

THE PARISHIONER

February 2024

THE FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, WOODBRIDGE,
CT *since 1738*
An Open, Welcoming, and Affirming Church

My ministry with FCCW as we go into 2024

February 2024 marks two years of our interim ministry together. Through it, we have explored many possibilities, discussed and discerned next steps, launched new ministries, experimented with multiple ad hoc teams, created FCCW's Local Church Profile, launched a Search Committee, stretched and grown as a Body of Christ, and accomplished so much. And yes, for sure, there is more to do!

Through recent months, I have given a great deal of thought and prayer to FCCW's needs in 2024, as well to my personal needs. It is deeply important to me to continue with the interim ministry work that is crucial to FCCW. It is also deeply important to me to attend to many personal matters to which God calls me. I am grateful that the Deacons and the Church Council are supportive of a work plan that will allow me to maintain my focus some areas and to step back in some others. Without going into unnecessary detail, I want to share with you a general sense of my work as we go forward ...

Children & Families: I am passionate about the helping churches learn how reach out to young families to provide wholesome nurture amid the very real stresses of modern life. I'm especially passionate about the biblical mandate to pass on the Gospel to each generation. As such, I will continue leading and developing FCCW's family outreach ministry, and the work of overseeing and developing Kids Church. Both are "start-up" ministries and need time-intensive work in ongoing experimentation as well as in growing them into structured and sustainable forms.

Governing Boards & congregation: As your interim minister, I have been leading the congregation in a process of future vision and creating the path to live into that vision. This process requires working closely and well with the church's governing boards. Currently, these boards and the congregation are engaged in significant decision making that will shape the well-being of the church for generations to come. As such, I will continue my work with FCCW's Church Council, Deacons, and Trustees, focusing on the areas where my leadership is needed and stepping back where lay leaders are taking on new and greater responsibilities. I will also continue to envision, coordinate and co-lead "All-church New Steps" gatherings as needed.

Church Office: The church office is the interface between the congregation and the wider community. It is also the hub for the administration of all-things-church: financials, electronic and written communications and records, coordination of events / calendar, coordination between internal and external groups, and much more. I will continue as the supervisor of the Office Manager, attending to and coordinating the many and varied needs of the church office for the benefit of FCCW.

Worship leadership: Through the past two years, I led worship twice each month and on holy days. Beginning February 2024, I will lead worship once/month. Truly, I will miss worshipping together more frequently, but be assured I am working closely with the Deacons to create and coordinate excellent worship leadership for each Sunday!

Other: There are many other areas where I'll continue (ex. supporting the Search Committee as needed) as well as some new ones I'll take on (ex. Aging as Spiritual Journey series).

Our work for FCCW is blessed, but it is our trust in the work God's Holy Spirit among us that will all the difference. As we go together into 2024, let us pray upon apostle Paul's assurance ...

God can do anything, you know – far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! God does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.

Glory to God in the church!
Glory to God in the Messiah, in Jesus!
Glory down all the generations!
Glory through all millennia! Amen!

– *Ephesians 3:20-21*, The Message translation

All blessings,

Rev. Susan



FCCW CHURCH COUNCIL REPORT

January, 2023

The FCCW met in January and by-and-large heard reports from its various members regarding the continuing and routine operations of the FCCW, with four exceptions: Namely, two reports from Trustees, one regarding the sale of the cell tower leases which in turn was reflected in the presentation of the 2024 FCCW budget. Both matters were reported on, discussed, and approved by Council. The third exception was the report from the Sanctuary Restoration Committee that the restoration of the Sanctuary was completed with the expectation of a dedication celebration in the Spring. The last exception was the discussion of the Deacon's report of their approval of the Interim Minister, Susan Murtha's proposed 2024 work schedule, a plus for us at FCCW, as it means she will be leading our congregation for another year. So, you say, "are these not routine in nature?" No, not in my opinion. And here is why.

The first two topics dealt with FCCW's future financial life, with both indicating a potentially very bright financial future for FCCW, allowing us to meet, and maybe expand, our Christian based activities and programs for members and the community we serve. The third, regarding the Sanctuary, is that our church building will continue for long into the future to serve as a warm, peaceful setting serving as a symbol to and for the community as a place of worship for all who wish to enter. And lastly, the extension of the Rev. Susan Murtha's continued interim status as our religious and program leader whose extensive time, effort and energy have brought us to this point---and showed us the pathway to a potentially successful future for the continued existence of FCCW and in turn to the communities served thereby.

So "why?" you say, are these four topics of any particular note, now in the middle of this winter of 2024? They all pertain to the FUTURE! Which is where our focus has, at last, been directed. We, as many of you know, have spent a great deal of time in the past talking about "the good old days" and "what was" This is not the case, anymore! While initially started under the skilled leadership of the Rev. Murtha and her "pathways" sessions and creation of new programs; her leadership has spread to more active leadership and involvement with program development initiatives from members of the congregation and many boards and committees. To note a few: Family & Children's Ministries; refurbishing the Parish House, led by Trustees, for use as an early childhood education center, Kid's Church, reviewing and revising FCCW's role as a center of Christian worship and programs and not a landlord, Community outreach programs. These efforts along with new faces in church, an excellent coffee hour on Sunday, an expanded choir on Sunday formation of an active pastoral search committee; are examples of the building blocks toward a better FCCW future.

We at FCCW have come so very far in the last two years: From the brink of extinction to a bright future. Why? Due to the leadership of the Rev. Murtha which in turn has led to others of us assuming and taking more active leadership role through our different boards and committees, all for the benefit of our future church life. We all, to varying degrees, have taken on different types of leadership roles and should, and must, continue to do so! Have I missed an example or program? Probably. My point, friends, is simple and made in one word: "Lead" One dictionary definition: "To show the way to, by going in advance". We should all, in our own way and fashion, continue to show the way, by going in advance for FCCW's future. Leading takes us forward into the future and does not drag us back into the past. We now do, members of FCCW, have a future. Please, continue to build toward it!

Respectfully Submitted, Richard A. Prescott, Moderator



Scouting at FCCW



Troop 907 News

IBSA Troop 907, based in Woodbridge at the First Church of Christ in Woodbridge has been very active. Over the past six months a few of our members were inducted into the Order of the Arrow – the Scout honor society - and participated in those specific activities. All of our scout members continued working on various merit badges meeting up as a group at Camp Sequassen, New Hartford, Connecticut in August.

We had the largest contingent of Troop 907 scouts ever at that camp out. We now have a total of 18 registered scouts. Along with a few provisional campers from other troops, we enjoyed ruling the camp as the “Jeroman Empire” naming our time there after our campsite name. (Jerome) While in the eyes of Sequassen we didn’t win super troop, it was one of the best summer weeks ever. The troop considered themselves earning our own Super Troop Award with many personal bests like the most Merit Badges earned, Mile Swim Awards and other accolades.

In September, scouts of First Class rank and above had the opportunity to attend Camp Sikorsky. Tents were set up on the grounds and they could earn various Merit Badges including Aviation and Engineering. The younger scouts spent the weekend at Camp Whiting earning check marks in their books and putting them closer to their next advancement rank.

In October, the group tested our scare factor level attending the Legends of Fear Haunted HayRide.

November brought the troop’s very famous and very fun family Thanksgiving feast and campout. Scouts prepped, cooked and readied the campsite so the scouts and their families could celebrate an early Thanksgiving together at Camp Whiting.

In between, the troop continued to meet weekly and work on various skills, advancements and activities. Next for the troop is the CT Yankee Council’s Winter Klondike gathering at Camp Sequassen. There, our patrols will be tested with challenges to see if we can walk away Klondike champs.

The calendar year was wrapped up with a community pancake breakfast with the scouts as hosts and Santa Claus as the starring attraction. The goal of the day was to offer a place for the community to gather as well as fundraising for the upcoming year’s activities.

It will be a difficult half year to surpass with the number of merit badges earned and milestones achieved by these 18 scouts, but the group will continue to work on leadership skills, team building, personal fitness goals and so much more including continuing to practice good citizenship with our communities.

Mark your calendars for these upcoming events

Pancake Friday for Families

(with extra Valentines added)

Kids can come in their PJs

(ready for bed after pancakes)

February 16, 2024

5:00 – 6:30p.m.

Parish Hall

5 Meetinghouse Lane

Woodbridge, CT



**Pastor Susan will talk with the children about simple
ways to grow closer to God in the season of Lent**

For more info call (203) 936-9356

Aging as Spiritual Journey

a 3-part series
led by Rev. Clare Robert



Mondays, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
with soup & bread

January 22 Sharing stories of spiritual journey

We all have stories about our faith journey. And nested in these stories are our views of aging, our questions about life, our desire for the spiritual gifts of wisdom and self-acceptance, and others that ripen in our later years. How do we want to live and love, at this stage of life?

February 12 *The Gift of Years* by Joan Chittister

We will read several short chapters from this classic book about aging. Themes may include meaning, regret, joy, possibility, adjustment, freedom, time, wisdom, faith, letting go, learning.

March 4 Our legacy & becoming an Elder

We will continue to delve into *The Gift of Years* as we listen for its personal relevance and share our hopes for our continuing spiritual growth as we grow older. What kind of legacy do we hope to leave? And how can we continue to commit ourselves to the work of becoming an Elder – one who is wise to the ways of life and seeks to live as fully as possible during the time we are given?

Parish Hall
5 Meetinghouse Lane, Woodbridge CT

About Rev. Clare Robert: Most recently, Clare served Spring Glen Church in Hamden as Associate Pastor & Chaplain for over a decade and was named pastor emeritus upon her retirement in October 2023. She has a Master of Sacred Theology in ethics from Yale Divinity School and studied theology in Washington DC, Lyon France, and Geneva Switzerland. Beginning in 2018, Clare led an initiative at Spring Glen to provide older adults the opportunity to discuss the challenges we face as we age. Topics included spiritual autobiography, leaving a legacy, how to face change, the resources our faith provide as we navigate these years, and how can we continue to learn and grow at this stage of life. Clare brings all this experience and much more to our 3-part series in Woodbridge.

RVSP not required, but very appreciated: 203-936-9356 or PastorSusan@uccw.org

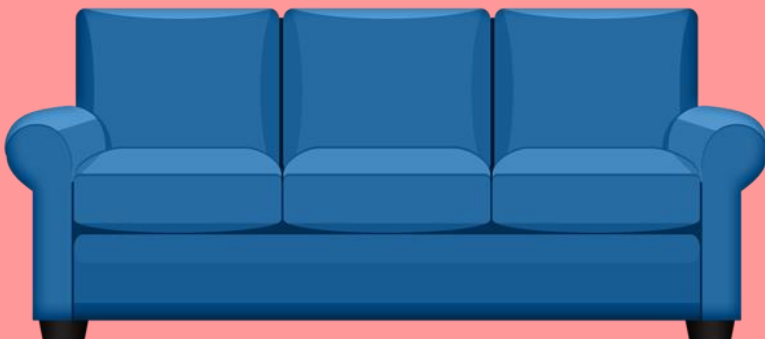
A Successful Woodbridge Food Pantry Drive

Thank you to everyone who helped out with the Woodbridge Food Pantry Drive on Saturday, December 16th, either by working at or donating household products for the drive. We collected many bags and boxes full of detergent, paper goods, dishing washing detergent, sponges, cleaning goods, soaps, toothpaste, brushes, etc., etc. etc. The Town was very grateful to receive these items. The drive took place in front of our church with a steady flow of people dropping goods off. Thank you to Richard Prescott, Jinny Schneider, Nancy Dickgiesser, Sharon Finkenauer, Stefany Schulz, our faithful Sexton Bob, and all of you who contributed to this drive. Look for announcements in the Spring for another drive! Thank you.

Sue Stoddard

Home Furnishings and Home Furniture Collection

IRIS, in New Haven needs home furniture and furnishings. We at FCCW can help in this effort. Please call the church office and arrange to either drop items off at the Parish House, for IRIS to come and collect; or call us for making arrangements to drop items off at the IRIS office in New Haven. By going through our office, FCCW will be given acknowledgement for coordinating any and all contributions of items. This will be an ongoing project for FCCW and not just seasonal or one time in nature. If you have any questions, please call the FCCW office or Penny Rogers.



Donate your Furniture
Help us furnish refugee homes!

Let's downsize with a purpose!
IRIS will find the apartments (40 of them)
and
We will help furnish them
Please Donate

Tall Dressers
Dining Room Tables + Chairs
End Tables - Small Sofas - Rugs
Pots - Pans - Full Dish Sets - Glasses

Items will be picked up at your house by volunteers.
No lugging and hauling on your part.

Contact Penny Rogers
203-530-2486

The seven-year Meetinghouse stabilization and redecoration project at the FCCW is complete.

The John Canning Company has provided a Phase II completion report & photographs of the final phase of the work. They have been paid in full.

Close-out documents were submitted to the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) on January 5th. The SHPO grant (\$124,033.00) will be paid to the FCCW within 4-6 weeks of the DECD Commissioner signing off on the project. Her signature is necessary to file the required 20-year easement with the Town of Woodbridge.

In preparation for their application for a prestigious decorative arts award, the John Canning Company arranged for renowned architectural photographer, Bob Benson, to be at the FCCW on January 11 to document the décor restoration. Canning will give copies of his photos to the church at no cost. As we begin to organize a 'marketing' effort for weddings, concerts, and recitals in the sanctuary, these quality photographs will be very much appreciated. Thank you Canning and Benson!

Work on a book to recognize donors to the Sanctuary Fund, the granting agencies, and the contractors is underway. It will eventually be placed on display in the narthex.

A service to re-dedicate the Meetinghouse and a celebratory reception to thank everyone who contributed to this historic project will be held on Sunday, April 21. Please plan to attend.

The Sanctuary Fund will continue to accept donations that will be used for future improvements. The Sanctuary Committee is extremely grateful to those who supported this challenging restoration and trusts that the sanctuary will provide everyone who enters a spiritual home of beauty and peace.



Special Guest Preacher coming to First Church Woodbridge!



On February 25, we will welcome Rev. Dr. Sarah Drummond to the pulpit. Hailing from Suffield, CT, Sarah serves as Founding Dean of Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School. She is the seminary's chief academic officer, lead administrator, and part of the senior leadership team at Yale Divinity School. She also teaches and writes about leadership, and serves as combination advisor/ minister/ mentor to students engaged in graduate theological education.

Sarah is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. She graduated from Yale College with a major in Ethics, Politics, and Economics; Harvard Divinity School with a Master of Divinity; and the University of Wisconsin with a PhD in Urban Education, specializing in administrative leadership.

Sarah has written five books on ministerial leadership and dozens of articles on the same. Her most recent books are *Sharing Leadership: a UCC Way of Being In-Community* and *Intentional Leadership In-Between Times*, published in 2021 and 2022 respectively. Sarah also 'blogs' weekly on *Medium* using a hopeful and often humorous approach as she addresses issues of church life and leadership.

(Note from Rev. Murtha: Sarah is a fabulous preacher! Save the date!)

FCCW OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Wednesday - Friday

8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Weekly Bible Study

All are welcome to join our Weekly Bible Study every Wednesday morning at 11 a.m. in the Parish House.

Parishioner DEADLINE

Articles and photos for the *March* edition of *The Parishioner* are due by **Monday, February 22nd** *Please submit materials by email. office@uccw.org

Worship Service

Everyone is invited to gather at the Meetinghouse for the 10:00 a.m. service. For participation via ZOOM, Check the church website—uccw.org

Printed copies of *The Parishioner* are always available in the office and on the UCCW website

If you would like to go paperless and only receive an emailed copy.

Contact Josh in the Office to be put on the list

Marking Life's Passages

Please contact the office with any birth or death notices, baptisms or memorial service dates.

KIDS CHURCH

EVERY SUNDAY MORNING AT
10:10
IN THE PARISH HOUSE!



Interim Minister: Rev. Susan Murtha (pastorsusan@uccw.org) (203) 936-9356
Pastoral Care: Rev. Janice Touloukian (jantouloukian@gmail.com) (203) 915-1510
Pastor Emeritus: Rev. Boyd M. Johnson, Jr.
Office Administrator: Joshua Sharp (office@uccw.org) (203) 389-2119
Sexton/Custodian: Bob Turner
Project Leader for Children's Ministries: Forest Vandeflor

February 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>4 10:10 Kid's Church 10:00am Worship 10:00 am AA 3:30 Girl Scouts</p>	<p>5 Church Council(on Zoom) 6:30 7:30pm Lamppost Group AA</p>	<p>6 6:30 Choir Practice 7:00pm Alateen 7:30Pm AA/Al-Anon</p>	<p>7 Musical Folk 9:30 Am 11:00am Bible Study 3:00pm NMS 7:00pm Search Committee</p>	<p>1 2:00pm NMS 7:00pm Boy Scouts</p>	<p>2 10:00Am Musical Folk 2:00pm NMS</p>	<p>3 9:30 am Musical Folk</p>
<p>11 10:10 Kid's Church 10:00am Worship 10:00 am AA</p>	<p>12 7:30pm Lamppost Group AA Aging as Spiritual Journey 11:00 Am - 1:30</p>	<p>13 6:30 Choir Practice 7:00pm Alateen 7:30Pm AA/Al-Anon</p>	<p>14 Ash Wednesday Musical Folk 9:30 Am 11:00am Bible Study 3:00pm NMS 7:00pm Search Committee</p>	<p>15 6:30pm Deacons 2:00pm NMS 7:00pm Boy Scouts</p>	<p>16 10:00Am Musical Folk 2:00pm NMS Pancake Friday for Families</p>	<p>17 9:30 am Musical Folk</p>
<p>18 10:10 Kid's Church 10:00am Worship 10:00 am AA 3:30 Girl Scouts</p>	<p>19 7:30pm Lamppost Group AA</p>	<p>20 6:30 Choir Practice 7:00pm Alateen 7:30Pm AA/Al-Anon</p>	<p>21 Musical Folk 9:30 Am 11:00am Bible Study 3:00pm NMS Woodbridge Parks Meeting 7pm 7:00pm Search Committee</p>	<p>22 2:00pm NMS 7:00pm Boy Scouts 6:30 pm Trustees</p>	<p>23 10:00Am Musical Folk 2:00pm NMS</p>	<p>24 9:30 am Musical Folk</p>
<p>25 10:10 Kid's Church 10:00am Worship 10:00 am AA</p>	<p>26 7:30pm Lamppost Group AA</p>	<p>27 6:30 Choir Practice 7:00pm Alateen 7:30Pm AA/Al-Anon</p>	<p>28 Musical Folk 9:30 Am 11:00am Bible Study 3:00pm NMS 7:00pm Search Committee</p>	<p>29 2:00pm NMS 7:00pm Boy Scouts</p>	<p>Key Sanctuary Parish Hall Memorial Room Board Room Music Room</p>	<p>Kids' Church Room Kitchen Online</p>