



Sunday Notes



First Church Happenings for the week of December 21, 2025

Sunday Worship

"God sent [Jesus] among us to bring an end to fear and hatred, darkness and sin...God gave light, to let God's love in."

– from *Welcome to Bethlehem: A Christmas Story*

If you've heard me say this before, bear with me...I think the thought is worth repeating. Christmas season – in terms of church planning – is different every year, except for the things that stay the same. That's a paradoxical way of saying that the work of balancing tradition and innovation yields different outcomes, depending on each year's unique set of circumstances.

This is our fourth Christmas together and while the moving parts still remain constant, they've been arranged dissimilarly...again. The multigenerational pageant takes place this Sunday morning rather than Christmas Eve (a former idea that has found new life). The customary service of lessons and carols is scheduled for Christmas Eve at 5:00pm -- one festive worship opportunity for all to experience at the same time...except 30 minutes later than last year.



You get the point. Same sacred story. New chapter.

Love you lots and lots.

Rev. Fredd

Altar Flowers

Thank you to everyone who donated poinsettias and wreaths or contributed to the organ and carillon fund this holiday season. See bulletin insert.

Light the Steeple

This week our Steeple is lit by **The Guerraz Family** in loving memory of our grandmother, **Norma Guerraz**.

Volunteers Needed to Deliver Poinsettias

The Inreach Team invites volunteers to deliver poinsettias to Parish Care members following Sunday's service. Please meet Nancy Ball by the bell tables following the service for directions. Thank you!

Share A Gift Tree For Our Covenant to Care Children

Thank you to everyone who took a gift tag from the share-a-gift tree. Just a reminder that the gifts are due back **TODAY** (this Sunday 12/21). Contact Diane Bohman at dmbohman@comcast.net or Molly Bohman at jpwebsterlib@whfirstchurch.org

Let's Make Lunches! TODAY! Dec 21, 2025

Every month as part of our Outreach mission, we make 80 sandwiches and fill lunch bags for folks in the Asylum Hill neighborhood with "very low food security." After Sunday worship in the Auditorium, half-hour activity for all ages
Contact: Outreach member Dottie Stone, dottie@stone-stonect.com, 203-856-7403

Christmas Angelicus is coming to First Church on Sunday, December 21st at 4:00 pm. Join Chorus Angelicus and Gaudeamus for an evening of seasonal choral music and readings from CT Public Radio's Chion Wolf! Tickets can be purchased at www.chorusangelicus.com.

Holiday Closures

- The office will be closed Thursday, December 25 - Friday, December 26 for the Christmas Holiday.
- The JPW Library will be closed Wednesday, December 24 - Friday, December 27 for the Christmas Holiday.

December 24, 5pm – Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols featuring First Church Brass Quintet

Covenant to Care

Now through December 31st we will be collecting new or gently worn mittens, hats, scarves, and other winter clothing for Covenant to Care! Please bring items to church and look for designated boxes for collection. Thank you!

Join the Choir for Advent and Christmas!

There isn't a better way to feel the joy and celebration of the holiday than by singing beautiful music with the choir for the Advent and Christmas season! We need singers in all voice parts. Experience is helpful, but not necessary. We will teach you all you need to know. We rehearse on Tuesday nights in the Choir Room (near the JP Webster Library) from 7:00-8:30. Come sing your favorites and learn a few new ones!

Fern Street Backpack program is looking for more volunteers beginning in 2026

We need brown bag packers, drivers to deliver bags and drivers to pick up food donations! See specific details in link, visit the Outreach webpage [here](#) and scroll down to the Fern Street button to find the link for opportunities to help. Thank you in advance.

Fill our Food buckets!

We know we have been asking a lot over the holidays, but this is just a gentle reminder that the day-to-day needs for food aren't going away. Please see [suggestions here](#) for ideas and add a few items to your grocery cart.

The Stewardship Team invites flavorful people like you to Stay Salty!



"You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world." These are the words that Jesus uses to remind us that we're powerful and brilliant. Our power and brilliance equip us to do God's good work in the world through the church.

Help us season and brighten the world by making an annual pledge. In so doing, you make it possible for us to fulfill the Savior's instruction: "...let your light shine before others". You can bring your completed pledge card to worship or mail it to the office. You can also make your pledge online

[HERE](#) or scan the QR code. Thank you!

December 2025 Reach Out Veterans of the Cross Christmas Fund

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund is a Special Mission Offering that congregations have been supporting for over 100 years. The offering is administered through the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, the charitable arm of the Pension Boards. Funds provide direct financial support to those who serve the church and are facing financial difficulties. Active and retired clergy, lay employees, and their surviving spouses may be eligible for the Supplementation of Small Annuities, Supplementation of Health Premiums, Emergency Grants, and/or Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks.

To learn more and donate please use the links provided or donate in church (**Write Christmas Fund on your envelope**) or online thru the church: <https://pushpay.com/g/whfirstchurch>

Or to give directly to Christmas Fund: <https://pbucc.donorsupport.co/page/christmasfund2025>

To learn more about UCC: <https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/>

Coffee and Conversation Join First Church Friends at Nero Kitchen at 13 South Main Street in West Hartford Center on Wednesdays at 10 a.m. for coffee and conversation.

Family News! We need your family news and photos! Click here to submit yours and we'll share as soon as we can. Please include captions for your photos, keeping in mind that we may edit to fit, and that this is a public page.



Visit the JPWL this Sunday!

- Watch the live-streamed worship services while your toddler explores the children's area!
- Find a separate place to worship when you need one
- Have a cup of tea or coffee (or hot chocolate!) at our Coffee Bar

The JPW Library, located beneath the Meeting House, is open Monday-Thursday 9am-5pm, and Sundays 9am-12pm

Please Note the JPW Library's Holiday Hours: December 24 – closed, December 31 and January 1 – closed
Have a blessed Christmas and New Year!

A Wonderful Gift Idea!

Post-Holiday Detox & Spiritual Reset -- A Weekend Retreat for Women, January 16–18, 2026

[The Guest House Retreat & Conference Center](#) | Chester, CT

Come and reflect on the holiday season just passed and explore patterns or triggers that you noticed. Through guided reflection, group conversations, journaling, quiet time, and embodied practices, you will create a personalized plan to gently reset and nourish your spirit in the months ahead.

Retreat Includes: Two nights lodging at The Guest House (Friday & Saturday), six delicious, chef-prepared meals, comfortable rooms with private baths, all retreat programming, materials, and guided sessions. Cost (includes lodging, meals, and retreat program):

First Church Members: \$390 per person for a single room; \$280 pp for a double room, Non-Members: \$610 pp for a single room; \$500 pp for a double room, a \$100 deposit holds your space. Final payment due January 5, 2026

Come as you are. Leave renewed! More information is available at the Sunday Book Mobile. Register [HERE](#)

Grace in Action: Cultivating Resilience & Presence - A 6-Session Group Coaching Series

Led by Stephanie Simpson, MA, MFA, PCC

Sunday, February 8: Lunch and Learn kick-off in the JPW Library, 11:30am-1:00pm

Remaining VIRTUAL Sessions: Feb. 19 and March 5, 12, 19, 26, 7:00 – 8:00pm

Cost: \$150 per person* A fantastic opportunity for anyone looking to work with a life coach!

Life is full of uncertainty—and yet we all have the capacity to meet it with resilience, presence, and purpose. Join this unique group coaching experience designed specifically for the West Hartford First Church community to deepen emotional intelligence, strengthen connection, and cultivate leadership from the inside out. Rooted in the [Core Energy Leadership™](#) framework, this series will help you gain practical tools to navigate stress, lead with intention, and build more meaningful relationships—with yourself and others. Program includes Energy Leadership Index Assessment and personalized report, 90-min in-person session, and five 60-min virtual sessions. (dates above) Space is limited—registration required. More info available at the Sunday Book Mobile. [Register Here](#).

Stephanie Simpson, MA, MFA, PCC is a West Hartford native and an Executive + Leadership Coach, Educator, and Facilitator who helps individuals and organizations unlock their full potential through emotional intelligence, resilience, and conscious leadership. Learn more at www.stephanie-simpson.com

**As a friend of First Church, Stephanie is offering this class at the discounted rate of \$300 per person. In addition, the JPW Library will help offset fees with a half scholarship for each participant!*

The Great Green Gift is Back!

A unique opportunity to buy local: The JPWL is selling bags that are repurposed from old church banners. These make great lunch, accessory, book, or gift bags! Suggested donation: Totes: \$10; clutches: \$5. All proceeds will be used by the Outreach Team to support nearby environmental charities. These upcycled; one-of-a-kind First Church-branded totes and clutches will be for sale during the Coffee Hour at the Book Mobile.

FREE Fitness Classes -- Healthy Body, Healthy Mind, Healthy Spirit!

The JPWL invites you to attend a free Faithful Fitness class. Each class provides an opportunity for meditation as well as movement. More information is available on each class's registration page. These programs are provided for free through the JPWL Crofut Fund.

FitMix with Kathi Boratko – Tuesdays, 5:45 – 6:45 pm in the Auditorium. [More info and registration here.](#)

Tai Chi & Qi Gong with Cynthia Hoag – Thursdays, 10:30-11:30am in the Chapel. [More info and registration here.](#)

Yoga with Cynthia Wolcott, Wednesdays, 9:30-10:45 am in the chapel. \$20 per session (if this causes a hardship please speak to Cynthia), enter via the North Door. Cynthia Wolcott has been leading yoga and healing movement classes for nearly two decades.

Book Group Info

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

Awakening the Spirit meets Mondays from 12-1:30 pm. Rev. Tom Carr returns to lead a discussion of *The First Christmas: What the Gospels really teach about Jesus's Birth* by Marcus Borg and John Crossen.

Food for Thought meets Tuesday, January 6, 5-6:30 p.m. to discuss *Take My Hand* by Dolan Perkins-Valdez. "This illuminating novel exposes a dark episode in American history: the forced sterilization of mostly poor recipients of welfare benefits in Alabama in the 1970s. Dolan Perkins-Valdez probes the many ways institutional racism and classism inflict lasting scars, and the grace, courage, and love necessary to begin to heal those wounds" (online reader review).

Believe in YourSHELF Tween Book Group's next meeting is **January 11 at 10:15am** in the Community Room (please note the date change). We will discuss *Blue Stars Mission One: The Vice Principal Problem* by Kekla Magoon and Cynthia Leitich Smith; illustrated by Molly Murakami. "Two cousins take a cue from their activist grandma to save their school culture from an influential foe...Relatable and rich in themes of family, community, and compromise."

JPWL Art Gallery

Stop by the J. P Webster Library Art Gallery to see our church through the years! Materials on display are all from our archives. The display includes books from the libraries of Thomas Hodgdon, pastor of First Church West Hartford from 1891–1926, as well as Timothy Goodman, who donated the land we now call Unity Green to the Church in 1747. Also displayed is a clay replica of the Library in the Greystone Church, known as the Talcott Room.

Spreading Your News

The Communications Team is made up of members of our Outreach Ministry, and the church Office Administrators.

- **Sunday Notes/Happenings submissions** are *due by noon* on Tuesdays to Bethany: office.manager@whfirstchurch.org
- **Website, printed pieces, and Social Media additions or changes** can be sent to Amy and Joy anytime. Amy Melvin: Communications@whfirstchurch.org, Joy Taylor: Communications2@whfirstchurch.org

Four Ways to Give

1. **Sunday Morning Offertory** Please note the designation of your donation on the envelope. (Pledge, Reach-Out, General Fund)
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. – Fri. 9:30am-3pm. Contact: Office.Manager@whfirstchurch.org or 860-233-9605.
[Submit Prayer Requests: http://bit.ly/FCprayer_request.](http://bit.ly/FCprayer_request)

