sunday for a Parent Open House. Come enjoy refreshments and find out what is happening in Sunday School at First Church. We welcome any questions or feedback you may have. Contact Amanda Bethune at faith.formation@whfirstchurch.org if you have any questions.



Celtic Lessons and Carols

Saturday, December 21 at 4 p.m. in the Chapel

Come enjoy some calm before the rush of the holiday season! Our Lessons and Carols service takes place on the Winter Solstice this year. Many cultures see this time as a period of rebirth. In Celtic tradition it is seen as the return of the light as the days begin to lengthen. Invite light and renewal into this hectic time with meditation and music, featuring members of the Jolly Beggars.



Christmas Angelicus Concert

Sunday, December 22 at 4 p.m. in the Meeting House

Join Chorus Angelicus and Gaudeamus in welcoming the holiday season across Connecticut! A New England tradition, hear a diverse assortment of Christmas classics, seasonal music, works from the past, and works by contemporary composers. Order tickets [HERE](#).

Ring in the New Year with Colossal Mary and Joseph!

The Colossal Puppets of St. Michaels Church (Litchfield) are returning to First Church Sunday, December 29 for the 10 a.m. service! Come see this collection of massive shepherds, angels, kings, and the Holy Family as they march throughout the Meeting House. It's a memorable way for children of all ages to commemorate the end of the Christmas season and look forward to greeting the New Year. Want to get involved? Volunteers are needed for the following:

- Assembling/preparing the puppets Friday, December 27 from 2 - 4 p.m.
- Puppeteers for the Dec. 29 worship service. This involves rehearsing on Saturday, Dec. 28 from 10 - 11:30 a.m.
- Disassembling and transporting the puppets back to St. Michaels Monday, December 30 at 10 a.m.

Sign up for any of these spots [HERE](#), or speak to Jim Boratko.



Wreath, Poinsettia and Organ & Carillon Donations

Wreaths will adorn the doors of First Church during the season of Advent. Poinsettias can be used to brighten the holiday for another or taken home after worship on December 22. Donations can also be made to the Organ & Carillon Reserve Fund. Online orders and donations can be made [HERE](#) (*Please note: page one of the form is for Wreaths, you will need to hit "NEXT" to get to Poinsettia & Organ donations). You can also print a form [HERE](#) to mail in with your payment. All donations must be received in the office by Monday, December 16.

The Inreach Team is looking for volunteers to deliver poinsettias to church members after worship on Sunday, December 22. Please join us in the Meeting House following worship or contact Nancy Ball if you are able to help with this meaningful opportunity. (860-232-5036 or mailto:shoedog1961@gmail.com).



Share A Gift Tree for Our Covenant to Care Children

Thank you to everyone who took a tag from the gift tree! Please bring the unwrapped gift to the church by December 15. Thank you for helping our Covenant to Care children have a Merry Christmas! For any questions, please contact Diane Bohman at dmbohman@comcast.net or Molly Bohman at jpwebsterlib@whfirstchurch.org.

Are you glad that First Church is part of GHIAA?

Then please help us fulfill our commitment to contribute \$5000 each calendar year to pay for the staff that keeps GHIAA functioning and the materials and events that make it possible to get the work for justice done. Every year the First Church Outreach Team contributes \$2500, and the other \$2500 needs to come from individual donations. Through the end of October 2024, donations came to \$850. **If you can help -- whether it's \$5 or \$500 -- please make your donation ASAP.** If you give online or by text, you will find GHIAA is one of the categories you can designate your gift for. If you donate by check, please write "GHIAA" in the memo line. Thank you for your support, financial and otherwise!

Hat and Mitten Collection for Covenant to Care -- and Sock Collection for The House of Bread

Now through December 31, we will be collecting new or gently worn mittens, hats, scarves, and other winter clothing for Covenant to Care! We will also be collecting NEW socks for The House of Bread. Please bring items to the church and look for designated boxes for collection. Thank you!

Christmas Fund

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. [The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund](#) is one of the UCC's special mission offerings. Individuals can also [donate directly online or by mail](#). The Christmas Fund for Veterans of the Cross is managed by the Pension Boards. [Get more information here](#).

December Reach Out: The Village for Children and Families

For more than 200 years, The Village has been dedicated to building a community of strong, healthy families who protect and nurture children. Established in 1809 by a committed group of women, the Hartford Female Beneficent Society, The Village's name and services have changed but the desire to assist children and families has remained constant. To learn more: <https://thevillage.org/programs-services/>.

Programs and services include:

- Addiction and recovery support
- Adult mental health and wellness
- Children and teen mental health and wellness
- Early childhood care and development
- Financial and career support
- Foster care and child welfare
- Integrated care
- Parent education and family strengthening
- School based support
- Support for justice-involved youth

To donate online: <https://thevillage.org/give/>. Or to donate online through the church, click [HERE](#).



Watch Live-Streamed Worship in the Church Library!

First Church's worship services are live-streamed every Sunday in our bright, comfortable John P. Webster Library. Come watch while your toddler plays in our children's area or if you need a separate place to worship for any other reason. The JPW Library is also open Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Everyone is welcome -- church membership is not required! Come in and find your next read!

G.O.A.T.* Bible Study – No Class 12/15

Every Sunday from 9-9:45 a.m. in the Friendship Room (305)

Please note: No class 12/15 or 12/29

Join Rev. Tom Carr for a deep dive into the book of Isaiah. Explore historical contexts, find out who was duped (and by whom), and see how and where the Gospels echo the ancient Hebrew Bible. "Tom's engaging style and knowledge of scripture have really helped me understand the Bible's ongoing story and meaning in our own lives" (participant). Bibles provided; [register here](#). *Greatest Of All Time!

Book Group News:

The John P. Webster Library coordinates and sponsors three book groups that meet regularly in the library. Copies of the books are provided for participants. New members are always welcome to either group! For more information, please contact Jennifer or Molly at 860-232-3893 or at jpwl@whfirstchurch.org.

- **Awakening the Spirit** - Meets every Monday from 12-1:30 p.m. - Rev. Tom Carr, facilitator
Join us to discuss [The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness](#) by Gregory Boyle. In this follow-up to *Tattoos on the Heart* and *Barking to the Choir*, Boyle is "incandescent, always hope-filled, and often hilarious, sprinkling his narratives with theological and spiritual reflections from a variety of theologians, poets, and other writers" (Christian Century). Don't miss reading this encouraging and uplifting book!
- **Food for Thought** - Meets on first Tuesdays of the month from 5-6:30 p.m. - JPW Library Staff, facilitators
Next Meeting: January 7 - This month we will be reading [First Ladies](#) by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray. A novel about the extraordinary partnership between First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune. This unlikely friendship between two different, yet equally formidable and committed, women helped form the foundation for the modern civil rights movement.
- **Believe in YourSHELF Tween Book Group**
Meets on the third Sunday of the month at 10:15 a.m.- Facilitated by Molly Bohman, JPWL Assistant Librarian

Next Meeting: December 15

For students in Grades 6-8: We meet (with snacks!) on the third Sunday of the month in the Library. Our next book is [Invisible](#) by Christina Diaz Gonzalez, illustrated by Gabriela Epstein "Five students meet in the school cafeteria when they're forced to complete their school community service hours. Even though their school administration has decided that they all belong together, none of the kids wants to be there. But when they encounter someone who truly needs their help, they might just be able to come together to work as a team—and help their community—after all" (back cover) Questions? See Molly at the Book Mobile or in the JPW Library.

Faithful Fitness Classes Continue

The JPWL invites you to attend, or continue attending, a free Faithful Fitness class! Each class provides an opportunity for meditation as well as movement. Perfect attendance is not required – it's ok to miss a couple of classes. More information is available on each class's registration page:

- Qi Gong with Cynthia Hoag -Thursdays from 10:30-11:30 a.m. in the Chapel - (No class 12/26).
QiGong, a Chinese exercise that promotes the flow of qi, or energy, in the body, can reduce stress, depression, or fatigue while providing a sense of balance and clarity. Each session will conclude with a short meditation. More info and registration [here](#).
- FitMix with Kathi Boratko will resume Tuesday, January 7 from 5:30 – 6:30 p.m. in the Auditorium.
This is a well-rounded class including resistance training, cardio, and balance using multiple fitness modalities. Chairs will be used for seated and standing support. Please bring a mat, light weights, and a small ball. No tools? No worries! Some tools can be provided. [Register here](#) to join the class!
- Janice Olson's Chair Yoga will no longer meet in person, but will continue online:
Yoga for Every Body - Balance, Flexibility, and Mobility - On Friday mornings from 9 - 10 a.m. you can join Janice for an uplifting and invigorating Chair Yoga class from the comfort of your own home! This all-levels class is being offered online via ZOOM. To receive the ZOOM login details, please email Janice at janiceolson756@gmail.com. Class is offered on a donation basis but there is no financial requirement. Grab a chair and see you there!

In the JPWL Gallery

We are delighted to present the work of three women artists: Dolores Howard, Michelle Peterson, and Michele Quinn. "Reveries and Reflections: Three Local Artists" will be on display from December 1 through January 12 in the JPW Gallery and in the Alcove to the right of the Rotunda Entrance. Many of the pieces are for sale -- these would make unique Christmas gifts! A percentage of the proceeds will be donated to First Church Outreach Ministries. Please see Jennifer with any questions.

A Great *Green* Gift

Here's your opportunity for local, "green" gift buying! The JPWL is selling bags that were sewn from old church banners. These upcycled, one-of-a-kind First Church-branded totes and clutches will be for sale during Hospitality Hour. Totes are \$20 each; clutches are \$10 each, or 3 for \$25. All proceeds will be used by the Outreach Team to support nearby environmental charities.

Ongoing Announcements

Our 2024 Stewardship Campaign is underway. You can bring your completed pledge card to worship or mail it to the office. You can also make your pledge online by filling out the online pledge card [HERE](#). Thank you!

Sunday School Registration

Sunday School is underway at First Church and all children are welcome to attend! Parents of children (infants through 8th grade) can register online for childcare or Sunday School by clicking [HERE](#). If you have any questions, please reach out to Amanda Bethune at faith.formation@whfirstchurch.org.

West Hartford Food Pantry

Please drop off donations in the marked blue bins outside the auditorium and around the building. Specific needs include: baked beans, canned fruit/applesauce, pasta and sauce, cold cereal, canned chicken and tuna, 1 lb. packages of rice, 16-18 oz sized peanut butter, soup, macaroni and cheese. Food donations can also be dropped off at the town hall lobby, Monday - Friday, from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Altar Flowers

If you would like to donate altar flowers, please contact Sarah in the church office. Many dates available in the new year.

Light The Steeple in Honor of a Loved One

For a \$25 donation, you are invited to "Light the Steeple" for one week in honor of a loved one. We ask that you pick a date at least one week in advance of the desired week, and all donors will be acknowledged in our weekly *Happenings*. Please note more than one donor can fall on any given week. Donations will be added to the Save the Steeple fund. Click "Light The Steeple for a loved one" found on the "Save the First Church Steeple" web page or [click HERE](#).

Family News!

We now have a family news page on our website: [click here](#). Family news will be shared when it is submitted to [Amy Melvin](#) or [Joy Taylor](#). Send your photo(s) with caption(s) any time! We may edit content to fit. Check it out under the Inreach Menu! Please keep in mind that this is a public page.

Submit Prayer Requests at http://bit.ly/FCprayer_request.

Four Ways to Give (besides Sunday Morning Offertory)

1. **Give by Text:** Text "GIVE" to (860) 222-7870. Choose the fund you would like to donate to and follow the text prompts to enter your credit or debit card and follow all instructions. It's amazingly fast and simple!
2. **Give Online:** To make an online donation with your credit or debit card, click DONATE in menu, type amount and choose the designation from drop-down. To set up recurring payments, or to use ACH, login to "My First Church Login" and select GIVE and follow prompts.
3. **Give by Mail:** Checks can be mailed to First Church West Hartford: 12 South Main Street, West Hartford, CT 06107. Please indicate the fund, of your choice, in the memo line of your check.
4. **Give Gifts of Securities:** Contact local Financial Advisor Sue Banville at Edward Jones in West Hartford at 860-521-2119.

Office Hours: Mon. – Thurs. 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. and Fri. 9 a.m. - Noon.

Contact: Office.Manager@whfirstchurch.org or 860-233-9605.